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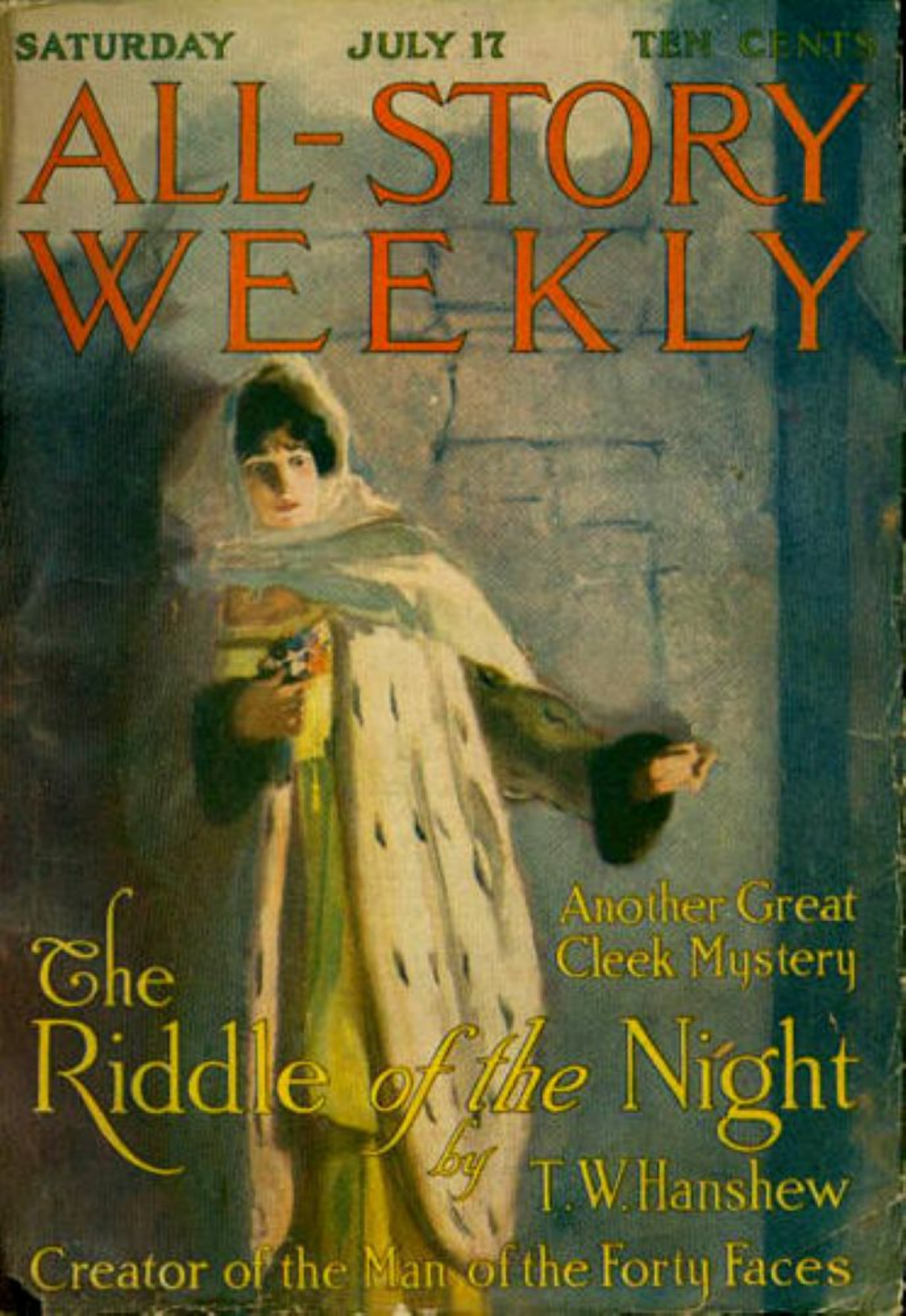
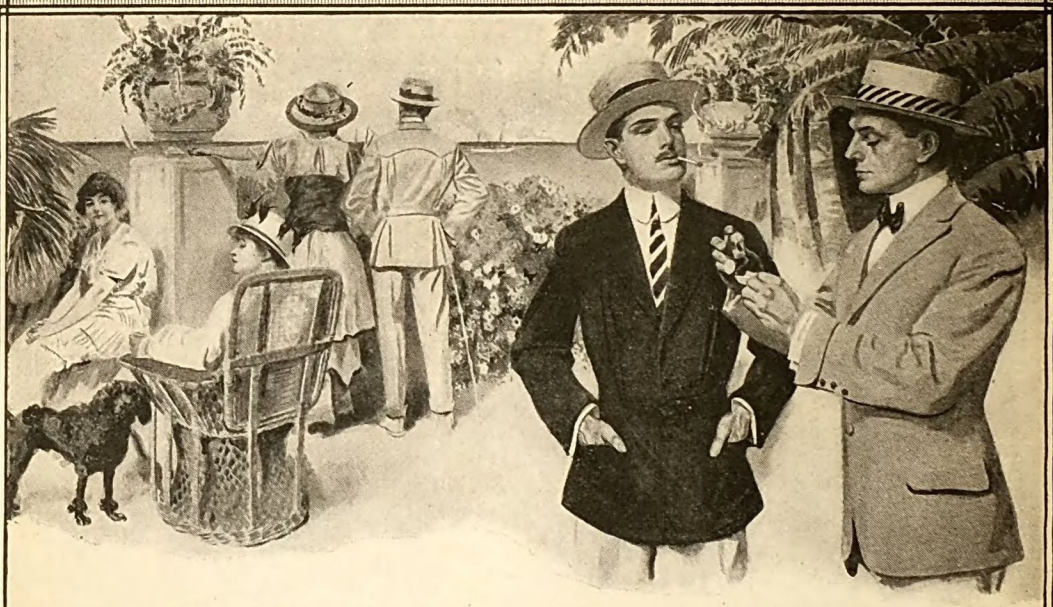


Another Great Cleek Mystery

The Riddle of the Night

by T. W. Hanshew

Creator of the Man of the Forty Faces



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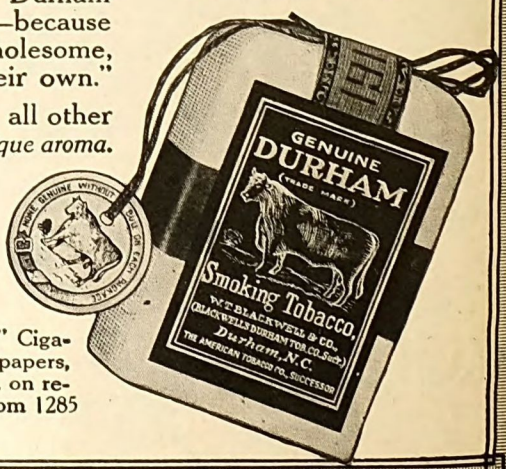

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. XLVII — NUMBER 2

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SEVEN SHORT STORIES

VERSE

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 8 WEST FORTIETH STREET, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY
VOL. XLVII SATURDAY, JULY 17, 1915 NUMBER 2

The Riddle of the Night

by T. W. Hanshew

Author of "Cleek of the Forty Faces," "Cleek of Scotland Yard," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A Mysterious Affair.

IT was half past eleven on the night of Wednesday, April 14, when the well-known red limousine of Mr. Maverick Narkom, superintendent of Scotland Yard, came abruptly to the head of Mulberry Lane, a narrow road skirting one of the loneliest and wildest portions of Wimbledon Common.

Lennard, the chauffeur, put on the brake with such suddenness that the car seemed actually to rise from the earth, performed a sort of buzzing and snorting semicircle, and all but collided with the rear wall of Wuthering Grange before coming to a halt in the narrow road space which lay between that wall and the tree-fringed edge of the great common.

Under ordinary circumstances one might as soon have expected to run foul of a specimen of the great auk rearing a family in St. Paul's churchyard, as to find Mr. Narkom's limousine in the neighborhood of Mulberry Lane at any hour of the day or the night throughout the whole cycle of the year.

For a reason which will be made clear in the course of events, however, the superintendent had been persuaded to go considerably out of his way before returning to town that evening.

He had been mingling duty with pleasure in taking part in the festivities attendant upon the coming of age of his friend Sir Philip Clavering's son and heir, incidentally seeing that Petrie and Hammond, two of his sergeants, kept a watchful eye upon the famous Clavering service of gold plate which had been brought out of the bank vault for the occasion.

All three were sitting serenely back among the cushions of the limousine when Lennard brought it to this abrupt and startling halt, the result of which was to fairly jerk them out of their seats and send them sprawling over one another in a struggling heap.

There was a moment of something like absolute confusion, for mist and

darkness enveloped both the road and the common, and none of the three could see anything from the windows of the car which might decide whether they had collided with some obstruction or were hovering upon the brink of some dangerous and unexpected pitfall.

Nor were their fears lessened by perceiving — through the glass screen —that Lennard had started up from his seat, and, with a hastily produced electric torch in one upraised hand, was leaning forward and wildly endeavoring to discern something through the all-enfolding mist. Mr. Narkom hastily unlatched the door and leaned out.

"What is it? What's gone wrong?" he inquired in the sharp staccato of excitement. "Anything amiss?"

"Lord, yessir! I heard a shot and a cry. A pistol shot—and a police whistle—and a cry of murder, sir. Up the lane ahead of us!" began Lennard, in a quaking voice; then he uttered a cry of fright, for, of a sudden, the darkness was riven by the screaming note of a police whistle—of two police whistles in fact — shrilling appeal and answer far up the lonely lane.

Hard on this came a man's voice shouting: "Head him off there, whoever you are! Don't let him get by you. Look sharp! He's making for the railway arch!"

"All right, mate. I'm here!" another male voice flung back. "He won't get past me, the blighter!"

Instantly there struck out the swift-measured sound of heavily shod feet racing at top speed up the mist-shrouded lane, and rapidly increasing the distance between the unseen runner and the standing limousine.

No need to tell either Narkom or his men that the man whose steps they heard was a constable, for there is a distinctive note, to ears that are trained, rung out by the heavy, cumbersome boots which folly accords to the British policeman.

Catching the ring of that tell-tale note now, Narkom shouted out at the top of his voice: "All right, constable! Stick to him! Help coming!"

Then with a word of command to Lennard he pulled in his head, slammed the door, and the chauffeur, dropping back to his seat, threw open the clutch and sent the limousine bounding up the lane at a fifty-mile clip.

To-night, with the trees shadowing it and the mist crowding in, shoulder high, from the adjacent common, the lane was a mere dark funnel; but to Lennard, whose boyhood had been passed within hailing distance of the place, it possessed no mysteries that the night or the vapor could hide.

He knew that it ran on for some seven or eight hundred feet, with the high brick wall which marked the rear boundary of Wuthering Grange on one side of it and straggling trees and matted gorse bushes shutting it in on the other, until it dipped down a steadily increasing incline, and ran straightway through an old brick-walled, brick-roofed arch of a long-abandoned Wimbledon Loop line.

Some two hundred feet upon the other side of this it divided into a sort of "Y," one branch swerving to the left forming a right of way across the meadows to the public highway, while the other struck out over the common to the right, crossed Beverly Brook, and merged at length into the road which leads to Coombe Wood, and thence, through picturesque ways, to Kingston and the river.

The limousine took those seven or eight hundred feet between the head of the lane and the old railway arch at such a stupendous pace that it seemed to have no more than started before the distance was eaten up and it came to a halt again; but this time, in such a din and babel of struggling and shouting that Lennard seemed to have reached the very gateway of Sheol.

Narkom and his men were out of the vehicle almost as the brake fell into place, and clicking their electric pocket-

torches into sudden flame, rushed headlong into the black opening of the arch, into which they had taken but half a dozen steps, when they came upon a startling sight.

Snarling and yapping like a couple of fighting dogs and crying out in concert: "Got you, you blighter! Got you fast!" were two men, locked tight in each other's arms, reeling and swaying — one wearing the official badge of an appointed common keeper, the other in the helmet and tunic of an ordinary constable.

"Lend a hand, gov'ner, for Gawd's sake!" rapped out the former. "Name's Mawson, sir—keeper on the common — No. 4, sir. Got the blackguard! Murder, sir—got him red-handed!"

"Good Lord!" little more than gulped the man he held.

The two pairs of gripping hands dropped, the struggling figures fell apart, and the two men who but an instant before had been locked in an angry embrace stood staring at each other in open-mouthed amazement.

"What kind of a game is this?" demanded Narkom, as with his allies he crowded forward. "You two people are paid to keep the peace—not to break it, dash you!"

"My word!" exclaimed the common keeper, finding his voice suddenly. "A copper, is it? — a copper! when I thought— Gawd's truth, constable! Wot have you done with him? He run in here with me on his blessed heels. You didn't let him get past you, did you?"

"No fear!" snapped out the constable indignantly. "I stood here waiting—waiting and shouting to you —until you ran smack into my blessed arms; and if anybody but you come in *your* side of the arch, he never come out o' mine, I'll take my solemn oath!"

"Then where's he gone? Wot's become of him?" shouted the common keeper excitedly. "I tell you I was on the very heels of him from the moment I first whistled and called out to you to head him off. I could a'most have touched him when he dashed in here; and—and his footsteps never stopped soundin' for one second the whole blessed time. Murder is wot he's done — murder! — and I've been on his heels from the very moment he fired the shot."

Narkom and his allies lost not an instant in revealing their identity and displaying their insignia of office to the two men.

"Murder is it, keeper?" exclaimed the superintendent, remembering all at once what Lennard had said about hearing the cry and the shot. "When and how? Lead me to the body!"

"Lor' bless you, sir, I aren't 'ad no time nor chanst to look after any body," replied the keeper. "All I can tell you is that I was out there in my shelter on the common when I heard the first cry — like as some one was callin' for help whiles some one else had 'em by the windpipe, sir; so I dashes out and cuts through the mist and gorse as fast as my blessed legs could carry me.

"Jist as I gets to the edge of the lane, sir, *bang!* goes a revolver-shot jist 'arf a dozen feet in front of me, and a man, wot I couldn't see 'ide nor 'air of on account of the mist, nicks out o' somewheres and cuts off down the lane like a blessed race-'orse. I outs with me whistle and blows it as 'ard as I could, and cuts off after him.

"He never stopped runnin' for a blessed instant. He never doubled on me; never turned to the right nor to the left, gov'ner; but jist dashes into this arch—straight in front of me, sir; and me running on almost within reachin' distance, until I runs smack into the arms of this constable here, and grabs *him,* thinkin' I'd got my man for sure. Wherever he's got to since, I tell you he come in here, sir—smack *in!*—and me after him; and if he didn't get past the constable—"

"He didn't—I've told you so once, and I'll stick to it!" interrupted the constable himself, with some show of heat. "What do you take me for—

an old woman? Look here, Mr. Narkom, sir; my name's Mellish. It's true I've only been on the force a little over a week, sir; but my sergeant will tell you I've got my wits about me and aren't in the least likely to let a man slip past me in the manner that this chap thinks. *Nothing* went past me—nothing the size of a cat, let alone a man, sir—and if the party in question really *did* come in here—"

"I'll soon settle that question!" rapped in Narkom sharply.

He flung a hurried command to Lennard, waved Petrie and Hammond aside, and an instant later the limousine moved swiftly up out of the mist until its bulk filled the entrance of the arch and its blazing acetylene lamps were sweeping it with light from end to end.

Smooth as a rifle-bore, its damp walls and curving roof shone out in the sudden glare—not a brick displaced, not a crevice big enough to shelter a rat much less a human being—and of the man the common keeper had been chasing, not a sign nor a trace anywhere!

"Whatever the fellow did or wherever he went, he can't have gone far, so look sharp, my lads!" commanded Narkom. "If we're quick we're sure to nab him. Come along, constable; come along, keeper. Lennard, you stop where you are and guard the exit from the arch, so if he doubles on us he can't get by *you!*"

"Right you are, sir!" responded Lennard, as the superintendent and the four men made a dash toward that end of the arch through which the keeper was so positive the fugitive had come.

"I say, Mr. Narkom!" he added, raising his voice and shouting after them. "Eyes sharp to the left, all of you, when you get outside this arch. Know the neighborhood like a book, sir. Lane forks out into a wye after you get about fifty yards on. Branches off on the left where there's an old house called Gleer Cottage, sir, that hasn't been tenanted for years and years. Walled garden—tool-house—stable. Great place for a man to hide, sir!"

"Good boy! Thanks!" flung back Narkom. "Come on, my lads! Lively!"

Then they swung out of the arch with a rush, and the last that Lennard saw of them before the shrouding mist took them and blotted them from his view, they were pelting up the lane at top speed and making headlong for the branching wye to which he had directed them, their footsteps sounding on the moist surface of the road and their electric torches emitting every now and again a spark like a glowworm flashing.

Five minutes passed — the click of their flying steps had dropped off into silence; the flash of their torches had vanished in the distance and the mist; even the blurred sound of their excited voices was stilled. Neither ear nor eye could now detect anything but the soft drip of the moisture from the roof of the arch and the white oblivion of the close-pressing, ever-thickening mist.

Still he sat there, waiting—alert, watchful, keen — looking straight before him and keeping a close watch on the unobstructed end of the miniature tunnel whose entire length was still flooded with the glare from the motor's lamps.

If a mouse had crawled down its damp walls he must have seen it; if even so much as a shadow had come up out of that wilderness of mist and crept into the place, he must have detected it. But there was nothing; neither man nor beast, neither shade nor shadow; only the loneliness and the mist and the soft *plick-plick!* of the dropping moisture.

The five minutes became eight, ten, a dozen, without the slightest change in anything. Then, all of a sudden, Lennard's tense nerves gave a sort of jump and a swift prickle flashed up his spine and through his hair. A

sound had come—a rustle—a step—a movement. Not from the direction in which he was looking, however, but from the lane beyond the arch and *behind* the limousine.

He jumped to his feet and rising on tiptoe on his driver's seat flashed the light of his electric torch back over the top of the vehicle; what he saw took all the breath out of him and set his heart and pulses hammering furiously.

Against that thick blanket of mist the penetrating power of the torch's gleam was so effectually blunted that it could do nothing more than throw a pale, weak circle of light a few feet into the depths of a crowding vapor, leaving all beyond and upon either side doubly dark in contrast.

Yet as the light streamed out and flung that circle into the impinging mist, there moved across it the figure of a woman, young and fair, with a scarf of lace thrown over her head, from beneath which fell a glory of unbound hair, thick and lustrous, over shoulders that were wrapped in ermine—ermine in mid-April!

A woman! Here! At this hour! In this time of violence and evil doing! The thing was so uncanny, so unnatural, so startlingly unexpected, that Lennard's head swam.

She was gone so soon—just glimmering across the circle of light and then vanishing into the mist as suddenly as she had appeared—that for a moment or two he lost his nerve and his wits, and ducked down under the screen of the motor's top, remembering all the tales he had ever heard of ghosts and apparitions, and, in a moment of folly, half believing he had looked upon one.

But of a sudden his better sense asserted itself, and realizing that for a woman—*any* woman, no matter how dressed, no matter how young and fair and good to look upon—to be moving stealthily about this place, at this hour, when there was talk of murder, was at least suspicious, he laid hands upon the wheel, and being unable to turn the vehicle in the arch and go after *her,* put on full power and went after Narkom and his men.

A swift whiz carried him through the arch and up the lane, and, once in the open, he laid hand upon the bulb of the motor-horn and sent blast after blast hooting through the stillness, shouting at the top of his voice as he scorched over the ground:

"Mr. Narkom! Mr. Narkom! This way, sir, this way! This way!"

CHAPTER II.

How the Chase Ended.

MEANWHILE Mr. Narkom and his zealous assistants had rushed wildly on, coming forth at last from the old railway arch into the narrow lane without so much as catching a glimpse or finding the slightest trace of either victim or murderer.

But that they had not all been deceived by a hallucination of the night, received proof from the triumphant discovery of Sergeant Petrie, who, with the aid of his torch and the bull's-eye lantern of Constable Mellish, had found the unmistakable traces of hurried footsteps on the soft, yielding earth.

"Lummy, sir! the place is alive with 'em," ejaculated Mellish. "This is the way he went, sir, down this 'ere lane, and making for the right of way across the fields, like wot that shuvver of yours said, sir."

Narkom, Hammond, and Petrie were at his side before he had finished speaking. It was true, other footprints were there, all the lonely tree-girt road was full of them, going down the center in one long, unbroken line. They stopped but a moment to make sure of this, then rose and dashed on in the direction which they led.

Straight on, down the middle of the thoroughfare, without break or interruption, the foot-made trail drew them; under dripping overshadowing

trees; by natural hedges and unnatural mounds where weeds and briers scrambled over piles of débris, and the light of their torches showed Narkom and his men the dim irregular outlines of a crumbling wall, green with moss and lichen and higher in parts than a man's head.

On and still on, the deeply dug footprints lessening not a whit in their clearness until, all of a moment, they swerved slightly to the left and then abruptly stopped—stopped dead short, and after that were seen no more!

"Here's where he went!" called out Hammond, pointing to the left as Narkom and the others, in a sort of panic, went running around and endeavoring to pick up the lost trail. "Look, sir—grass here and the wall beyond. Hopped over onto the grass, that's what he did, then scaled the wall and 'went to earth' like an idiot in that old house Lennard told us of. Come along—quick!

"Fair copped him, sir, as sure as eggs," he added excitedly, plunging in through the mist and the shadow of the trees until he came to the wall in question. "Break in the wall here, coping gone, dry dust of newly crumbled mortar on the grass. Got over here, Mr. Narkom—yes, and cut himself doing it. Hand, most likely; for there are bits of mortar with broken glass stuck in 'em lying about and a drop of fresh blood on the top of the wall!"

A single look was enough, when Mr. Narkom came hurrying to his side, to verify all that had been said; and with an excited: "This way, all of you. Look sharp!" the superintendent sprang up, gripped the broken top of the wall, scrambled over it, and dropped down into the darkness and mist upon the other side.

The others followed his lead, and the next moment all were in the dark, walled-in enclosure, in the middle of which the long-abandoned house known as Gleer Cottage stood. They could see nothing of it from where they were, for the mist and the crowded screen of long-neglected fruit-trees shut it in as with a curtain.

"Better let me go ahead and light the way, gents," said Constable Mellish in an excited whisper, as he again unshuttered his bull's-eye and directed its gleam upon the matted and tangled verdure. "Stout boots and thick trousers is what's wanted to tramp a path through these briers; them evening clothes of yours 'u'd be torn to ribbons and your ankles cut to the bone before you'd gone a dozen yards. Lummy! there's another of his footprints—on the edge of that flower-bed, there! see? Come on."

Too excited and too much occupied with the work in hand to care who took the lead so that they got through the place and ran their quarry to earth, Narkom and the rest suffered the suburban constable to beat a way for them through the brambly wilderness, while with bodies bent, nerves tense as wire, treading on tiptoe along the trail that was being so cautiously blazed for them, they pressed on after him.

Suddenly, without a hint of warning, a faint, metallic *click* sounded, the light they were following went suddenly out, and before Narkom, realizing that Mellish had sprung the shutter over the flame of his lamp, could voice a whispered inquiry, the constable's body lurched back against his own and a shaking hand descended upon his shoulder.

"Don't move, don't speak, sir!" said Mellish's voice close to his ear. "We've got him right enough. He's in the house itself, and with a light! There's a board or something put up against the window to shield it, but you can see the light through the chinks—coming and going, sir, like as he was carrying it about."

Startling as the statement was, when Narkom and the rest came on tiptoe to the end of the trampled path and peeked around the last screening bush into the open beyond, they found it to be the case.

Blurred, shadowy, mist-wrapped—like the ghost of a house set in a ghostly garden—there stood the long-abandoned building, its blank upper windows lost in the wrapping fog; its dreary face toward the distant road; its bleak, unlovely side fronting the point from which Narkom and his men now viewed it; and from one of the two side windows thin, wavering lines of constantly shifting light issued from beneath the shadow of a veranda.

"Candlelight, sir, and a draft somewhere, nobody moving about," whispered Hammond. "Window or a door open—that's what makes the light rise and fall. What an ass! Barricaded the window and never thought to stop up the chinks. Lord, for a fellow clever enough to get away from the constable and the keeper in the manner he did, you'd never look for an idiot's trick like this."

Narkom might have reminded him that it was an old, old failing on the part of the criminal class, this overlooking some trifling little point after a deed of almost diabolical cunning; but at present he was too much excited to think of anything but getting into the lighted room and nabbing his man before he slipped the leash again and escaped him.

Ducking down he led a swift but soundless flight across the open space until he and his allies were close up under the shadows of the building itself, where he made the rather surprising discovery that the rear door was unlocked. Through this they made their way down a passage, at the end of which was evidently the room they sought, for a tiny thread of light lay between the door and the bare boards of the passage.

Here they halted a moment, their nerves strung to breaking-point and their hearts hammering thickly as they now heard a faint rustling movement and a noise of tearing paper sounding from behind it.

For a moment these things alone were audible; then Narkom's hand shot upward as a silent signal; there was a concerted movement, a crash that carried a broken door inward and sent echoes bellowing and bounding from landing to landing and wall to wall, a gush of light, a scramble of crowding figures, a chorus of excited voices, and—the men of Scotland Yard were in the room.

But no cornered criminal rose to do battle with them, and no startled outcry greeted their coming—nothing but the squeal and scamper of frightened rats bolting to safety behind the wainscot; a mere ripple of sound, and after it a silence which even the intruders had not breath enough to break with any spoken word.

With peeling walls and moldering floor the long, low-ceiled room gaped out before them, littered with fallen plaster and thick with dust and cobwebs.

On the floor, in the blank space between the two boarded-up windows, a pair of lighted candles guttered and flared, while behind them, with arms outstretched, sleeves spiked to the wall—a human crucifix, with lolling head and bended knees—a dead man hung, and the light shining upon his distorted face revealed the hideous fact that he had been strangled to death.

However many his years, they could not have totaled more than five and thirty at most; and, ghastly as he was now, in life he must have been strikingly handsome—fair of hair and mustache, lean of loin and broad of shoulder, and with that subtle *something* about him which mutely stands sponsor for the thing called birth.

He was clad in a long, gray topcoat of fine texture and fashionable cut—a coat unbuttoned and flung open by the same furious hand which had rent and torn at the suit of evening clothes he wore beneath.

The waistcoat was wrenched apart and a snapped watch-chain dangled from it, and on the broad expanse of shirt-bosom thus exposed there was rudely smeared in thick, black letters

—as if a finger had been dipped for the purpose in blacking or axle-grease —a string of mystifying numerals running thus:

2—4—1—2

For a moment the men who had stumbled upon this appalling sight stood staring at it in horrified silence; then Constable Mellish backed shudderingly away and voiced the first spoken word.

"The Lord deliver us!" he said in a quaking whisper. "*Not* the murderer himself, but the party as he murdered! A gent—a swell—strangled in a place like this! Gawd help us! What was a man like that a doing of here? And, besides, the shot was fired out there—on the Common—as you know yourselves. You heard it, didn't you?"

Nobody answered him. For Narkom and his men this horrifying discovery possessed more startling, more mystifying, more appalling surprises than that which lay in the mere finding of the victim of a tragedy where they had been confident of running to earth the assassin alone. For in that ghastly, dead thing spiked to the crumbling wall they saw again a man who less than four hours ago had stood before them in the full flower of health and strength and life.

"Good God!" gasped Hammond, laying a shaking hand upon Narkom's arm. "You see who it is, don't you, sir? It's the Austrian gent who was at Clavering Close to-night—Count What's-His-Name!"

"De Louvisan—Count Franz de Louvisan," supplied Narkom agitatedly. "The last man in the world who *should* have shown himself in the home of the man whose sweetheart he was taking away, despite the lady's own desires and entreaties! And to come to such an end—to-night—in such a place as this—after such an interview with the two people whose lives he was wrecking! Good God!"

A thought almost too horrible to put into words lay behind that last excited exclamation, for his eyes had fallen on a thin catgut halter—a violoncello string—thus snatched from its innocent purpose, and through his mind had floated the strains of the music with which Lady Katharine Fordham had amused the company but a short time before.

He turned abruptly to his men, and had just opened his mouth to issue a command when the darkness and silence without were riven suddenly by the hooting of a motor-horn and the voice of Lennard shouting.

"Stop!" commanded Narkom as the men made an excited step toward the door. "Search this house—guard it—don't let any one enter or leave it until I come back. If any living man comes near it, arrest him, no matter who or what he is. But don't leave the place unguarded for a single instant. Remember that. There's only one man in the world for this affair. Stop where you are until I return with him."

Then he flung himself out of the room, out of the house, and ran as fast as he could fly in the direction of the tooting horn.

At the point where the branching arm of the wye joined the main portion of Mulberry Lane he caught sight of two huge, glaring motor-lamps coming toward him through the mist and darkness. In a twinkling the limousine had halted in front of him, and Lennard was telling excitedly of that startling experience back there by the old railway arch.

"A woman, sir—a young and beautiful woman! And she must have had something to do with this night's business, gov'ner, or why should she be wandering about this place at such a time? Hop in quick, sir, and I'll run you back to the spot where I saw her."

At any other time, under any other circumstances, Narkom might, probably would, have complied with that request; but now— A woman indeed! No woman's hand could have nailed

that grim figure to the wall of Gleer Cottage—at least not alone, not without assistance. This he realized, and, brushing the suggestion aside, jumped into the limousine, and slammed the door upon himself.

"Drive to Clarges Street! I must see Cleek! Full speed now! Don't let the devil himself stop you!" he cried; and in a moment they were bounding away townward at a fifty-mile clip that ate up the distance like a cat lapping cream.

CHAPTER III.

The Shadow That Lay Behind.

IT had but just gone midnight when the car slowed down before the house in Clarges Street. Here, in company with his faithful henchman, Dollops, and attended upon by an elderly housekeeper and a deaf-and-dumb maid of all work, there dwelt—under the name and guise of "Captain Horatio Burbage," a superannuated seaman—that strange and original genius who chose to call himself "Hamilton Cleek," but who was known to the police of two continents as "The Man of the Forty Faces."

In the merest fraction of a minute Narkom was out of the limousine, had crossed the narrow pavement, mounted the three shallow steps, and was standing in the shadow of a pillared porch, punching a signal on the button of an electric bell.

In all he could not have been kept waiting more than a minute, but it seemed forty times that length when he at last heard a bolt slip and saw, in the gap of the open door, the figure of a slim, red-headed youth arrayed in a bed-quilt, a suit of pink flannelette pajamas, and a pair of white canvas tennis-shoes.

"Come in, sir; come quick!" this young man whispered in the broadest of Cockney accents, as he opened the door just wide enough for Narkom to sidle into the semidark passage.

"Where's your master, Dollops?" put in the superintendent. "Speak up! Is he in? I've got to see him at once!"

The voice which answered came, not from Dollops, but from the dark top of the dim stairase.

"Come up, Mr. Narkom," it said. "I thought that young beggar had gone to bed ages ago, and was just coming down myself to let you in. Come along up. You know the way."

Narkom acted upon the invitation so promptly that he was up the stairs and in the cozy, curtained, and lamplit room which Cleek called his den almost as quickly as his host himself. In fact, Cleek had scarcely time to sweep into the drawer of his writing-table a pile of something which looked like a collection of odds and ends of jewelery, bits of faded ribbon, and time-stained letters, and turn the key upon them before the police official was at the door.

"Hello!" said Cleek in a tone of surprise and deep interest as the superintendent came fairly lurching into the room. "What's in the wind, Mr. Narkom? You look fairly blowed. Whisky and soda there—at your elbow—help yourself. I presume it's a case—nothing else would bring you here at this time and in such a state. What kind is it? And for whom? Some friend of yours or for the Yard?"

"For both, I'm afraid," replied Narkom, pouring off a stiff peg of whisky and nervously gulping it down between the words. "God knows, I hope it may be only for the Yard, but considering what I know— Get your hat and coat. Come with me at once, Cleek. It's a murder—a mystery after your own heart. Lennard's below with the limousine. Come quickly, do, there's a dear chap. I'll tell you all about it on the way. The thing's only just been done—within the hour—out Wimbledon way."

"I might have guessed that, Mr. Narkom, considering that you were to mingle duty with pleasure, and spend the evening at Wimbledon with your

old friend, Sir Philip Clavering," replied Cleek, rising at once. "Certainly I will go with you. Did you ever know the time when I wouldn't do all that I could to help the best friend I ever had—yourself? And if it is, as you hint, likely to be in the interest of the friend of *my* friend—"

"I'm not so sure of that, Cleek. God knows, I hope it's a mistaken idea of mine; but when you have heard, when you have seen, how abominably things point to that dear boy of Clavering's and to the girl that dead fellow was conspiring with her father to take away from him—"

"Oh!" interjected Cleek with a strong rising inflection. "So there is that element in the case, eh?—love and a woman in distress! Give me a minute to throw a few things together and I am with you, my friend."

"Thanks, old chap; I knew I could rely upon you. But don't stop to bother about a disguise, Cleek; it's too dark for anybody to see that it isn't 'the captain' that's going out. And besides, there's everything of that sort in the limousine, you know. The street is as dark as a pocket, and there's nobody likely to be on the watch at this hour."

The curious, one-sided smile so characteristic of the man looped up the corner of Cleek's mouth; his features seemed to writhe, a strange, indefinable change to come over them as he put into operation his peculiar birth-gift; and an instant later, but that he had not stirred one step and his clothing was still the same, one might have thought that a totally different man was in the room.

"Will it matter *who* watches?" he said with just a suspicion of vanity over the achievement. "It will be—let us see—yes, a French gentleman whom we shall call 'Monsieur Georges d'Lesparre' to-night, Mr. Narkom. A French gentleman with a penchant for investigating criminal affairs, and who comes to you with the strong recommendation of the Parisian police department. Now cut down to the limousine and wait for me; I'll join you presently. And, Mr. Narkom?"

"Yes, old chap?"

"As you go out, give Dollops directions where and how to get to the scene of the tragedy, and tell him to follow in a taxi as quickly as possible."

"Oh, Molly 'Awkins! There ain't no rest for the wicked and no feedin' for the 'ungry this side of Kensal Green—and precious little on the other!" sighed Dollops when he received this message. "Not four weeks it ain't since I was drug off in the middle of my lunch to go Cingalee huntin' in Soho for them bounders wot was after Lady Chepstow's 'Sacred Son,' and now here I am pulled out of my blessed pajamas in the middle of the night to go 'Tickle Tootsying' in the bally fog at Wimbledon!

"Well, all right, sir. Where the gov'ner goes, I goes, bless his 'eart; so you can look for me as soon as I can get out of these Eytalian pants."

Narkom made no comment; merely went down and out to the waiting limousine and took his seat in it, full of a racking, nervous impatience that was like a consuming fire; and there Cleek found him, ten minutes later, when he jumped in with his kit bag and gave the signal which set Lennard to speeding the car back on its way to the scene of the mysterious tragedy.

"Pull down the blinds and turn up the light, Mr. Narkom, so I can make a few necessary changes on the way," he said, opening the locker and groping round in the depths of it as the limousine scudded around the corner and tore off up Picadilly. "You can give me the particulars of the case while I'm making up. Come on—let's have them. How did the affair begin, and where?"

Narkom detailed the occurrences of the night with the utmost clearness, from the moment when the shot and the cry attracted Lennard's attention to that when the ghastly discovery was made in the semiruined cottage.

"O-ho!" said Cleek, with one of his curious smiles. "So our friend the mysterious assassin disappeared in the middle of a sort of tunnel did he—and with a man at either end? Hum-m-m! I see, I see!"

"Do you? Well, I'm blest if I do, then. There wasn't a place as big as your hand to hide anything in, much less shelter a man; and the fellow who could do a diabolical thing like that—"

"That is a question which simply remains to be seen," interposed Cleek. "The thing is not so supernatural as it appears at first blush. Once—in the days that lie behind me, when I was the hunted and not the hunter—in that old 'Vanishing Cracksman' time of mine, I myself did that 'amazing disappearance' twice.

"Once in an alley in New York when there was a night watchman and a patrolman to be eluded; and once in Paris when, with Margot's lot, I was being hunted into a trap which would have been the end of one of the biggest *coups* of my career had I been nabbed that night."

"Margot?" repeated Narkom. "Yes, I remember the Queen of the Apaches—the woman with whom you used to consort. Said she'd get even with you when you turned down the old life and took sides with the law instead of against it, I recollect. And you tell me that in those old days you practised a trick such as this fellow did to-night?"

"Yes. Beat him at it—if you will pardon the conceit—for I vanished in the middle of a narrow passage with a *sergent de ville* chasing me at one end and a concierge accompanied by a cabman and a commissionnaire racing in at the other.

"I always fancied that that trick was original with me. I know of no one but Margot and her crew who were aware of the exploit, and if any man has borrowed a leaf from the book of those old times— Oh, well, it will be the end of all your fears regarding any friend of yours, Mr. Narkom, for the fellow will stand convicted as a member of the criminal classes and, possibly, of Margot's crew. We shall know the truth of that when we get to the scene of this mysterious vanishment, my friend."

"Yes, but how was it done, Cleek? Where did he go? How did he elude the chasing keeper and the waiting constable? A man can't vanish into thin air, and I tell you there wasn't a place of any sort for him to hide in. Yet you speak of the trick as if it were easy."

"It *is* easy, provided he had the same cause and adopted the same means as I did, my friend. Wait until we come to investigate that railway arch and you will see. Now tell me something, Mr. Narkom: How came you to be in the neighborhood of Mulberry Lane at all to-night?

"It is nowhere near Clavering Close; and it was decidedly out of your way if, as you tell me, you were on the way back to town. It is peculiar that you should have chosen to go out of your way like that."

"I didn't choose to do it. As a matter of fact I was executing a commission for Lady Clavering. It appears that a jewel had been found by the maid in attendance lying upon the floor of the ladies' room, and as Lady Clavering recollected seeing that jewel upon Miss Ailsa Lorne's person to-night, she asked me to stop at Wuthering Grange and return it to her."

"Ailsa Lorne!" A light flashed into Cleek's face as he repeated the name, and, rising into his eyes, made them positively radiant. "Ailsa Lorne, Mr. Narkom? You surely do not mean to tell me that Ailsa Lorne is in Wimbledon?"

"Yes, certainly I do. My dear fellow, how the name seems to interest you. But I remember: You know the lady, of course."

Know her? Know the woman whose eyes had lit the way back from those old days of crime to the higher and the better things, the woman who

had been his redemption in this world, and would, perhaps, be his salvation in the one to come? Cleek's very soul sang hymns of glory at the bare thought of her.

"I did not know Miss Lorne would be in Wimbledon," he said quietly, "or anywhere in the neighborhood of London. I thought she had accepted a temporary position down in Suffolk as the companion of an old school friend, Lady Katharine Fordham."

"So she did," replied Narkom. "And it is as that unhappy young lady's companion that she was at Clavering Close to-night. Lady Katharine, as you doubtless know, is Lord St. Ulmer's only child."

"Lord St. Ulmer?" repeated Cleek, gathering up his brows thoughtfully. "Hum-m-m! Ah-h-h! I seem to remember something about a Lord St. Ulmer. Let me see! Lost his wife when his daughter was a mere baby, didn't he, and took the loss so much to heart that he went out to Argentina and left the girl to the care of an aunt?

"Yes, I recall it now. Story was in all the papers some months ago. Got hold of a silver-mine out there; made a pot of money, and came home after something like fifteen years of absence; bought in the family place, Ulmer Court, down in Suffolk, after it had been in the hands of strangers for a generation or two, and took his daughter down there to live. That's the man, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's the man. He's worth something like half a million sterling to-day—lucky beggar!"

"Then why do you allude to his daughter and heiress as an 'unhappy young lady'? Surely with unlimited wealth at her command—"

"Which I dare say she would gladly give up to get back other things that she has lost," interposed Mr. Narkom. "Her hopes of becoming young Geoff Clavering's wife for one!"

"Young Geoff Clavering? The chap whose coming of age was celebrated to-day?"

"Yes, the son and heir of my friend, Sir Philip Clavering, as fine a boy as ever stood in shoe leather. He and Lady Katharine have almost grown up together, as her uncle and aunt, General and Mrs. Raynor, are close neighbors at Wuthering Grange. They were engaged at seventeen; a regular idyllic love-match, old chap.

"Sir Philip and Lady Clavering were immensely fond of her and heartily approved the match. So apparently did her father, to whom she wrote, although she had not seen him since she was a baby. Even when he returned to England with a fortune big enough to warrant his daughter wedding a duke, he still appeared to approve of the engagement, and suggested that the wedding should be celebrated on the young man's twenty-first birthday."

"Which, as to-day is that day, and you still speak of her as Lady Katharine Fordham, I presume did not take place?"

"No, it did not. Some three months ago a certain Count de Louvisan, an Austrian, appeared on the scene, claiming acquaintance with St. Ulmer; and it seems that, after a subsequent interview, Lord St. Ulmer informed his daughter that her engagement with Geoff Clavering must come to an end, and that it was her father's intention that she should become the wife of Count de Louvisan."

"O-ho!" said Cleek in two different tones. "All of which goes to suggest that the count had some hold over the old gentleman and was using it to feather his own nest. Of course, the girl couldn't be compelled to marry the man against her will; so if she consented to the breaking of the engagement— Did she?"

"Yes."

"Then something must have been told her—something which was either a lie or an appalling truth—to make her take a step like that; for a woman does not break with the man she loves unless something more than life is at

stake. And it is this Count de Louvisan, you tell me, that has been murdered? Hum-m-m!"

"Yes. The worst of it is," said Mr. Narkom gloomily, "there was a scene between him and young Clavering but a couple of hours before the murder was discovered."

"What's that?" rapped out Cleek. "A! 'scene'! A quarrel, do you mean? How and where? Or perhaps you don't know?"

"As it happens, I do," said Narkom, "for I happened to be at Clavering Close when it took place. You see, Lord St. Ulmer is laid up with a sprained ankle at Wuthering Grange, where he had been staying with his sister and brother-in-law, the Raynors. Lady Katharine seized the opportunity to say farewell to Geoff and came over at about eight o'clock; and I hope, Cleek, I may never in my life again see anything so heart-breaking as was made those last few minutes of parting."

"Few? Why few, pray?"

"Because they had not been together half an hour when the Count de Louvisan came over, post-haste, after his *fiancée.* Lady Katharine's absence had been discovered from the Grange, and naturally he was the one who would come after her. You can guess what followed, Cleek.

"Young Clavering fairly flew at the fellow, and would have thrashed him but that his father and I got hold of him, and Hammond and Petrie hustled the count out of the room.

"But, even so, nobody could prevent that wild, impetuous, excited boy from challenging the man then and there. To that the count merely threw back a laugh and said, as Petrie and Hammond hustled him out of the room: '*Monsieur,* one does not fight a fallen foe—one merely pities him!' And it took all his father's strength and mine to hold the boy in check.

"'Pity yourself if I ever meet you!' he shouted. 'There'll be one blackguard the less in the world if ever I come within reach of you again, damn you! I had nine years of hope until you came, and I'll put a mark on you for every one of them that you've spoiled.'"

"'A mark!'" repeated Cleek, with some slight show of agitation. "A mark for every year? It is true that the barking dog is the last to bite, but— What were those figures that you tell me were smeared on the dead man's shirt-bosom—2—4—1—2, were they not? And that sum equals nine!"

For a moment each stared at the other, neither speaking. Then:

"Yes," said Narkom with a groan. "Just nine, Cleek—just exactly nine. That's what cut the heart out of me when I saw that dead man spiked to the cottage wall, bearing the very mark he had sworn he should bear."

"I see," murmured Cleek, thoughtfully. "Of course, the wisest of men are sometimes mistaken; but somehow I took those numerals to stand for a sign of a secret society; but, as you say, the numbers do indeed total nine—the years of young Clavering's threat, but—"

His voice trailed off; he sat for a moment in deep thought.

"Then there is the 'spike'; that is an old apache punishment. They spiked Lanisterred to the wall when he went over to the police. Which is it? The apaches or this foolish, hot-headed boy lover?"

Narkom wisely refrained from comment. He knew the ways and methods of his famous ally only too well, and he sat silent therefore till Lennard pulled up the limousine sharply in front of Gleer Cottage.

"Here we are at the cottage—unless you would like to see the arch first?"

"Oh, no!" Cleek smiled softly. "That part of the mystery, my friend, is quite simple. Lead the way, please."

They alighted without further remark, and Narkom was followed by as complete a specimen of a French dandy as could be found in Paris, from

the gardens of the Tuileries to the benches of the Luxembourg.

CHAPTER IV.

Clues and Suspicions.

A MINUTE more and Cleek was in the house — in the presence of Hammond and Petrie—and Nardom had introduced him as "M. Georges de Lesparre, a distinguished French criminologist who had come over to England this morning upon a matter connected with the French police department, and who, in the absence of Mr. Cleek, had consented to take up this peculiar case."

"My hat! Wouldn't that drive you to drink?" commented Petrie in a disgusted aside as he eyed this suave and sallow gentleman with open disapproval. "What will we be importing from the Continent next, Hammond? As if there aren't detectives in England good enough to do the Yard's work without setting them to twiddling their blessed thumbs while a blooming Froggie runs the show and —beg pardon, what's that? Yes, Mr. Narkom. Searched the house from top to bottom, sir. Nobody in it, and nobody been here, either, sir; not a soul since you left."

"You are quite sure, *monsieur?*" This from Cleek. "About the 'nobody in the house,' I mean, of course. You are quite sure?"

"Of course we're sure!" snapped Hammond savagely. "Been from the top to the bottom of it—me and Petrie and the constable here—and not a soul in it anywhere."

"Ah, the constable, eh? You shall tell me, please, Mr. Narkom, is this the constable who was at the one end of the arch while the keeper was chasing the man in at the other? Ah, it is, eh? Well—er—shall not we see the keeper, too? I do not find him about, and I should much like to speak with him. Where is he?"

"Who—the keeper?" said Narkom. "Blest if I know. Is he about, my lads?"

"No, sir. Ain't *been* about — has he, Petrie?—for the Lord knows how long! Never thought of the beggar until this moment, sir."

"Nor did I," said Narkom. "Come to think of it, I haven't seen the fellow since we came to the wye of the road and found those footprints leading here. No doubt he has gone back to his shelter on the common and — *Monsieur!* Why are you smiling? Good God! you—I— *Monsieur,* shall I send my men for the fellow? Do you want to see him?"

"Yes, M. Narkom, I want to see him very, very much indeed—if you can find him! But you can't, *monsieur;* and I fear me that you never will. What you will find, however, if you will send your men to the shelter of which you speak will be the *real* keeper, either dead or stunned or gagged, and his coat and hat and badge removed from his body by the man who personated him."

"Good Heavens above, man, you don't mean to say—"

"That you had the real criminal in your hands and let him go; that you talked with him, walked with him, were taken in by him, and that he told you no lie when he said the assassin really *did* run into the arch," replied Cleek quietly. "It is the old, old trick of that fellow who was called the 'Vanishing Cracksman,' my friend; to knock down the fellow who first gives the alarm, rip off his clothing, and then to lead the hue and cry until there's a chance to steal away unobserved.

"Send your men to the keeper's shelter and see if I have guessed the truth of that little riddle or not. I'll lay you a sovereign, my friend, that your man has slipped the leash, and it will be but a fluke of fate if you ever lay hands on him again."

In a sort of panic Narkom turned to his men and sent them flying from the house to investigate this startling

assertion. Cleek walked into the room where that awful dead figure hung. He had taken but one step across the threshold, however, when he stopped suddenly and began to sniff the air—less to the surprise of Narkom, who had often seen him do this sort of thing before, than to Constable Mellish, who stood looking at him in open-mouthed amazement.

"Good Lud, man—I should say *monsieur,*" exclaimed the superintendent agitatedly, "after what you have just hinted, my head is in a whirl and I am prepared for almost anything; but surely you cannot find anything suspicious in the mere atmosphere of the place?"

"No; nothing but what you yourself must have observed. There is a distinct odor of violets in the room; so that unless that unhappy man yonder was of the kind that scents itself we may set it down that a woman has been in here."

"A woman? But no woman could do a thing like that," pointing to the position of the dead man. "Nor"—after sniffing the air repeatedly—"do I notice anything of the odor of which you speak."

"Nor me nuther, sir," put in the constable.

"Still, the odor is here," returned Cleek. "And—no! It does not emanate from the dead man. There is scent on him, to be sure; but it is not the scent of violets. Odors last at best but a little time after the person bearing them has left the room, and as it must now be upward of an hour since the discovery of the crime—"

Cleek sucked in his upper lip and took his chin between his thumb and forefinger and pinched it hard. What was that that Narkom had told him regarding Lennard's startling experience after he had been left on guard at the old railway arch? Hum-m-m!

Certainly there was *one* woman abroad in this neighborhood to-night, and a woman decidedly *not* of the lower classes at that, as witness the fact that she had worn an ermine cloak. Certainly, that would point to the wearer being a woman to whom money was no object—and to Lady Katharine Fordham, with all the great St. Ulmer wealth behind her, it assuredly was not.

Clearly, then, whoever was or was not the actual perpetrator of this night's crime, a woman of the higher walk of life—a rich and fashionable woman, in fact—was in some way connected with it.

The question was, did Lady Katharine Fordham possess an ermine cloak? And if she did, would she be likely to have brought it up from Suffolk at this time of the year? The curious smile slid down his cheek and vanished. He turned to Mr. Narkom, who had been watching him anxiously all the time.

"Well, my friend, let us poke about a bit more till your assistants get back from the shelter on the common," he said, and dropped down on his knees, examining every inch of the flooring with the aid of a pocket torch and a magnifying-glass. For some moments nothing came of this; but of a sudden Narkom saw him come to an abrupt halt.

Twitching back his head, he sniffed at the air, two or three times, after the manner of a hound catching up a lost scent; then he bent over, brought his nose close to the level of the bare and dirty boards, sniffed again, blew aside the dust, and exposed to view a tiny grease spot not bigger than a child's thumb nail.

"*Huile violette!*" he said, with a sound as of satisfied laughter in his voice. "No wonder the scent of violets lingered. Look! here is another spot—and here another," he added, blowing the dust away and creeping on all fours in the direction the perfumed trail led.

"Oh, I know this stuff well, my friend," he went on. "For many, many years its manufacture was a secret known only to the Spanish monks

who carried it with them to South America and subsequently established in that part of the country now known as Argentina a monastery celebrated all over the world as the only source from which this essential oil could be procured."

"Argentina?" repeated Narkom, agitatedly. "My dear chap, have you forgotten that it was in Argentina Lord St. Ulmer spent those many years of his self-imposed exile? If then, the stuff is only to be procured there—"

"Gently, gently — you rush at top speed, Mr. Narkom. I said '*was*,' recollect. It is still the chief point of its manufacture, but since those days when the Spanish monks carried it there others have learned the secret of it, notably the Turks who now manufacture an attar of violets just as they have for years manufactured an attar of roses.

"It is enormously expensive; for the veriest drop of it is sufficient, with the necessary addition of alcohol, to manufacture half a pint of the perfume known to commerce as 'Extract of Violet.' At one time it was a favorite trick of very great ladies to wear on a bracelet a tiny golden capsule containing two or three drops of it and supplied with a minute jeweled stopper attached to a slender golden chain, which stopper they occasionally removed for a moment or two that the aroma of the contents might diffuse itself about them.

"I knew one woman—and one only —who possessed such a bracelet. You, too, have heard of her. Whatever her real name may be, she is simply known to those with whom she associates as 'Margot.'"

"Scotland! The Queen of the Apaches?"

"Yes."

"You are sure of that?"

"I ought to be. I myself stole the bracelet from the collection of the Comte de Champdoce and presented it to her. I remember that the stopper to the capsule was carved from a single emerald that, owing to its age—it was said to have belonged in its day to Catherine de Medici—had worn loose, and could only be prevented from dropping out and allowing the contents to drip away by wedging it into the orifice in the capsule by winding the stopper with silk."

Narkom's face positively glowed.

"My dear Cleek, you give me the brightest kind of hope," he said enthusiastically, as he stooped and investigated the tiny, perfumed grease-spots on the floor, so clearly made by the dropping of some oily substance that there could be no question regarding their origin. "Then, there can be no possibility of connecting young Geoff Clavering or the girl he loves with this ghastly business if that Margot woman has been here, and it was from her bracelet that these stains were dropped? Besides, after what you said about that fellow of her crew who was spiked to the wall as this poor wretch here is—"

"A moment, my friend — you are on the rush again," interrupted Cleek. "All that we actually *know*, at present, Mr. Narkom, is that some one, and very likely a woman, has been here and—unconsciously, of course — has spilled some drops of a very valuable and highly concentrated perfume. This naturally points to a defective stopper to the article containing that perfume, but whether or not that defective stopper was one carved from a single emerald and wound with silk—"

He stopped and let the rest of the sentence go by default. All the while he had been speaking he had been following, after the manner of a hound on the scent, the trail of that perfume's lead; now it had brought him to a litter of rat-gnawed paper and a parcel containing a peach and the remnants of a roasted fowl.

As if the scent seemed stronger here than elsewhere—so strong, in fact, that it was suggestive of a goal—he began

tossing the scraps about, till at last he gave a sort of cry and pounced upon something in a distant corner.

"Cleek!" rapped out Narkom, in an excited but guarded tone, as he noted this, "Cleek, you have found something? Something that decides?"

"Yes," the detective made answer. "Something which proves that, whoever the woman who dropped the scent may be, Mr. Narkom, she was *not* Margot!"

He unclosed his hand and stretched it out toward the superintendent; and Narkom saw lying on his palm a crushed and gleaming thing which looked like a child's gold thimble that had been trodden upon.

The snapped fragment of a hairlike gold chain still clung to it, and at the end of this dangled a Lilliputian stopper, a wee mite of a thing that was little more than a short, thick pin of plain, unjeweled, unornamented gold.

"One of the 'capsules' of which I spoke, you see," said Cleek, "and bearing not the slightest resemblance to the one belonging to Margot. The thing has snapped from its fastening and been trodden upon—trodden under a very heavy foot, I should say, from the condition of it. There is something engraved upon it, something that won't tend to ease your mind, Mr. Narkom. Take my glass and look at it."

Narkom did so. Engraved on the crushed and fragrant-smelling bit of gold he saw a coat of arms — arms which he, at least, knew to be those of the house of St. Ulmer—and under this the name "Katharine."

"Good Lord!" he said, and let the crushed bauble fall back upon the palm from which he had lifted it. "That child—that dear girl who is as much as life itself to young Geoff Clavering? But how could she—a slip of a girl like that—"

He turned and looked over at the dead figure spiked to the cottage wall. Cleek made no reply, at least for the moment. He had gone back to the "hound's trick" of sniffing the trail, and was creeping on again—*past* the litter of papers this time—and crawling on all fours toward the very doorway by which the police had first gained access to the room.

"Wait! Cross no bridges until you come to them," he said at last in an excited whisper. "Some one who trod upon that thing passed out this way. I *knew* I smelled the oil the very instant I crossed the threshold; now I can understand why. The assassin left by the very door you entered, but whether man or woman—"

By now the trail had led him to the very threshold of the room. Beyond lay the dark hall by which Narkom and his men had entered the house, and the light of his upraised electric torch shining out into that black passage showed him something that made his pulses leap.

It was simply a fragment of some soft, pinkish material caught and torn off from a woman's skirt by a nail head that protruded above the level of the boarded floor. He rose and ran out to it; he caught it up and examined it; then, with a laugh, shut his hand over it and went hurriedly back to the superintendent's side.

"Mr. Narkom," he said, "tell me something. We have, presumably, found a perfume receptacle belonging to the Lady Katharine Fordham; but did you notice—can you remember what manner of frock her ladyship wore at Clavering Close to-night?"

"I remember it very well indeed. It was a simple white-satin frock, very plain and very girlish, and she wore a bunch of purple pansies with it."

"Ah-h-h!" Cleek's voice was full of relief, his eyes full of sparkle and life. "Then she did *not* wear a gown of some soft, gauzy, pink material, eh? An airy sort of gown trimmed at the hem with scalloped embroidery of rose-colored silk. Good! Can you remember any lady to-night that did?"

"Yes," said Narkom promptly. "Miss Ailsa Lorne did. She wore

some soft, gauzy, pink stuff—chiffon, I think I've heard the wife call it—with a lot of rose-colored silk stitchery on the edges of the flounces; and she had a band of pink ribbon on her hair."

Cleek made no comment, nor did his countenance betray even the slightest trace of emotion. He simply put the shut hand that held that gauzy, pink fragment into his pocket and shoved it far down out of sight.

A while ago he could have sworn that Ailsa Lorne's foot had never crossed the threshold of this house of crime; now he knew that it had, and if the evidence of this scrap of chiffon stood for anything, crossed it *after* she had left Clavering Close — after she had heard that threat against the Count de Louvisan's life.

CHAPTER V.

The Riddle of the Night.

BEFORE Mr. Narkom could ask any questions the sound of excited voices and hasty footsteps coming up the drive and making toward the lonely house drove all other thoughts from his head.

"Come along," he whispered to Cleek. "It's Hammond and Petrie returning from the keeper's shelter on the common. I know their voices. And they have unearthed something startling, or they wouldn't be talking so excitedly.

They had indeed, as he learned when he hurried out and intercepted them at the cottage steps; for between them they were supporting a man stripped of coat, waistcoat, and hat, and wearing bound round his head a blood-stained handkerchief.

His bearded face was bruised and battered, his shirt and trousers were covered with mud, and he was so weak from loss of blood that it was next to impossible for him to stand alone.

"Sir," broke out Hammond, as they came up with Mr. Narkom and paused with this unexpected newcomer before him, "I don't know whether that French mounseer is a wizard or not; but he copped the lay at the first guess, Mr. Narkom, and, foreigner or not, I take off my blessed hat to him.

"Here's what we found when we got to the shelter, sir—this here party, knocked senseless, tied up like a trussed fowl and tucked out of sight under the gorse-bushes nigh the shelter. Coat, cap, badge, and truncheon all gone, sir — nicked by that daredevil who took us in so nicely down there at the old railway arch. The murderer himself he were, I'll lay my life; for look here, sir, here's what he most brained this poor chap with—a hammer, sir—look! And a hammer was used, wasn't it, to spike that dead man to the wall?

"Had him, Mr. Narkom; had the rascal in our very hands—that's what we did, sir—and then like a parcel of chuckle-heads we went and let him go."

"It is a trick that has succeeded with others besides yourselves," said Cleek, who had been bending over the injured man. He looked up at Narkom significantly. "*Monsieur,* I expect my assistant here any minute now. Would it not be as well to report this shocking affair to the local authorities?"

"Certainly, *monsieur!*" agreed Narkom, who had forgotten that Dollops might arrive now at any moment.

"What about this poor chap here, sir?" interposed Petrie. "He's in a desperately bad way. Oughtn't we to take him with us and turn him over to the hospital-folk?"

"*Non*—that is, not yet, my friend," softly interposed Cleek. "Your good superintendent and I will look after him for a little time. There is a question or two to ask. He will bear the strain of talking now better than he might be able to do later. Notify the hospital officials as you pass through the town proper, and have an ambulance sent out. That's all. You may go."

"Well, so help me—" began the indignant Petrie, then discreetly shut up and went. A moment later the limousine had whizzed away into the mist and darkness with the three men, and Cleek and Narkom were alone with the injured keeper.

"I expect that is Dollops in his taxi," whispered Cleek. "I thought I heard the sound of a motor. That will obliterate every track if you don't stop him. Head him off if you can, dear chap, and set him to work directly you have dismissed the taxi. Tell Dollops to measure and make a drawing of every footmark in and about the place. Quickly, please, before it is too late."

Mr. Narkom hurried off and vanished in the mist, leaving his ally alone with the dying man, for that he was dying there could be no question.

A bullet had gone through his body; a hammer had battered in the back of his head; he was but partly conscious — with frequent lapses into complete insensibility—and the marvel was not that he occasionally uttered some wandering, half-coherent sentences, but that he was able to speak at all.

"My poor chap!" Cleek said feelingly as he administered a stimulant by which the keeper's flagging energies were whipped up. "Try to speak — try to answer a question or two — try—for a woman's sake."

"A woman's?" he mumbled feebly. "Aye, my poor wife—Gawd 'elp her—her and the kiddies! And me a goin' 'ome, sir — me a gettin' of my death like this for jist a doin' of my duty—doin' of it honest and true, sir, for king and country!"

"And both letting you face the nightly peril of it unarmed!" said Cleek bitterly; then, passionately: "Will you wake up, England? Will you wake up and do justice by these men who give their lives that you may sleep in peace, and who, with a badge and a truncheon and two willing hands, must fight your criminal classes and keep law and order for you?"

"Aye—some day, may like—some day, sir," mumbled the dwindling voice; then it trailed off and sank sobbingly away, and Cleek had to administer more brandy to bolster up his fading strength.

"A word," he said eagerly, the hammering of his heart getting into his voice and making it unsteady. "Just one word, but much depends upon it. Tell me—now—before anybody comes: Who did it—man or woman?"

"I dunno, sir — I didn't see. The mist was thick. Whoever it was, come at me from behind. But there was two—there must have been two—one as I heard a runnin' toward me when I challenged, sir, and—and got shot down like a dog; and 'tother as come at me in the back when I sang out 'Murder!' and blew my whistle for help. But, men or women, whichever it may 'a' been, I never see, sir—never. But one woman was on the common to-night. A lady, sir—oh, yes, a lady indeed!"

"A lady? Speak to me—quickly—my friend is returning. What did that lady wear? Was it a pink dress? Or couldn't you see?"

"Oh, yes! I could see—she came near me—she spoke in passing. She gave me a bit of money, sir; and asked me not to mention about her bein' out there to-night and me havin' met her. But it wasn't a pink dress, sir; it was green—all shiny pale-green satin with sparklin' things on the bosom and smellin' like a field o' voylits on a mornin' in May!"

The sense of unspeakable thankfulness that Cleek experienced upon hearing that the dress of this unknown "lady" was not pink was lost in a twinkling in one of utter and overwhelming surprise at learning that it was *green!*

Pink, white, and green, here were three evening dresses called into the snare of this night's mystery; and yet a *third* woman now involved. White satin, that had been Lady Katharine Fordham's gown to-night; pink chiffon, that had been Ailsa Lorne's. Who

then was the wearer of the pale-green satin gown? Here was the riddle of the night taking yet another perplexing turn.

A clatter of hasty footsteps came along the drive and up the steps to the veranda, and Narkom, in a state of violent excitement, stood beside him.

"All right," he said, answering Cleek's inquiring glance. "I headed the taxi off and set Dollops to work as you suggested—and a blessed good thing I did, too, otherwise we might have lost valuable clues."

"There *were* footsteps, then?"

"Footsteps? Great Scott, yes—heaps of them; the absolute continuation of those which led me and my men to this house. But the madness of the thing, the puzzle of the thing! No man on earth can run away in two directions; yet there the blessed things are, going down the road at full tilt, and coming back up it again still on a dead run.

"Two lines of them, old chap—one going and the other returning and both passing by the gate of this house. By it, do you hear? *By* it, and never once turning in; yet in the garden we have found marks that correspond with them to the fraction of a hair, and we know positively that the fellow *did* come in here. It licks me, Cleek—it positively licks me. It's beyond all reason."

"Yes," admitted Cleek, thinking of the green satin dress. "It is, Mr. Narkom; it certainly is."

"Dollops will bring the drawings he's making to you as soon as he has covered all the ground," resumed the superintendent almost immediately. "Clever young dog that, and no mistake. But to return to our muttons, old chap. Did you get anything out of this poor fellow—any clue to the party who assaulted him?"

"None. He doesn't know. For one thing, the mist prevented him seeing his assailant; and for another, he was first shot down by some one who was running toward him and answered his challenge with a bullet, and then pounced upon by somebody else who was behind him and floored him with the hammer.

"I take it that the person who was running and who fired the shot was advancing toward him from this direction—was, in fact, the actual assassin—and that having discharged the pistol and caused this poor fellow to whistle a call for assistance to the constable in Mulberry Lane, he was put to it to get out of the box in which he had found himself by those two things.

"To escape across the common meant to be pursued by the constable and driven across the track of one of the other keepers; so he took the bold hazard of putting on this poor chap's coat, cap, and badge and playing at joining in the hue and cry in the manner he did. Is that"—turning to the dying man—"the truth of it?"

The keeper could only nod—he was now too far gone to make any verbal response, and even the administering of another dose of brandy failed to whip up his expiring strength.

"I'm afraid we shall never get any more out of him, poor fellow," said Cleek feelingly. "He is lapsing into unconsciousness, you see. Raise him a bit, make him a little more comfortable if pos— Quick! Catch his head, Mr. Narkom! Don't let it strike the boards. Gone! A good, true servant of the public gone! And the blackguard that killed him still at large!"

Then he gently folded the useless hands and closed down the sightless eyes, and, shaking out the coat which Petrie had bundled into a pillow, spread it over the dead man, and was very, very still for for a little time.

"There's a widow—and some little nippers, Mr. Narkom," he said when he at length rose to his feet. "Find them out for me, will you? And if you can see your way to offer a good, substantial reward for the clearing up of this case and the capture of the criminal, I'll pull it off, and you may

pay that reward to the mother of this man's children."

"Cleek, my dear fellow! How ridiculously quixotic! What on earth can you be thinking about?"

"A woman, Mr. Narkom—just a woman—and a few little nippers . . . who might take the wrong road as—well, as somebody I know of took it once—if there wasn't a hand to help them or a friend to guide. That's all, dear friend, that's all!"

Lifting his hat to that silent, covered figure, he turned and walked away. But at the foot of the steps leading down to the mist and darkness of the drive he came to a halt; and there Narkom, who was following almost immediately behind, joined him again.

"My dear fellow, of all the impulsive, of all the amazing men—" he began, but got no further; for Cleek's upthrown hand checked him.

"We won't go into that, Mr. Narkom," he said. "We'll stick to the case, please. I've got something to tell you that you haven't heard as yet—something that that poor, dead chap did manage to tell me. A woman—a lady—was out there on the common to-night and paid him not to disclose the fact."

"Great Scott! My dear fellow, you don't surely mean to hint that by any possibility that poor child, Lady Katharine Fordham—"

"No, I do not. The lady in question was neither Lady Katharine Fordham, who you tell me wore a white-satin dress to-night, nor yet Miss Ailsa Lorne, whose frock you say was of gauzy pink.

"The lady in question wore, I understand, a gown of very pale-green satin with what I take to have been several diamond ornaments upon the corsage; furthermore, a delicate but very distinct odor of violets clung about her."

"Good Lord!"

"No wonder you are surprised, Mr. Narkom. Ladies dressed in that fashion are not, as a general thing, given to wandering about Wimbledon Common either by night or day, and the presence of this particular one is curious, to say the least of it. I am of the opinion, however, that she was no stranger to the common keeper, otherwise he would have hurried her into the shelter the instant she offered to bribe him, whistled up the constable in Mulberry Lane, and given her in charge as a suspicious character.

"Then there is another side to the affair which we must not overlook. An entertainment was in progress at Clavering Close to-night, and there must have been many ladies present dressed in gala attire. But if your exclamation means that you have no recollection of seeing one who wore a gown of pale-green satin—"

"It doesn't!" rapped in Narkom excitedly. "It was the absurdity, the madness, the—the utter impossibility of the thing. That she—she of all women— What rot!"

"O-ho!" said Cleek, with a strong rising inflection. "Then there *was* such a gown in the rooms at Clavering Close to-night, eh? And, by the way, you do remember the lady that wore it?"

"Remember her? There's nobody I should be likely to remember better. It was Lady Clavering herself!"

"Whew-w! The hostess?"

"Yes. Sir Philip's wife—young Geoff's stepmother; one of the sweetest, gentlest, most womanly women that ever lived. And to suggest that she . . . either the fellow must have deliberately lied or his statement was the delusion of a dying man. It couldn't have happened—it simply couldn't, Cleek.

"Why, man, her ladyship was there—at the close—when I left. It was she who put that jewel into my hand and asked me to leave it at Wuthering Grange when—"

He stopped, biting his words off short and laying a nervous grip on Cleek's arm; and Cleek, facing about

abruptly, leaned forward into the mist and darkness, listening.

For of a sudden, a babble of angry voices, mingled with the sounds of a scuffle, had risen from the road beyond the gates, and hard on the heels of it there rang forth sharply the shrill tones of Dollops crying out at the top of his voice:

"None o' yer larks, now! Got yer! Gov'ner! Mr. Narkom! This way! Come quick, will yer? I've copped the bounder. Out here in the bushes under this blessed wall!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

It Can't Be Done

by Frank Condon

IT is extremely difficult to tell precisely when to cease referring to some young married women as brides. Some of these charming adventurers upon the sea of matrimony continue to look, act, and talk like brides for a long, long time after the fatal stroll down the church aisle, while others drop off the bride look about a week later.

And the husband — the husband ceases to feel like a bridegroom almost instantly, although he conceals this impression with great deftness from the fluttery half of the partnership.

It is when he definitely refuses to shave of a Sunday morning and lolls around the house in a frayed bathrobe descended from bachelor days, preferring the comic supplement and a couple of pipes to wifely approval and a stiff, white collar—it is then that the musing bride begins to comprehend that, after all, she simply married a male person and not a young Greek god.

You would undoubtedly speak of Beth King as a bride, and you would inevitably envy Joe King because of his possession of Beth. Beth is a little pink-and-white pint of femininity, usually surrounded by white lace and brown curls.

She is slender and blue-eyed and appealing, and you would no more hurt her feelings with a harsh word than you would kick a new-born kitten.

Furthermore, Beth loves Joe beyond the power of human expression to describe, and Joe is equally affectionate and thoughtful. Joe is a pretty decent chap, who works for a mining company in a building forty stories high, and now you know enough about this admirable and perfectly mated pair to start off intelligently.

They have been married two years, and it is doubtful if, in all that time,

an unkind word has passed between them.

Beth invariably meets Joe at the door when he comes home in the evening, wearied and petulant from the day's cares; and after she has kissed him several times and rushed him into his slippers and fixed up the hot water for him and variously ministered to his wants, Joe forgets his weariness and sits down to dinner contentedly and without the fifty-horse-power grouch observed in many husbands.

And that is why, considering all these and other unmentioned things, that there came to Joe a day of unutterable self-contempt. It is true that he had determined to tell the truth to Beth, to confess everything and shrive his soul, but at the wrong moment Mrs. Henry J. Circumstance leaped into the game and crabbed it. The facts were these:

On a certain broiling hot day in July Joe walked down the elevated-railway steps at Warren Street feeling that he was in for a bad day at the office.

The sun glared down upon a cringing metropolis with a feverish, brassy eye. The pavements began to turn into goulash, and in the offices electric fans served only to swirl the hot air into the gasping countenances of perspiring men and women.

After lunch, Joe took himself by the hand and announced to the office manager that if the business depended upon him that afternoon it would be wrecked before nightfall, because he had no intention whatever of remaining in the bake-oven in which he had toiled during the morning.

He felt hot and sticky and miserable.

He didn't even want to see or talk with Beth, which shows you how really bad he felt, and, after giving the matter continued thought, he wended his way toward Brooklyn Bridge and disappeared from New York without informing any living soul.

Ordinarily he would have telephoned Beth that he was taking an afternoon off on account of the heat; but as he fully intended to reach home before the dinner hour, he omitted the message to his beloved spouse. He had no intention of deceiving her or pretending that he had been working as usual during the afternoon.

He was merely going down to Diamond Beach to escape the deadly city heat.

Diamond Beach is an obscure strip of sand forty miles from New York, where the ocean rolls in cheerfully on a hot day and few city people congregate. It is far off the beaten path, and New Yorkers—most New Yorkers—know nothing of its lure.

Joe was looking for peace and calm and a dip in the cooling waves, and if you had told him on the train going down to the Beach that he would do something that afternoon of which he would be miserably ashamed, he would have laughed in your face.

If you had informed him prophetically that before the shades of evening drew nigh he would have lowered himself in his own estimation and offered a deadly affront to his own adored wife, he would have snickered and called you hard names.

If you had told Joe King that another girl that very afternoon would —but let us keep this chronologically straight.

Joe stepped off the train and walked happily down the long board-walk in the direction of the sea. He could hear the rollers murmuring their incessant welcome, and the cool breeze sifted in from afar, bringing with it the revivifying tang of the salt sea.

"This certainly is fine," Joe said, breathing deeply. "I make a mistake in sticking so close to the office. I ought to get out here oftener. Already I feel like a new man, and I'll bet it's a hundred and ten in the shop this minute."

Filled with pleasing thoughts, he hunted out a bath-house, equipped himself with a suit, and plunged into the breakers, where he reveled luxuriously

for an hour or more. There were very few people passing along the board-walk in front of the big hotels and even fewer on the smooth, white beach.

Cooled and refreshed by his plunge, he donned his clothes, bought a stein of beer and some cigars, and set forth upon a stroll down the beach. He passed beyond the board-walk into the vasty silences beyond, and for some time he was in sole possession of the beach.

Then very abruptly, suddenly, unexpectedly, and cheerfully, he met the Girl with the Green Feather.

She had been sitting against a sand-dune, staring out to sea, an open book beside her, a parasol stuck in the sand and on it the hat sporting the green feather.

She glanced up at Joe as he slowly passed. He glanced down at her. They were quite close together, and so far as any one could see, they were the only two people in the world.

The Green Feather Girl lowered her eyes and then raised them again. Whenever a girl does that to you, citizens—whenever she looks away and then looks back one second later, it is an indication that your presence is not regarded as a horrible offense.

Furthermore, Joe imagined that the faintest suggestion of a smile lurked about the corners of her mouth, and when you consider that it was a delightful, pretty mouth, you may or may not pardon Joe for stopping in his tracks, removing his hat, and murmuring something.

The Green Feather Girl smiled outright after Joe's murmur, and right there Joe King began to sink by the bow. The more he looked, the more it became apparent that the lonely lady was a pippin from Pip County, East Pipton. She was clad in a diaphanous blue gown, a creamy, lacy waist, and her pumps were of dull black kid, small and shapely.

Furthermore, her ankles were silk-clad and extremely easy to look at. The hat, hanging on the parasol, was a small, silk affair, and the green feather thrust itself defiantly into the air.

For one fleeting, self-accusing instant Joe reflected that this was no place for him to drop anchor. He was a married man, two years recorded, with the finest little spouse in the world, and no dainty siren on the sands should be permitted to halt him, no matter how alluring she might be.

Then the instant passed on, and Joe murmured something else.

"It certainly is a lovely day," replied the Green Feather. "And so delightfully cool and remote. With the great white rollers breaking and the breeze and the smell of the sea, it is almost heavenly!"

"It is more heavenly now," said Joe, regarding the damsel appraisingly, "than it was before I saw you"—which is pretty fair batting for a man out of practise. "How does it happen that such an alarmingly pretty girl as you is found all alone on a deserted beach, far from home and friends?"

"I am a peculiar person," she laughed. "Sometimes I am overcome with an intense longing for the sea and lonesomeness, so I come down from New York all by myself and wander in the solitude of this great white beach. Don't you love it? Of course I've had all the solitude I want now, and I am very glad you happened by."

"Thank you," Joe answered politely, stretching out comfortably on the warm sand. "This is a great place. The city was hot and I was tired, so I came down here for a swim, little dreaming that good fortune would bring me near one so charming."

"You didn't forget any of the regular New York stuff when you came, did you?" she said, looking at him.

"I presume you are a New Yorker," he answered. "You dress with the skill of one accustomed to the newest modes. Your hat is a wonder! I like the green feather immensely."

"I trimmed it myself," she said, and

thus by easy degrees the two lonely ones drifted into casual conversation, embracing such subjects as may be of interest to a young man and a young woman.

It is not the purpose of this narrative to suggest ideas and thoughts to young married men that might not otherwise have occurred to them. But facts are facts.

Joe King undoubtedly was to blame for the situation because he walked into it deliberately under the influence of a pretty face, and, furthermore, it was a wholly harmless flirtation.

It is true that Green Feather had no way of knowing that Joe King had a Beth King at home. It is also true that there can be no excuse for Joe's reaching over through the sand, about four o'clock, and closing his left hand over Green Feather's right, on the pretext of examining a lapis lazuli ring.

It was a pretty ring and a pretty hand and Joe was forced to examine it intently, thus bringing himself even nearer to Green Feather than he had been.

You may want to know whether the damsel blushed when Joe spoke of the violet shade in her eyes or the glint of the Southern sun in her bonny hair, but you will never know. You may be mildly curious to learn whether Joe's arm totally forgot itself and wandered about a slender and sand-strewn waist.

It might occur to you as interesting to find out whether a small head drooped further and further toward a broad and manly shoulder until it rested there, with a pair of cherry-red lips in such tantalizing proximity that an angel from above might have shivered with apprehension for the weal of Joe's soul.

You may want to know all these things, but after all you have no right to know. It is, bluntly, none of your business.

The red sun dropped into the Highlands of Navesink across the rolling sea, and Joe King came to himself with a start—possibly a guilty start.

"I—I don't know about how the trains run," he said. "Perhaps we had better start."

"You are right," replied Green Feather. "We must be getting back to town. We've had a pleasant afternoon, haven't we?"

"Glorious," returned Joe, but there was a certain halting catch in his voice. It seemed to him as though he had been wandering through the hazy, delightful mazes of a sweet dream and somebody had abruptly dragged him out of bed.

They wandered up the beach until they came to the board-walk, and Joe noted with alarm that the sun was sinking faster than ever and that darkness would soon be upon them. To make matters worse, the train had gone ten minutes before they reached the station and the next one would not leave—horrors—until seven o'clock, thus bringing the travelers into the city at eight.

"Well," said Joe as cheerfully as he could, "we might as well have a bite to eat. It will be too late when we arrive in town."

"That would suit me perfectly," she smiled. "I *am* hungry. It's a pity we missed the train. Perhaps you should have been in town by six."

"Oh, no," Joe replied, but the hollow tones in his voice were plainly perceptible.

"You don't seem to be as happy and gay as you were," she said somewhat accusingly. "Aren't you happy now?"

"I'm as happy as a lark. Who could be otherwise in the company of one so radiant and angelic as you?"

It was a dying effort.

Try as he would to restrain it, the tone of woful melancholy would creep into Joe's voice and he could think of nothing but his own dear wife, the delayed, cold, flat dinner at home in the apartment—and of his own colossal perfidy. He had begun to picture himself as a gorgon, a wretch beyond human forgiveness, utterly unworthy of

the sweet and confiding creature who was devoting her life to him.

If he could have done so without attracting attention, he would have sat himself down upon a heap of sand and indulged in salty tears.

The dinner they had was unmarked by boisterous merriment, joyous jestings, or undue mirth. Green Feather regarded Joe with puzzled eyes, and as for Joe—the longer he remained at Diamond Beach the sadder he became.

It was not a successful dinner in any sense of the word, and when it was ended Joe gave an inward cheer and hurried his fair partner over to the seven o'clock train.

On the ride to New York he was strangely silent, and the rallyings of the lady failed to restore his joviality. Large, copious hunks of gloom surrounded him, and he indulged in some free and prolonged thinking.

He admitted to himself that he had done something for which Beth would probably never forgive him. He had lowered himself in his own eyes and succumbed to the fascinations of a pretty face.

Possibly Beth would break all known records and forgive him, but he would never forgive himself, and, no matter what happened, he would never do anything like it again.

And sternest among his thoughts on the way home was the resolution to go straight to Beth and make full and complete confession. He would hide nothing from the trusting and innocent darling.

He may have done wrong, but he would not live a lie. Beth should know of the trip to Diamond Beach, of the lady with the green feather, of the sundry and several scenes, incidents, and happenings by the sad sea waves, of the dinner together, the missed train—the whole unfortunate business!

After he had made this resolution he felt better, and toward the end of the journey he again attempted to be cheerful to his companion. She had probably caught some of his gloom, so he gave up the attempt, and when the train stopped he bade her a hasty adieu.

"Shall we meet again?" she asked, smiling the same dazzling smile that had sunk him in the afternoon.

"I regret to state," replied Joe firmly, "that I am going into the coal business in the middle of South Africa, and leave for there immediately. I am never coming back to America again. I fear we shall never meet."

Green Feather laughed, held out her hand, and said:

"I meet lots of queer men. Take care of yourself, and don't swallow any coal-dust."

She walked away jauntily—and out of this narrative.

Joe galloped down the subway steps, looking at his watch. It was a few minutes before eight o'clock. All the way up-town he gave himself a mental tongue-lashing, and when he emerged from the station near his apartment, he was the most penitent husband in New York, where there are many such.

He scurried down the street, rushed into the entrance of his building, nearly tore the bell off the elevator, dashed down the hall, thrust his key into the door, opened it, and faced—a dark, empty, desolate, Bethless apartment. Excited as he was, the shock chilled him, and for a moment he stood dumbly in the doorway. Then he closed the door and walked down the long hall to the parlor.

"Beth!" he called, but the answer was that of the grave. Silence. Coldness. He placed a trembling hand upon the dinner-table and found it guiltless of even a cloth.

No one had dined there that evening. Where was she? Torn between conflicting emotions, he switched on the electric lights and stared around the room.

He looked about for a note explaining her queer absence, but there was none. Forty explanations came into his mind, and were rapidly thrust out.

Then he heard a grating sound—the scraping noise of a key being inserted in the lock, and even as he peered down the hall the door opened and Beth, his trusting wife, entered.

She was clad in her long, blue coat and the pretty bowler hat he loved to have her wear. She walked down the hall toward him and, in the parlor entrance, she slowly removed her hat. Joe stared at her for an instant, and then she said:

"*Well, I know everything!*"

There was a cold, icy note in her voice. In her eyes was the steely glint of a wronged and knowing woman. Her chin was firmer than he had ever remembered it, and her lips were pressed tightly together. This was a different sort of Beth.

"What—" he began falteringly, guiltily, cringingly—"what do you know?"

"I would never—never—never have dreamed it," Beth continued in the same monotonous, frigid way. "You were the man I trusted. You were the man I loved. I have been behind you all the time."

"Not—" Joe trembled — "not down at the beach."

"Yes, down at the beach," she answered.

"How did you get there?"

"I simply followed you, of course."

"From—from the office?"

"From the office."

"And—and you saw—you came home on the same—the same train?"

"I did."

"You saw the—the girl?"

Beth shuddered.

"I saw the girl. How could I help it? You made no effort to conceal her."

Joe sat down limply upon the sofa and wiped his forehead. In the center of the room Beth remained standing like a statue of Justice, Vengeance, and Outraged Wifehood. She was slowly unbuttoning her gloves and looking at Joe as though she meant to plunge a dagger through his false heart.

"Let me tell you something," he pleaded. "You probably will not believe me when I say it, but I swear to you that, on the way home, I made up my mind to tell you everything that has happened this afternoon, concealing nothing."

Beth laughed mirthlessly, raising her chin and throwing off the "Humph!" ironically.

"A very likely thing," she replied haughtily.

"I swear it," Joe repeated miserably. "I will admit that I acted wrong to-day, but I insist that I meant to hide nothing from you. I was going to begin with my leaving the office because of the intense heat and tell of the trip to Diamond Beach, of the Girl with the Green Feather, and—and all the rest. I didn't see you there, Beth."

"Naturally, you did not. Do you think me an imbecile? Would I be standing before you waving a flag to attract your attention?"

"It was all harmless enough and you must know it," Joe went on in the same voice used by the old French nobles before the guillotine was released above their aristocratic necks. "I was alone and I met the girl and she was alone. Naturally—"

Joe did his best for himself under the painful conditions.

He softened the story as much as possible. He did not dare conceal a solitary fact, because he did not know exactly how much Beth knew, and he feared that if he told a lie at this critical moment the ship would be wrecked beyond a doubt. So he told the truth.

Beth finally sat down at the table, strumming it nervously with her fingers and fixing Joe with a steady look. He was perspiring when the story was over, but not an ounce of it remained within his system.

He had told everything.

"I will never do anything like it again," he pleaded. "I made up my mind to that, and when you stop to think that I had intended telling you all

the facts, anyhow, I think you ought to forgive me. It will never happen again, Beth dear. I swear it."

Then came a period of durance in which Beth slowly shed her air of grim justice. The steely glare departed from her eyes and, when she spoke again, the old delightful softness had returned to her voice. Joe gave a thankful sigh and moved across the room toward her.

"This time, Joe, I will forgive you," she said, pressing his hand as it lay upon her shoulder.

"It will be the only time," he answered fervently.

Then he kissed her, and she smiled. The storm had been weathered. Presently she rose from her chair and began to unbutton the long, blue cloak.

It fell away from her slender figure and beneath it Joe saw with bulging eyes the creamy, pinkish, wispy, cloud-like garment a woman calls a kimono, whether it is one or not. Beth's was made of cobwebs and angels' whispers, and it was naturally a garment for indoor or boudoir wear.

"What's that?" Joe demanded hoarsely. "You haven't been wearing that thing outdoors—why, you haven't —you haven't—"

"I haven't been out of the house at all," Beth said sweetly. "I have been sitting here waiting for you and, having nothing to do, I thought. So I thought of waiting until you had come in and then stepping out into the hall unknown to you, wearing the blue street coat and the hat and—well, you know the rest."

She smiled at him. All at once Joe suddenly shrank and, instead of being six feet tall and proportionately broad, he could easily have walked through the keyhole.

"You are quite a thinker," he said feebly. "In fact, from now on, perhaps you had better do all the thinking for this family."

BESIEGED

BY H. S. HASKINS

AS Cupid is belligerent
  And sails life's stormy sea,
I'll have a care he doesn't launch
  A submarine at me.

But while I scan the troubled waves,
  Where hidden dangers lie,
He's apt to take an air-ship and
  Bombard me from the sky.

His ordnance is the latest type,
  His aim is straight and true,
And when he gets a bead, alas!
  It's all but up with you.

Last night I barely did escape,
  For, taken by surprise,
I hobbled off the battle-field
  With wounds from Mabel's eyes.

Zuleika the Moonflower

by Caroline Stinson Burne

CHAPTER I.

A Breach of Military Etiquette.

STUART HARDING was like most cadets who have passed through plebe year and emerged not altogether chastened. In summer he was accustomed to go on ten-mile hikes with three pints of lemonade "slum" under his belt, then dance all evening till "hell cats" and be ready at the crack of the sunrise gun for drill. (He rarely slept except in chapel.)

He was never captain of his company and he was sometimes caught in the class-room "trying a spec," which term denotes an unsuccessful attempt at bluffing. He was always in love with the L. P., or lady of the post, and, although no "spoonoid," usually "dragged a femme" at every fortnightly hop and took her for a walk down Flirtation during the second half of at least one dance.

In fact he had tried out a great many "femmes" in the course of this narrow but by no means straight path. But the one who had failed most signally to respond to its well-known allurements was a certain small red-haired girl with doll-like features and a tip-tilted nose.

Stuart Harding was six feet, with a chiseled profile, blue eyes, and an infectious habit of smiling. He gave her his class ring.

This was all before the day that Stuart and two other first class men became rather intimately connected with a pint of Three Star smuggled in by way of Highland Falls. Not that any of them did anything unbecoming officers and gentlemen. But the presence of a flask in Harding's bunk constituted a breach of military etiquette that could not be overlooked.

There was a trial—Harding boned military law every night for two weeks—but most of the evidence piled up against him he refused, for reasons best known to himself, to remove. Some people talked of toasts drunk—obligations owed, and said, "*Cherchez la femme!*" But then, there is almost always *some* talk on an army post. The charge was "conduct prejudicial to military discipline."

So Harding called on all his friends, then left by an afternoon boat.

He had previously informed his family of the course events had taken—likewise the red-haired lady. And the red-haired lady wrote briefly, saying, "Mamma thinks I need a change, so I am going for a cruise around the world on my cousin Fred Dalrymple's yacht, the Sylph." It was signed, "Your sincere friend, Doris Carring-

ton," and this had a vaguely chilling effect on Stuart.

"If she only knew!" he groaned.

Meanwhile Harding had become acquainted with lunch counter doughnuts and the slats of park benches while trying to convince sundry gentlemen that he was a necessary adjunct to their business success. Then his father came on from Tennessee and at length succeeded in locating Stuart where he was holding down an eight-dollar job as a maintenance-of-way engineer on the New York Central.

For three generations there had been Hardings in both branches of the service. Therefore, it had been a heavy blow to Colonel Harding when his son's military career had ended abruptly. But he liked the boy's pluck and the fact that he hadn't given up and come home with a hard-luck story.

And privately, he considered that the commandant had been oversevere.

So the colonel gripped Stuart's hand firmly when they met for the first time after the court-martial. Then Colonel Harding invited his son to dine. They went to the Belmont and the colonel bought Stuart grape fruit and white bait and fillet mignon, potatoes *au gratin* and coffee with crackers and a Camembert. Because there was no corn whisky on the wine list, he also ordered a bottle of champagne.

Then his father passed Stuart a Havana which his son accepted, and for a while they smoked in a friendly silence. And they presented a pleasing picture of mutual regard and respect. The elder Harding, a dignified, handsome man of sixty, his son a dignified, handsome youth of twenty-three, in spite of the civilian clothes he wore, cut in the style of two summers ago when he had been home on furlough and which he had outgrown. Colonel Harding was the first to break silence.

"Stuart, you want to make good?"

"Yes, sir, I sure do."

"Do you think you can make use of your engineering knowledge beyond just what you're doing now?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have a friend who wants to build a railroad through Zanzibar. So far the sultan of that country has refused to give them a concession. Some one has to go and get it out of the sultan, then survey, draw up specifications, etc. It will probably take time, and Melton, my friend, has no one he can spare just now. Would you like to try it?"

"Yes, sir," Stuart replied.

"Then here's luck, my boy. We'll stay here to-night and go around to the office together in the morning."

"Thank you, dad. I'm—I've *got* to make good," he blurted out, deeply touched.

That night Stuart got down an encyclopedia and looked up Zanzibar. He was not sure of its location. He found that it was an island off the east coast of Africa; that it was a "cesspool of wickedness, Mohammedan in religion, Oriental in appearance, and African in morals."

This was sufficient to fire young Stuart's imagination. But he read further that there were savage tribes in the interior of the island known as Bantus, and his imagination was still more fired and his enthusiam whetted at the thought of possible fighting.

He went to bed to dream of minarets and narrow, winding streets, of veiled women, savage black warriors, crowded bazaars and the smell of the East, whatever that may be! And blueprints and red-haired girls with tip-tilted noses were mingled inextricably in it all.

CHAPTER II.

The Red-Haired Girl.

ON the following day Harding was accompanied to the office of a great man by his father, who forthwith made all the arrangements for him.

The great man looked hurriedly at Stuart's neat blue-print drawings and

rather more attentively, more piercingly at Stuart, freshly garnished for the occasion by the proprietor of a Fifth Avenue shop. The little white-etched lines of the blue-prints made them look very like most blue-prints. Stuart, with his straight figure of a Greek athlete (not a prize-fighter exaggeration of one) and his straight-from-the-shoulder glance and a smile with which he seemed to challenge Fortune, was *not* exactly like every other young man.

"This isn't going to be fighting, you know, or even engineering—it's going to be diplomacy and quinin," said the great man.

Stuart's face fell. "I see, sir," he vouchsafed.

"Not but what you mayn't be called on to do some fighting, too," the great man continued. "There's no Sullivan law in Zanzibar."

Stuart's face brightened again.

"And, of course, you're to call on us for any necessary expenses in connection with surveying—and, in fact, the granting of the concession. Entertaining, you understand, and that sort of thing. Do you like music? I hear the sultan is musical."

This seemed a rather irrevelant fact to Stuart, but he merely said that he could sing "Benny Havens" and some of the latest "rags." The great man (who was his father's friend, Mr. Melton), wrinkled up his brow and thought Stuart's musical knowledge might do.

"Whatever you accomplish, or don't accomplish, be careful about getting into difficulties with the British government. They have a sort of protectorate over Zanzibar and the place is full of British officials. Formerly part of a British regiment was stationed there. But the natives haven't been troublesome lately, so at present there are only a handful of officers and a company of native troops."

"And the railroad?" said Stuart.

"At present it's a small line running out to Chekeouwi, a few hundred miles. Now we want to put it through Diumbi, Tandium and Baush Madji, on up to the coast towns in the north. This will be connected with Mombasa on the mainland by a small steamer, and so the Zanzibar road will be a continuation of the Uganda line which goes all through East Africa. At present you have to go from Mombasa to Zanzibar—the city—by a steamer, all the way around the island. Wait—here's the map. You see?"

Stuart Harding and Mr. Melton were soon poring over various maps and plans.

The wagon roads throughout the island were to be surveyed and utilized as far as possible. The work after that would belong to an experienced engineer. The chief part of Stuart's work, after all, would be to get the concession!

Later Colonel Harding accompanied his son aboard the Mediterranean steamer on which he was to go part of the way. His father had been so thoroughly "decent," as Stuart expressed it, that he was feeling just a little "silly." At the door of the stateroom they caught sight of a floral tribute.

"What is the meaning of this?" the colonel haughtily demanded. "Any one would think you were a débutante, sir."

"I don't know, sir; unless it's some joke," replied Stuart with a mystified air, after he had stooped to pull off the tissue paper. This done, a huge horseshoe of roses was revealed with the sentiment in immortelles, "Good Luck!"

"Look at the card," his father suggested, and Stuart did so. It was signed, "Respectful yours, Sam Porter."

"Why, dad, that's the groom that took care of 'Whisky.' You remember the nigger down home that enlisted in the colored regiment? The whitest nigger you ever saw. He was up at the Point the last two years."

"Well—well—by George! This *is* astounding." The colonel could do

nothing but stare at the elaborate horseshoe.

"I should say so. The poor fellow must have spent every cent he had on that thing." Young Harding stared half ruefully at the big horseshoe of roses. Then he tenderly covered it up in its tissue paper shroud once more.

"Well—we'll take it as an omen," he said with a glance at his father. And they went up together and had a drink just before the last warning was bawled to those going ashore.

Stuart went immediately after the boat pulled out and inquired for mail. There were several letters postmarked West Point, and a telegram or two. There was one in his mother's handwriting from his home town in Tennessee. He found himself whistling something that was popular at the time, something about, "Take Me Back to Tennessee."

Then the band struck up another air. It was a rag with a theme stolen from one of Offenbach's operas, and it had been played at every West Point hop that year. And *she* had always danced it with him.

Now he realized what letter it was he had been looking for. His mother's he knew would be sweet and tactful—those from the fellows would keep up a pretense of jocundity—he knew them without opening them. They would be dated "Hell-on-Hudson"—something like that; and he would be addressed "Dear Old Stew," or something equally affectionate.

Somehow he could not open them now.

He jammed them down into his pockets. It seemed so odd to be in "cit" clothes and have pockets! Her tantalizing coppery hair had just come up to the third brass button from the top of his dress uniform. The music brought her to him more plainly than ever.

The trombones seemed to be sawing into him and through him, the drums were the beat of his own pulses, the trill of the piccolo was his own nerves quivering. There seemed to be a kind of gnawing sensuality, a piercing, sweet pervasiveness like a physical presence about this music. He could not endure it any longer.

With a muttered word he started for the bow of the boat. He looked out over the bright waters of the bay, a moody frown on his chiseled features! Probably, after all, Zanzibar would not be very amusing. He had no money beyond enough to supply his immediate needs, so he would study all the way over on some of the things he felt shaky about, then he would probably die ingloriously of fever after he got there!

A white yacht came down the bay. Brass work gleamed in the sun, and she made a line of black smoke in the milky sky. On the deck, lounging in a big wicker chair and wrapped in a heavy white coat, sat a slim, red-haired girl. Another girl and two men and an older woman, smiling and competent, were there too. But Harding only saw the girl with the red hair.

"Hell!" he said gently.

CHAPTER III.

A Rhine Maiden.

A WEEK later Stuart was talking with apparent enjoyment to a pretty girl who had come out in New York the winter before.

They were in the Winter Garden on the upper deck and Stuart was buying coffee for the girl at eleven in the morning. She had risen too late for breakfast in the saloon and couldn't bear to breakfast in her stateroom, she explained.

She was a blonde and very satisfactory to look at. When she spoke Stuart merely watched her. When she was silent, he watched her all the more.

There was nothing in what she said to distract one from the innocent pleasure of looking at her. No mental complexities interfered with her serene type of beauty. For her people had

come from southern Pennsylvania, and Katherine Vandenheuven was of Dutch origin.

She was beautiful, but she was wooden. But her very woodenness had a soothing effect on Stuart. He had told her something of his story and she had seemed very tactful and displayed just the right degree of sympathy mingled with optimism. After all, the army wasn't everything, he might do very well at this new undertaking!

Stuart winced at this last remark. Couldn't she see how he felt about it? But then, no one except the girls born and bred to the army ever understood —except in a few rare cases. He smiled to himself, a bitter smile for so young a man, a mere boy one would have said. *She* had that French instinct for understanding the unspoken word, for reading one's mind, and the Irish talent for reading the heart.

Stuart looked crossly at the Dutch Venus, as he had christened Miss Vandenheuven in his mind, and wished fervently that she would say something flippant. And a moment ago he had believed that he liked her mental qualities!

"I wish I could see you in a uniform," she said, looking at him with a calm smile.

"We all look exactly alike in them. Our own mothers couldn't pick us out of our company."

"O, I think *I* could," she replied with another wide, innocent smile. Stuart blushed for her.

"It's been a pleasant trip, hasn't it?" he inquired banally.

"Yes indeed. Only I don't care about shipboard. That why I refused an invitation to go around the world on a friend's yacht, a little while ago. A week or so is all I can stand of it—generally."

Stuart's heart gave a sudden leap as though it were going to take a five-bar fence. When it had come safely to ground again he found words to question her with.

"Whom—who—whom, that is, were you going with?" he asked.

"Just a party Freddy Dalrymple is taking out on his yacht, the Sylph. It's the one his father had fitted up for a privateer during the Spanish War, but the government refused it, as he wanted to command it himself. It has all kinds of guns and things—not sticking right out, but ready to be put up at a minute's notice. His cousin, Doris Carrington, who is going along, says she hopes they run into some kind of a fight. There are plenty of pirates in the South Seas, and even in the Mediterranean sometimes. I think that would be simply terrible."

"I bet she does!" Stuart exclaimed incautiously. His face was aglow with enthusiasm.

"O, do you know her? Do you know Doris?" Miss Vandenheuven asked.

"Yes; she used to be good enough to come to some of our hops," he answered with the greatest ease and fluency.

He felt enormously proud of himself at being capable of saying it so casually. And somehow his heart glowed at the mention of pirates. He already had a vision of himself fighting hand to hand with some African savages, some huge blackguardly Moors or cannibals from an uncharted coral isle, while Doris Carrington looked on with an ardent expression. Or perhaps he had arrived just in time to rescue her from a horrid fate in the harem, or caldron, of her captors, just when her brave little smile wavered on her white lips for the last time. Then he would demand an explanation from her—after kissing her just once and in a way that she couldn't possibly mistake!

Suddenly he was aroused from his reverie by his blond companion's smooth, velvety voice. Miss Vandenheuven really had a lovely voice. You had to give her that!

"They say Doris is engaged to her cousin—to Freddy. He seems devoted

enough. But of course we can't tell. Nothing has been announced yet."

"That little shrimp?"

Stuart was aghast. His expression threw caution to the winds or to perdition, he didn't care which. Miss Vandenheuven suppressed a smile.

"He has reams of money, and the Carringtons are very poor," she went on. No, he hadn't known. Doris had always seemed better dressed than most girls. He had never noticed any signs of extreme poverty. Besides, what had that to do with it?

The United States Military Academy might give to its cadets a liberal education; no one could accuse that education of being a commercial one. A cadet is brought up to consider his profession an end in itself, not a means to an end, and that end *money*. Poor Stuart! "I hadn't heard anything about it, but then a cadet wouldn't be likely to," Stuart Harding said quite steadily.

Miss Vandenheuven looked at him pityingly. She reflected that the army always gives one a certain position, after all. Her father had influence at Washington.

"Isn't there any way of your being reinstated at the academy?" she asked suddenly. But Stuart preferred not to discuss things with her just then, and replied with an evasion.

She was to disembark at Villefranche, and the night before the ship reached that port Stuart and Miss Vandenheuven were standing together up in the bow of the boat.

There had been a dance on board. Stuart had to admit that, Pennsylvania Dutch or not, the girl could dance. And Miss Vandenheuven was considerably surer of her dancing than of her social position in the big city where her father was such a power in the business world. She was gowned in green chiffon and lace and appeared as slim and round as an asparagus stalk.

And with her small head bound in plaits of hair, and with her green frock, she rather resembled one. Then, considering the diaphanous quality and negligible quantity of her attire, Stuart decided in favor of a Rhine maiden comparison. Yes, with her clinging green gown, she reminded him exactly of the supernatural beings who floated up on the stage by mechanical means and sang the approach of Siegfried. She really was an artistic thing.

"You look as though you had just risen from the water—sort of a nymph or something," he told her.

She shivered slightly and drew closer to him.

"I'm glad to say I haven't. Think how cold and dark it would be down there. And my hair all wet against the back of my neck."

"I dare say we're more comfortable here than down among the phosphorus," he conceded.

"Yes; isn't it nice and comfortable here?" she murmured. "We're just sheltered enough. And there's no one here but just *us!*"

Again he thought that the lack of imagination she displayed and the utter conventionality of her inner shrine were entirely pleasing. They had for him the pleasant, homey feeling that a German domestic interior has when painted by a conscientious artist.

The fingers of her left hand rested lightly against his forearm. He took it for a moment in both of his. The hand had a kind of firm softness about it, and the fingers were long and tapering.

Her hands were in fact the most distinctive thing about her.

Stuart wondered how he had missed them before. He found the other one and discovered that it was quite as alluring. The even-clinging pressure of the long fingers bit into his nerves. He felt as though bound in a silken cocoon from which there was no escape.

A faint fragrance came to him with the salt tang of the sea. He fought as though to waken from some dream. Finally, he grasped her roughly and drew her to him. Her soft cheek melt-

ed against his own without either resistance or will.

He had kissed her!

CHAPTER IV.

Concession-Hunting.

IT was some weeks later that Harding found himself actually in Zanzibar.

McNeil, the American consul, proved to be congenial, fortunately, as there were few of his countrymen in the city. McNeil was a few years older than Harding, having graduated from a fresh-water college half a decade before, since when he had knocked about the East, holding several minor diplomatic appointments. For the rest, he possessed slightly battered good looks, a fund of ingenuous good humor, and a vocabulary that would have made a column of baseball "dope" seem really intelligible.

Harding and the consul shared the same shack together.

It was perched on a hill overlooking the harbor and filthy streets of the city. It was of corrugated zinc and fairly sanitary. From its veranda the white-washed domes of the mosques, placed in juxtaposition to the blue deep water, made a lovely Della Robbia.

Harding's only intimate friend among the provincial aristocracy was the sultan, on whom he called every morning at ten. His only intimate enemy was Frisby, an Englishman and concession-hunter.

If it had not been for McNeil, Harding might never have stumbled on the keynote of the sultan's character. For elevations, specifications, and the accompanying blue-prints meant nothing to his gracious majesty. His views were all colored by childishly personal likes and dislikes, and his own amusement meant infinitely more to him than the civilization of Zanzibar.

"Go around and see him every morning. He may get to like your looks," McNeil advised. "And flatter him. Jolly him along. Offer him a cigar once in a while—er—be sociable, you know."

"Hang it, McNeil, but you don't seem to realize he's a sultan in his own right. That sort of thing isn't etiquette exactly. It isn't done in the best circles, when royalty is in evidence."

"Oh, poppycock!" McNeil disgustedly sang out. "You know you're as bad as the English chap. When did you ever mingle with any royalty before to get such benighted ideas?"

"It was last year that a cousin of mine chaperoned some of the British nobility up to the Point. It was a duchess and her five daughters. Not absolutely royal, but one or two degrees removed. Betty met them at their hotel and interviewed them for the New York *Scream*, and the duchess was so pleased with the witty remarks Betty ascribed to her that she invited her to tea. Anyway, I was detailed to take them around and show them over the reservation. Believe me, Theresa, it was a gay and profitable afternoon."

"Well," McNeil mockingly inquired, "how does one converse, and what's *their* line of talk?"

"I behaved like a Baedeker except that I didn't wear a red cover. And they replied 'Delicious' or 'Delightful' to everything they were told. Once her grace asked me if I were in the second class. I replied 'Yes.' And she remarked, 'How interesting!' She was strong on repartee."

"Well, take it from me about the sultan, nevertheless and notwithstanding," advised McNeil, "he wants to be amused. Give him some brand-new time-killer."

Harding stopped expatiating on the superiority of American steel and ordered a victrola from the States. Soon the sultan was nodding dreamily over "Celeste Aïda," chuckling with Harry Lauder, and "I Hear You Calling Me" brought tears to his eyes, which were narrow little slits half hidden under rolls of flesh.

But Harding underestimated his rival's ingenuity. The Englishman had a spark of imagination concealed beneath his noncommittal exterior. The next time Stuart went to the palace the sultan greeted him with the announcement, "The King of England has sent me his picture. It is a long continuous picture. Ver-ee fine thing. Ver-ee thoughtful of English king."

Frisby had imported the coronation films, and a moving-picture machine! Harding promptly cabled that he needed a high-power car, and was told that one would be shipped from Naples at once.

He and McNeil enjoyed it hugely, but the sultan was afraid of his precious life to step into it. He also understood the rivalry by this time and enjoyed playing Harding against the Englishman and vice versa. It was amusing and profitable!

Harding was furious.

"Hang it," he declared to McNeil. "I've got to make good. I've got to show them at home. And I've got to show *her*."

Once again McNeil made a suggestion. "The old boy's an inveterate gambler," he said. "Why not get him that way? He has a roulette-wheel in his bedroom and decides by it which side of the bed to get out of every morning. He's very superstitious, too."

"I wish he'd play me for the concession," Stuart remarked.

"You'd lose. He's a shark," was the comforting reply.

"Does he know poker?" Harding asked, a gleam of hope overspreading his features.

McNeil doubted it.

That same day Harding went again to the palace and took with him a pack of cards with President McKinley's pictures on the backs.

"The President sends you these with his love and hopes that you will enjoy playing the great American game, poker," Harding told him with features admirably composed. ("It doesn't matter that it's some years since McKinley happened to be President," he had explained to McNeil.)

The sultan appeared delighted at the deceased President's extreme consideration. He ordered cushions brought, and he and Harding were soon squatted on the floor, the sultan deep in the mysteries of "two of a kind" and "a full house." Barefooted slaves with jingling anklets and bangles brought them native drinks and bottled cocktails.

"The Count of Luxembourg" music was being played on the victrola, and they could look out over the fortifications which surrounded the palace, on the harbor side at brown-sailed boats framed in by palm-trees. Suddenly, "Here's luck, then," Harding cried. "I'll play you for the concession."

"Done-so!" the sultan agreed excitedly.

"I play you the railroad of yours against my Moonflower, Zuleika, the most bee-utiful—"

"What do you mean? What moonflower?" Harding broke in.

"She is brought to me just to-day by my agent. Her mother is Arab lady, daughter of rich planter of Pemba. Her father is Englishman in steamboat company. He die of fever and so the mother wish to dispose of daughter. Very good"—the sultan shrugged expressive shoulders—"you get her if you win from me. I get your railroad if I win from you."

Harding frowned. He would have preferred no mention of the moonflower lady in the stakes. But he was afraid of losing his one chance for the concession.

And he was getting uneasy about not having made any advance so far in his negotiations. What would the company think of him? What would his father think of him? And at the academy?

As for Doris Carrington, he hardly supposed she would be interested, but he longed to make good and at some

future time perhaps be able to show her that he could do something more than play at being a soldier! He still thought that if he could only see her alone for five minutes he could explain things to her.

He could not understand her letter. The coldly calculating discretion of it did not sound like Doris. She was a reckless, emotional little thing with a saving pride and a will of her own. But it was that very pride which had probably been hurt by Stuart's discharge from the academy.

She probably made no allowance for the fact that what a cadet is discharged for would pass unnoticed in a college boy. Just as with the army officers. What a business man does every day in the year is enough to bring a court-martial on an officer.

Stuart thought of the other girl on shipboard and cursed himself for a fool. Why had he behaved so idiotically? He wasn't in love with the girl. Stuart had often flirted before. It is almost the one form of sociability allowed to a cadet. It is a part of his training. But everybody understands that.

This was different, however, since he was no longer responsible to the academy. And it was particularly short-sighted in the case of Miss Vandenheuven, since she was a friend of Doris Carrington. Stuart had answered her letters because it was pleasant to have news and chatter from the world he had known percolate down the east coast of Africa to the bare little consulate.

But perhaps that was foolish of him as well. Suppose the yacht had stopped at any of the Riviera ports, at Villefranche, for instance! Stuart brought his thoughts back with a jerk.

They played.

At first the sultan won. He was having beginner's luck. He held a full house while Stuart had three of a kind. Harding dealt next and groaned inwardly when he looked at his hand. For he had a straight flush.

Small beads of perspiration stood on his forehead above the line of the helmet. He longed to cheat. If he could have gone out of the game! But his training was against him there.

The academy might repudiate him, but he must needs carry the marks of it always on him.

He could tell a straight lie under certain circumstances, but he could not cheat any more than he could quibble. He remembered Hunt, who had been a second classman in his plebe year. Hunt had been stopped by an officer while doing picket duty. He was asked if he was chewing gum.

"No," Hunt had replied, saluting, "but I have a piece in my mouth." Hunt had left the academy shortly afterward.

The sultan laid down his cards. "Ah," he sighed, then she is yours! Zuleika the Moonflower is yours."

Harding thrust his hands deep into his pockets. His features were stamped with a deep chagrin. And he could not help feeling that the sultan, for all his regretful tones, did not really mind the loss of his Zuleika so much after all.

He wished to prolong the struggle for the concession a little, perhaps.

Harding wondered what under the sun McNeil would think of the whole transaction. He never once thought of the girl in question and whether the change from a palace to a shack of corrugated zinc would be agreeable or not. He had no curiosity concerning her—none whatever.

He strode out of the official residence of the sultan of Zanzibar in a mood of mingled wrath and melancholy.

CHAPTER V.

The Honorable Miss Zuleika.

BARLAS McNEIL, American consul to Zanzibar, was seated at a battered-looking table-desk in the living-room of the consulate.

The table was covered with a litter of papers which occasionally fluttered about in the light breeze that blew fitfully from the harbor, greatly to the inconvenience of Mr. McNeil. Around the walls of the small apartment were hung excellent lithographs of the President and Vice-President of the United States, and one of his highness Ali bin Hamoud bin Mohammed bin Seid, Sultan of Zanzibar under the British East African Protectorate.

Well-kept firearms also helped to decorate the walls.

A center-table was strewn with ancient comic weeklies, pipes, cigarette butts, empty glasses and siphons. A dejected upright piano (execrably out of tune) and a number of wicker chairs with faded cushions completed the careless furnishing of the room.

Suddenly McNeil looked up from "cloves exported to the value of—" and burst out with an unnecessary remark about the weather.

"Lord! It's hot as Fourth of July!" At this moment a slim chocolate-brown boy entered by the door that led into the dining-room. He wore an immaculate turban and very little else.

"Bakaru," McNeil addressed him, "make me one of those American Beauties—I showa you how mix 'um last night. Just a little of the grenadine and *quite* a little of the Scotch, you know."

"Ye-es, but hell!" Bakaru whined, and continued languidly to rearrange the table in the middle of the room.

The consul fixed him sternly with a cold gray eye. "Get the drink, I say! Always remember you're a barkeep first, a general housework girl and no questions asked, second."

Again Bakaru protested with a faint sweet smile.

"Get out!" McNeil shouted with the force of a mine explosion. Bakaru got. "Why the deuce doesn't Harding come?" McNeil muttered to himself. "Bakaru!" Bakaru glided gracefully into the apartment.

"Ye-es, bibi," he drawled.

"Where Harding bibi go with devil wagon? What he say?" McNeil questioned in simplified English.

"He take devil wagon along palace of sultan. He stay all afternoon he say, giving talk to sultan and imploring for important paper which permit of iron road to be built," Bakaru replied.

Here an automobile-horn punctured the thick, hot air.

"Devil wagon sing outside now," Bakaru remarked.

"Well, what are you about? Darn you, anyhow!" McNeil exclaimed, as he dropped a pile of papers which flew over the floor in several directions. "Why can't you get me that drink?"

Bakaru disappeared, to return shortly, sampling the cocktail.

"See here—am I to drink that drink or are you? Put it down and get another," the irate McNeil growled out.

Again the automobile-horn was heard. "Where's Ali?" McNeil condescended to inquire of the departing back of the brown boy.

"Ali has gone out to seek some air," Bakaru returned.

"He's always seeking something. Let Harding bibi in."

Bakaru went to the door, mildly protesting. It was Ali's duty to wait on the door. But at present Ali was escorting a lady to a native dance, clad in white trousers and coat, and carrying a silver-headed cane and a cigarette.

A moment later Stuart Harding entered, with a somewhat agitated expression on his boyish face.

"Hello, old boy; any luck?" McNeil greeted him.

"Luck! Don't talk to me about luck," Harding replied sadly. "I don't believe there *is* such a thing. Mac, I'm in a devil of a mess.

"Well, why don't you say something?" he finished with an injured air.

"Say something?" McNeil considered for a moment.

"Certainly. Instead of sitting there

repeating my own words," Harding rather indignantly burst out.

"Well, suppose you proceed to enlighten me, then," McNeil returned dryly. "Have a drink?" he asked with sudden solicitude. "Let Bakaru make you an American Beauty."

Harding waved a deprecatory hand. "No, thanks. Not now. I don't want to put myself outside a pink poison with a kick like a coast-defense gun."

"See here, Harding," McNeil began, "you know that's one of my private specials. Why, the English barkeep at the Sports Club fairly begged me for the recipe."

"As a curiosity, I suppose," Harding remarked unfeelingly. "Or has he a grudge against one of the Reggies for not feeing him the proper sum?"

"The very youthful are ever unappreciative. Well, go ahead and tell me about the devil of a mess you're in." McNeil looked up from his official documents with a gleam of curiosity in his eye.

"Thanks for the sympathetic interest." Harding flung himself in an easy attitude over the arm of a chair and lighted a cigarette. "It's my own fault, of course. I've no one else to blame. I taught him to play poker, and this is how he repays me."

"Not the sultan?" McNeil asked in amused disbelief. "*He'll* never pay you. Poor old Stuart! All I have is yours. How much did you lose?"

"Wait till I get to that," Harding groaned between puffs. "Listen, Mac. I've tried every method known to science to get that concession for the company, haven't I?"

McNeil grinned.

"Every method known to bribery and corruption would be nearer the truth," he conceded. "You certainly have tried to make good since they let you out of the back door at West Point. You'll be a great loss to the army some day."

"Never mind that now." Harding glanced reproachfully at his friend. "Anyway, it was you who put me wise to the amusement game. Think of that car-load of records we just sent him! And that perfectly good machine I wished on him. It *was* a corking model, vintage of 1914, left-hand drive, center control, steering column control of carbureter, ignition system, transmission on four-cylinder chassis from rear axle to motor, perfect water-cooling, electric lighted throughout, a speedometer—"

"Never mind—I don't want to buy one, you know," McNeil cut in. "What's it all got to do with the great American game of poker?"

"Everything! You do rush a fellow so." Harding humped himself into a more comfortable attitude. "You see—I took your suggestion about playing on his weakness for gambling—the sultan's, of course. I played him for the concession—and lost."

McNeil looked at Harding with blank incredulity stamped on every feature. "Go on," he said slowly, "you didn't!" Then, after an affirmative nod from his friend, "Why didn't you cheat? Why didn't you—Oh, *anything?*"

"Blessed if I know," said Harding gloomily. "The training I got at my academy—or my own natural mulishness was against me."

"Well—win it back to-morrow. He may play you for it again. He'd play the roof from over his head," McNeil briskly put in.

Harding laughed without apparent cause. "That's not the real sticky part of the mess," he said finally.

"No?" McNeil inquired genially. "*Now* I suppose you're going to call a spade a spade instead of alluding delicately to the drawing-room shovel!"

Harding got up and began to pace back and forth. "Well, the fact is—she's coming this afternoon, so I might just as well—"

"*She's* coming! Great guns! Who's coming? Coming *here?*" McNeil shouted in some excitemeent.

"Zuleika the Moonflower." Harding

explained with weary patience. "You see, I won her this afternoon."

McNeil's face resembled a chart of the arctic currents. "You did? I congratulate you," he said.

"Confound you—" Harding started in abusively.

"I suppose you mean that you won her affections," McNeil coolly continued.

"Affections be damned!" Harding broke out. "Can't you understand, you thick-skulled—I mean I won her at poker this afternoon."

"See here, what's bitten you? Or is it a touch of the sun? Do let me make you an American Beauty—it'll set you up—" McNeil started up solicitously.

"My dear fellow—it's the simple truth—there's nothing the matter with me. The old boy put this girl up as stakes—I won her and lost the concession."

Harding, with deep chagrin, had to carry off the situation without much aid from McNeil. For McNeil started to laugh immoderately. "Gosh! You're a regular little Mark Antony!" he exclaimed joyously.

"It's no joke, I can tell you. He's going to send her around with her woman as soon as she's packed up," Harding told him.

"The old heathen!" McNeil exclaimed delightedly. "Who and what is she?"

"She's his ward, I believe. He relieves himself of his responsibilities in this manner. Her mother was the daughter of a rich planter of Pemba and her father was an Englishman in the steamboat company. That's what he says, at least," Harding returned indifferently.

"Pretty?" McNeil inquired next.

"Who? The girl? How the deuce should *I* know!" Harding irritably parried.

"Didn't you see her?" McNeil persisted.

"Didn't lay eyes on her once, and I *wouldn't* if I could help it," Harding replied. "If I wasn't afraid of offending the old boy I'd pay her fare one way to Cape Town. I *did* intimate that I wasn't in the habit of carrying young girls home from card parties as souvenirs, but he just grinned wickedly and said that the beauteous Moonflower was mine."

"It's probably one of his cast-off divorced wives. If it's Khole, she's as big as Mount Ætna and with about the same disposition."

Harding looked alarmed at this but said nothing.

"When is the bitter wallop most likely to fall?" McNeil continued.

"Any moment," said Harding briefly. The American consul drummed with his fingers absently.

"Er—what's the lady's social position to be?" he asked discreetly.

"I suppose the guardianship is transferred," said Harding coldly, with a meaningful glance at his friend. "I shall treat her very distantly."

"Oh, *we're* her guardians!" said McNeil without enthusiasm.

"I take it, *I'm* her guardian," Harding corrected him.

"Of course. Certainly. I mean *you're* her guardian." McNeil accepted Harding's amendment. "You know, Stuart, she may not be so bad. She may turn out to be rather useful about the house."

"About as useful as a cotillion favor," Harding growled.

"Oh, I don't know!" McNeil began hopefully. "At any rate we can train her. Implant a few useful ideas. Let her polish the brass on the automobile—and, mix our drinks! Bakaru's always sticking his ugly mug into the glasses. I shall teach her the secret of the American Beauty cocktail if she seems especially intelligent."

Harding's young brow was seamed with cares which refused to be dissipated. "You forget, Mac, if any one should turn up in this outlandish part of the world, Zuleika the Moonflower would figure rather awkwardly as a household pet!"

"Now who's going to turn up?" McNeil demanded. "Any one would think that you expected Mrs. Grundy and a whole chorus of Prunes and Prisms on the next mail boat."

"Maybe it's not likely—but you've heard me speak of Miss Carrington, Mac?" Harding asked seriously.

"Heard you *speak?*" McNeil jeered. "Heard you rave, babble and blat, you mean? I suppose you refer to the owner of the doll baby map you carry around with you," he ended up with delicate sarcasm.

"The same," Harding nonchalantly admitted. "And she's going around the world on her cousin Freddy Dalrymple's yacht. Well, the math sharks tell us there's no such thing as chance, or luck. But just suppose that crowd should drop in on us?"

"I should say the math sharks were right," McNeil answered promptly.

"And you'd be right — darned right," Harding agreed heartily. "You see, my dismissal from the academy sounds pretty raw at best. Somehow, people look at it in a different light from being handed the same thing from an alma mater. Now if Doris should blow in here and find Zuleika the Moonflower—"

"She doesn't take kindly to moonflowers and the other night-blooming varieties?" McNeil suggested.

"I don't think she would," Harding acknowledged in a reminiscent tone. "She just came up to the third button of my dress uniform," he continued dreamily.

"There's a subtle connection, of course," Mr. McNeil remarked dryly. "Engaged?"

"Yes," said Harding.

"Your one diversion up there, isn't it?" his friend asked soothingly.

"Stop slandering the future generals as the press always calls the cadet corps," Harding admonished him. "You sometimes hit the nail on the head, Mac; but when you do, you display the delicacy of a steam drill lamming into bed-rock with an iron pile."

McNeil whistled softly. Then he started to pile up the documents that were supposed to occupy his spare moments.

"Thank God you're not in the diplomatic service, my boy," he exclaimed. "And now we can all have another American Beauty."

He got up and went to the table where the Swahili boy had put out the materials for a variety of drinks.

A moment or so later, when McNeil was blissfully contemplating the pink depths of an American Beauty, and Harding was toying with a less elaborate concoction of his own, the *honk-honk* of an automobile horn was again heard.

"Well, there's the A-rab lady I guess. I suppose we might as well let her in," McNeil remarked resignedly.

"Hold on, Mac," exclaimed Harding, starting up, "we've got to do the thing right. Impress her a little—be very dignified, you know. Where's Ali?"

"Out swelling it around somewhere, of course," said McNeil disgustedly.

"Then where's that fool nigger, Bakaru!" Harding shouted.

"Ye-es, bibi," a languid voice was heard to reply from the kitchenette regions.

"Hurry—*vite!* Son of a scorpion!" McNeil encouraged.

"Come on here, Bakaru. We've got some guests—put your store clothes on and beat it to the door," Harding added.

"Lady outside in devil wagon," McNeil supplanted. He felt that the reputation of the United States through him was at stake. Bakaru appeared with his eyes popping out of his head. He was buttoning up a white coat. "Ah—it is always hurry up!" he exclaimed. Harding and McNeil fell upon him and helped him complete his toilet.

"After this," said McNeil, "I think he had better wear a *kanzu* for every day."

"Yes," said Harding agreeing to

the change in Bakaru's costume from a few simple folds of unbleached muslin to a long, discreetly cut white shirt.

Bakaru, in his glistening white, now paraded to the door and flung it open with immense ceremony. The sultan's orderly, who had accompanied the Moonflower on her journey from the palace to the American consulate, handed a large card to Bakaru and announced in loud, dignified tones, "The honorable miss—Zuleika the Moonflower."

Bakaru took the card, pretended to read it, then announced in apt imitation, "The honorable miss — Zuleika the Moonflower."

At the same moment a small slender girl with wistful dark eyes entered. She wore a bodice and tunic of tussur-silk, below which quaint skin-tight pantaloons with plaited ruffles at the ankles appeared. Accompanying her was a huge and very black Swahili woman in a red, yellow, and black garment printed over with pictures of ships and conventionalized lotus flowers, and a bright orange cloth twisted about her head.

She rolled her eyes and twisted her head in different directions and her various bracelets and bangles and earrings jingled and twinkled and gleamed. McNeil and Harding would have been spellbound by this extraordinary creature if it had not been for the entirely opposite effect produced by her young mistress.

CHAPTER VI.

A Tanglefoot Legal Process.

AFTER his great start of surprise, Harding bowed low in West Point fashion and murmured something about being charmed! "And this is my friend the American consul, Mr. McNeil," he added politely.

"Hoy d'ye do? Do you know it's great to meet any one like you out here?" said the entranced American consul, smiling and staring at the "honorable miss."

Zuleika the Moonflower showed some unsuspected dimples and replied that she was "of extreme happiness at the arrangement."

Harding and McNeil here exchanged puzzled glances.

"It ees most fortunate circumstances for me," Zuleika continued with her slight foreign accent that was altogether appealing.

"Won't you sit down?" said Harding affably if not comprehending, and shoved a chair toward her.

"Yes, do—won't you be seated?" McNeil pushed another chair toward the slim childish-looking girl. The Swahili woman dumped the cushions from the chairs without ceremony and Zuleika seated herself on the piled-up cushions comfortably.

"Well, say, you do look jolly and at home, you know," Harding told her admiringly.

"Why don't other girls sit on the floor like that?" McNeil wanted to know. "Here you, Bakaru, show the lady's nurse up-stairs. Carry the baggage for her."

Bakaru rolled his eyes protestingly but obeyed.

After casting about in his mind for a suitable subject of conversation, Harding finally asked Zuleika if she would have a cup of tea.

At this McNeil sent violent S. O. S. signals.

"What did you do that for?" he asked Harding, *sotto voce*. "You know we haven't a tea leaf in the house. Bakaru took that half-pound tin the colonel's wife gave us for a charm to cure his mother-in-law—she had water on the knee."

"What of it? We've got to show some enthusiasm—a little more pep you know!" Harding explained. McNeil appeared enlightened.

"Oh, I see! The hospitable act. We'll give her a snifter then. I'll just make her a little harmless American Beauty."

Harding looked as indignant as was possible under the circumstances.

"Why not say a little harmless gasoline and radiator paint with a dash of vitriol?" he asked bitingly. "No, McNeil, I shall make her some lemonade—it's very nourishing."

"Oh, just as you like," McNeil stiffly acquiesced. "Only you needn't think you're the only boob with any manners this side of the canal—just because you wiled away three precious years in a tin school you put on more airs than a footman."

McNeil then proceeded to devote himself to Zuleika. He sought out the most youthful of the illustrated weeklies and presented her with it.

"This number's pretty good," he explained. "It's *there,* all right." Zuleika accepted it graciously and regarded it gravely for some moments before exclaiming sympathetically: "The pictures are so very sad, do you not think so?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said McNeil solemnly gazing at a caricature which was supposed to excite hilarity. Harding proudly approached with a tall glass of lemonade dressed up with twin straws and an appetizing slice of the fruit floating on top.

"Here's some nice lemonade," said Harding smiling encouragingly.

Zuleika took the glass and tasted the beverage gingerly after first carefully removing the straws. She immediately made a very exaggerated *moue,* and then deliberately spit out the unpleasant liquid!

"It is very bitter—this how you say —limonade! I do not love it," she apologized.

"She means *sour.* They like everything dead sweet," McNeil explained to Harding.

"I'm mighty sorry," said Harding in distressed tones. "Here, put some more sugar in it." He handed her the sugar-bowl.

Zuleika the Moonflower smiled in great amusement. She had a subtle, shy Mona Lisa-like smile that was apt to burst out into childish glee at any moment.

"I would prefer to put into the sugar the limonade!" she exclaimed.

Harding looked relieved. "Why, of course. Go ahead."

McNeil was equally cordial. "Certainly—go ahead. You can have every sugar-bowl in the house. Only I think the other one's broken."

"No," corrected Harding, "but I'm using it for a shaving-mug."

Zuleika poured the lemonade into the sugar-bowl, stirred the sticky mess with a teaspoon, then started to eat it daintily but with evident satisfaction. McNeil and Harding watched her with interest.

When Harding started to light a cigarette Zuleika beamed at him and intimated that she would "adore one of the cigarettes for smoking, too."

Harding apologized profusely and held the match while she lighted one and puffed serenely at it with the air of a connoisseur.

"Well, what do you know about that! Some girl!" McNeil admiringly vouchsafed.

"It was most sweet of you to permit me to have the sugar-dish, Mistaire Harding," Zuleika began.

"Not at all," said Harding in some embarrassment.

"Oh, not at all!" McNeil assured her airily. "Perfectly natural thing to do."

But Zuleika continued to gaze adoringly at Harding.

"I think, too, that it is most sweet of you to wish to marry with me," she told him.

Harding stared at her transfixed. "Marry you! Sacred Blue!" he ejaculated at last.

McNeil sprang up and confronted his friend.

"Sacred Blue! Great guns! Harding, what's this you're springing? After the way you raved about the sweet young thing that comes up to your third button! Gosh! Every girl you see—"

"Man alive"—Harding started to defend himself from the implication—"for the love of the beautiful blue Mike! You're the one who's raving! I told you I never saw her before. You believe me, don't you?"

"I suppose so," said McNeil grudgingly.

"That's better," Harding remarked.

"In fact, I'm fool enough to believe anything you say," McNeil added. "*Mademoiselle,* who told you he was to marry you?" he asked Zuleika on a sudden impulse.

Zuleika answered quite cheerfully: "The sultan say to me, 'Go, Zuleika, with Mistaire Harding; he will marry you at earliest convenience.' So say his highness."

"His impudence, I should say," Harding burst out as he paced up and down the room distractedly.

"Oh, I say, Harding—remember this is rather embarrassing for her," McNeil protested.

But Zuleika seemed more disappointed than embarrassed. She was frankly hurt, like a child with whom some one has broken a promise.

"So, then, you do not wish to marry with me?" she exclaimed sorrowfully.

"I wouldn't put it that way, *mademoiselle,*" McNeil began in a kindly elder-brotherly fashion. "He's just not sufficiently well acquainted with you at present. In our country a man calls on a girl for a long time, plays tennis with her, dances with her, sends her five pounds of candy at a time. If at the end of six months he still likes the way she does her hair and wears violets better than the other girls he knows, they become engaged for another six months—followed by most anything."

Plainly this was utterly incomprehensile to Zuleika. She pondered it with a puzzled brow for a moment.

"Ah, you say we must first do those many things?" she asked. "I am afraid I have 'not the time to be engage'," she announced in businesslike tones.

"You see," said Harding, holding forth to McNeil, "the old rascal has been imposing on the girl and incidentally putting up a game on me!" He crossed over to where Zuleika sat on the throne of cushions.

"Zuleika, I never told the sultan anything of the sort," he went on excitedly. "My dear girl, it's absolutely impossible!"

"Then I cannot stay—that is also impossible. I must tell the sultan to have me marry to some one else," said Zuleika with sweet impassiveness.

"Not at all! I can't have that. I'm your guardian." Harding spoke decidedly.

Zuleika laughed softly. "What is it—a guardian?" she inquired archly.

"Why, a guardian—a guardian takes care of one. I'm going to take care of you," Harding explained grandly.

"Does a guardian not marry ever?" Zuleika wanted to know.

"In a few rare cases—mostly in the novels," Harding replied. "But what do *you* want to get married for? You are only a little girl."

Then Zuleika drew herself up and astounded both McNeil and Harding by her sophisticated reply.

"I am already divorced woman," she asserted. "I cannot marry again my husband until I am first marry to some one else," she explained.

"That tanglefoot legal process she's trying to get over to us does sound like something I heard a fellow telling about once. The Zanzibar marriage law is pretty rotten," McNeil commented.

Harding looked utterly incredulous. "Zuleika, are you sure you're married—and divorced?" he asked her.

"Yes, guardian," Zuleika replied meekly.

"Who's the man?" Harding shot the question at her.

"Yes, who's the rascal?" McNeil added.

Zuleika answered with immense serenity: "His highness the sultan.

I am married to him and divorce'. All happening day before yesterday."

Harding knitted his brows and dove into his pockets with both fists. "A dickens of a performance, I call it," he announced.

"His earliest wife, Salme, the sultana, she very displease' with me. She say, 'Divorce this daughter of an Englisher at once.' The mother of the sultan she also agree with Salme. It is done."

Zuleika giggled at the rumpus she had created in the royal family of Zanzibar.

"How could he divorce her the same day he married her?" Harding protested.

"Oh, it is ver' simple," Zuleika assured him. "He just say, 'I don't want you; I don't want you,' in presence of three persons. Divorce is accomplish'."

"Charming *ménage* the sultan must have," was Harding's comment. "What I can't see is why you want to marry the old scoundrel again. I should say once was enough," McNeil remarked.

But Zuleika did have reasons of her own. "Ah, that sultan is a most clever man! He have many papers—money and jewels left to me by my father. I wish to obtain them again."

"Rotten trick to play on a girl," said Harding indignantly. "He seems to have married her for her money, and she wants to marry him to get it back. Marriage seems to be the one way to circulate the currency in Zanzibar." McNeil laughed at such unique high finance.

When asked if she cared at all for the sultan, Zuleika laughed and answered that it was such a "fonny question." She declared that she merely wanted her jewels back, especially some beads which had been given her at the convent the year before. That Zuleika was convent-bred seemed rather amusing, taken with her environment and some of the ideas which it had fostered.

"And it is not so bad to be the wife of the sultan," she added. "Salme—pish! She has no children! I might soon have become the sultana," she finished, smiling complacently.

And it appeared that Zuleika was right in her surmise. For everybody knew that the sultan had divorced his real wife, the Princess Salme, and that the British government had requested him to remarry her. And officially he had no harem—the other wives were all married to him morganatically, which was more civilized and more palatable to the British protectorate. Practically, however, haremlik was carried on in the most orthodox Mohammedan manner, in spite of the sultan's European education.

The conversation with his new ward had been extremely illuminating to Harding in many ways. But it had also left a number of open questions. He felt that the girl as well as himself was in a "rotten hole," as he expressed it to McNeil.

He wished that he could at least get her jewels back for her, but was unwilling to risk his influence with the sultan to that extent when the real reason for his being in Zanzibar was so much more important.

When he proposed putting the matter into the hands of the British government, since his father had been an Englishman, McNeil advised against it, saying that the British would be very little inclined to grant him any favors if they found out that he wanted the concession that Frisby, the representative of the English company, was after.

And so, after telling Zuleika that she could retire to her own apartment—a rather small room with an iron cot and dotted Swiss window curtains and a Japanese screen and two camp-chairs—Harding and McNeil went down to the English Club and played pool for the rest of the evening. And neither of them mentioned Zuleika the Moonflower to any of the officers or other

members of the ruling class to be found there in the course of conversation.

CHAPTER VII.

McNeil Suggests a Solution.

McNEIL, as he himself phrased it, took to Zuleika at once. "She is a real little peach," he said. "Why her hands and feet are like flowers, and you could go swimming in her eyes. She seems to have a cheerful disposition, too, and what more could you want?"

McNeil challenged Stuart to name other desirable qualities."

"But what's that got to do with me?" Stuart asked him. They were in the living-room where McNeil had been endeavoring to pound out superannuated rag-time on the unresponsive piano.

"Gee!" he sighed out. "I wonder how it would seem now to float into a Broadway lobster palace and buy some of the sparkling juice, 'just to make us happy'—a bunch of good guys — and to see some real coons — not half Arab, half Swahili with some Canarian Portuguese thrown in—all twanging away, grinning to beat the cars. Oh, say, I haven't been home in so long I guess I wouldn't recognize a single face or a single tune from Hoboken to Forty-Second Street.

"'All is change but the unchanging law of change.'

"The nice girls I used to know are all married — the others are probably dead. Now, Harding"—McNeil came back abruptly from his reminiscing and replied to his friend's question—"maybe that was purely rhetorical on your part; but, anyway, it *has* got something to do with you. You know you haven't a chance for the concession as things stand. The sultan simply plays you and Frisby against each other, and then laughs loud and long at the result. Why not clinch the matter? You could dangle the stolen inheritance over him with Zuleika at your side until he'd give you anything, because you'd have it on him."

"What are you driving at, Mac?" Harding burst out. "Do you seriously propose my marrying the girl?"

"Seriously?" McNeil innocently questioned. "Why not seriously? But of course that's up to you. Another thing, you'd have to marry her to make it of any use. In this country a divorced woman has no legal rights. Otherwise she could get her junk without you."

"Well, she won't get it through me, then. I'm not so accommodating. Why don't you?"

"Oh, she'd rather have you!" said McNeil. "She does nothing but gaze rapturously at you when she's in the room. You've made a hit. Besides, I'm not the marrying kind. 'One or two women have loved me, God bless them!' and all that. But as for marrying — that was forcibly yanked out of my system some years ago, owing to the low cost of living on a diplomatic pittance. It's up to you, my boy."

"You forget. I have a previous engagement," Harding said with great dignity. "I still insist that it's an affair for the British government to take up. Then she'd be off our hands."

At this moment Zuleika came unconcernedly into the room.

She held a gay-colored scrap of embroidery in her hands, and insisted that it was going to develop into a tie for Harding. Harding could not, to save him, see it by any possibility in the light of an article of neckwear. But he did not say so. Zuleika had already learned in a single day's residence at the consulate that the sultan invariably took a fancy to the necktie Harding happened to wear when calling on him, and that Stuart was apt to return from the palace minus his neckgear. Evidently this was intended to supply the deficiency.

"Zuleika," McNeil asked suddenly, "what was your father's name?"

"It was Mistaire Hugh Rafferty," Zuleika replied in her musical treble.

Harding and McNeil both burst out laughing.

"Rafferty! Pretty good. Are you quite sure he was from the right little, tight little island?" Harding questioned her seriously.

"Island?" Zuleika asked in surprise. "He was from plaze call Connect-i-coot."

"Connecticut!" McNeil shouted in delight. "Say, this is good. Then, by heck, *I'm* her guardian! As United States consul *I* shall go to the sultan to-morrow and demand the Rafferty patrimony. Now, what do you think of that, Zuleika?"

Zuleika smiled rather wanly. "It is so ver-y good of you. But I am still a divorced woman. That station in life is unrespectable," she said.

"You're an ungrateful woman, which is much worse," McNeil told her shortly.

"For that I am most sorry," said Zuleika, as though acknowledging a fault.

"I say, Mac, how are you going to prove all this about Mr. Rafferty?" Harding asked him a moment later.

"That's so." McNeil thoughtfully gazed ahead of him. "Zuleika, how do you know your father was Hugh Rafferty from Connecticut?" he asked her.

"My sacred mother tell me so," Zuleika replied. "She have decease' from fever on island of Pemba. May her soul and the soul of all the faithful departed rest in peace!"

She crossed herself as she said this. Harding had not known of Mrs. Rafferty's death before.

"Learned all that in the convent, I suppose," McNeil remarked to Harding. "Haven't you any papers—marriage, birth, or baptismal certificates to prove it?" he asked the girl.

Zuleika thought a moment. "Ah, those papers—the sultan he have all!"

"Curse him! He would, of course," said McNeil with deep chagrin. "Another clue gone wrong. Stuart, the only way for her to get back the ancestral bucks is for you to marry her. Come on, be a sport! Zuleika, you might look over those photographs of the cathedrals of England. They're very thrilling. Or else go and examine the view."

Zuleika went over to the wide casement window with cheerful alacrity. She always did what was asked of her, as though one had conferred a favor on her.

Harding turned to McNeil with a puzzled countenance. "I've never seen you quite so facetious before," he remarked stiffly. "Hold on to your funny bone, won't you? You might dislocate it working it overtime."

"You keep right on thinking I'm joking, don't you?" McNeil asked in wonder.

"Well, then, do you honestly think it would be square to her? Do you think this marrying game would be quite the chivalrous thing?" Harding asked him.

"Certainly," McNeil answered with conviction. "Whatever else it may be, marriage is always chivalrous. You'd not only improve Zuleika's social position—you'd get the concession."

"Well, at any rate, I'm engaged to Miss Carrington as far as I know, and, as I'm not a Mohammedan, the thing is plain enough. You see, the Zuleika thing is all off."

Harding started to cross to where his ward was patiently examining the view.

"Wait a minute—you're so impetuous," McNeil hurriedly broke in. "Consider the girl's feelings. I mean Zuleika's. You could be released later, you know. You might even do it—sort of—morganatically."

Harding grinned. "Morganatically! No, thanks!" he said. "When I marry—it won't be morganatically—and the girl's going to be a queen!"

McNeil shook his head with a worldly-wise air. "You're a joker. Go

ahead, old man! Break the news gently," he said.

Harding walked over to the girl. She did not turn at his approach, but McNeil could detect a quick, subtle change in her bearing. It seemed as though every feature — even her hair and her clothes—took on a slight, upcurving motion, although actually she had not moved.

"Er—how's the view?" Harding asked crudely in his boyish voice.

"The *vue,* it is very well, thank you. I am growing quite accustom' to it," said Zuleika with perfect composure. "I have been looking long time at a bee-utiful white boat. It is ver' lovely, with shiny brass railing like the automobile," she continued.

"Must be a new yacht in the harbor!" Harding exclaimed with an air of intense interest.

"Didn't know you were yachting mad," said McNeil with an exasperating air of calm. "Why the display of emotion? Supposing it *is* a yacht. Yachts have been known to put in here. People generally start from Mombasa to hunt, and they do occasionally stop off—"

"Where's the glass? Don't you see? Maybe it's—" Harding was rummaging frantically in the table drawers for the field-glasses.

"Gee! You're as restless as a flea. Here, wait a minute." McNeil took up the glasses, which had been reposing on top of the piano for the past month, screwed and unscrewed them, and fitted them to his eyes.

"My, she's a beauty, all right!" he exclaimed.

"Well, what's her name? Can't you make it out?" Harding demanded.

"Oh, her name!" McNeil got the range again. "S-y-l—" he spelled out.

"The Sylph! I knew it," said Harding incredulously. "That's what I was afraid of. If they ever come ashore and find their way to the consulate— Zuleika, I was just going to say, as my ward, I forbid you to marry me or any one else for some time. Do you understand? I distinctly forbid it!"

Harding sank limply into a chair. Zuleika prostrated herself gracefully at his feet as a token that she had heard his remarks, and McNeil regarded them both with his brow whimsically corrugated and his hands deep in his pockets.

CHAPTER VIII.

Harding's Dilemma.

IT was two days after the Sylph had appeared in the waters of Zanzibar harbor.

McNeil was reading a two-weeks-old newspaper and lounged in an easy chair with his favorite drink at his elbow. Harding smoked a cigarette while in a semirecumbent position, and Zuleika sat at his feet on a pile of cushions and played a weird, plaintive melody on a native stringed-instrument.

"Why don't you go down to the harbor, board the yacht and call on Miss Carrington?" McNeil suggested to Harding, laying down his paper for a moment to do so.

Harding only snorted contemptuously.

"If I had a lot of swell friends blow in on a long, low, rakish, snow-white yacht with gleaming brass rails, Circassian walnut lined throughout and a hundred odd cubic feet of refrigerator room, I'd have been down there long ere this wishing them merry Fourth of July and all the rest," McNeil proceeded unabashed.

"I don't doubt you," Harding responded.

"That's very nice of you," said McNeil sweetly. "But why don't you go down? You know you want to see that girl. Ask them to come and take tea at the American consulate," he added grandly.

"And have Zuleika pour, I suppose," Harding remarked.

"I bet she'd do it like—like a débu-

tante angel!" McNeil exclaimed enthusiastically.

"What is it, to pour, dear chap?" Zuleika asked Harding.

"To pour," he explained, "is to be entirely surrounded by a solid-silver tea-service and to confine one's conversation to 'One lump or two?'"

Zuleika laughed gleefully. "'One lump or two?' How fonny that is, dear chap."

"Zuleika," Harding began accusingly, "what makes you call me dear chap? You know you've been doing it for three days."

Zuleika gazed up at Harding directly and replied simply, "Because I once knew an Englishman who was then very sick. Another Englishman love him very highly, he address always the sick Englishman 'Dear chap.' You are not sick, oh, no! But I love you very highly."

Harding did not reply for a moment but smoked thoughtfully. Then he said in a tone of gentle exasperation, "Zuleika Moonflower! (Just as one might say 'Jemima Robinson'!) I tell you it's not done — not in the best families."

But Zuleika only replied with great calmness, "But I am not best family at all. I tell you I am half English, also divorced woman, which is most distressing. But I am so useful!" she finished with an infectious smile.

Stuart had to admit that she had him there. For on the second day after her arrival, greatly to his consternation, she had insisted on assisting at his toilet, saying that "it was the custom."

But he had quickly become used to the custom, and would have missed her if she had not been there to hand him a coat or find his collar-button. She forced Piloola, the Swahili handmaiden, to keep his white-canvas shoes and cork helmet spotless, sewed on all his buttons, and was always waiting to hand him his bamboo cane just as he was going out.

"City clothes are such a confounded nuisance," Harding explained to McNeil. "When you leave I shall be able to give you a recommendation as a first-class valet," he laughingly told Zuleika.

But she only protested with simple fervor that she "would never leave him!"

McNeil was enjoying the comedy, as he called it, though Zuleika's last remark had made Harding a trifle uneasy. He again became thoughtful.

It was enough responsibility to have a ward thrust on him who had far different ideas on every aspect of life from those of the girls he had known —to have that ward falling gently but firmly in love with him and making no obvious efforts to check or disguise her emotions was disconcerting. And he thought of Doris Carrington. But Zuleika seemed to sense his latter thought at least. "I think you are thinking of a lady—a lady what you call your love," she said with a little sad droop at the corners of her childish mouth.

"What makes you think so?" Harding asked in amused surprise.

"Because you look sad and happy —you do not mind what I say—you are far away. And you make singing through your lips—*so*."

Zuleika sprang up and strode around the room whistling a rag-time air in absurd imitation of Harding. He burst out laughing, and she appeared delighted at having amused him.

"Shall I go and call on the lady? Shall I, Zuleika?" Harding questioned.

"Ah, then she is on this white boat in the harbor, is it not?" Zuleika asked quickly, a deeper glow in her dark eyes.

"Exactly. Mac's been trying to get me to go and see her," said Harding.

Zuleika looked over at McNeil reproachfully.

"Ah well," she said finally with a resigned little sigh, "I suppose you might just as well go, dear chap. You will then get it off your chest," she

finished, using one of the expressions she had heard Harding use.

"I shall bring you something nice from the boat," Harding promised.

"Sweets?" Zuleika asked ecstatically.

"If I have to commit burglary," said Harding. "And I shall think of you," he added rashly.

Zuleika flung herself on him in an abandon of gratitude.

"You are the most loveliest person in the world and all Asia besides," she told him and imprinted a large round kiss on his tanned cheek.

"Oh, I say, Zuleika. You're all sticky," Harding protested. "You've been eating that nasty sweet paste. A vile habit!"

McNeil laughed coarsely and put down the paper.

"Oh!" he shouted, "but you two are funny!" He went off into more cachinnation. "That sounded like an elephant pulling his foot out of an Irish bog."

"I wouldn't mind if she didn't eat such slues of sweet stuff," said Harding in some embarrassment.

"I shall live on limonade after this," Zuleika sobbed. "It is, you say nourishing," she added contritely.

"There, there." Harding patted Zuleika awkwardly. "I'd as soon urge cider vinegar on you. I'm truly sorry, Zuleika. Now go on up-stairs like a good girl and wash your hands and face. You might put on a clean dress—trou—change your things, you know."

Zuleika was conciliated. "And you will no more make laughter at me?" she asked breathlessly.

"Never again," Harding declared.

Zuleika started to go, then hesitated with childish reluctance.

"And you will give me, if I am very agreeable, one, or perhaps two little kisses, like butterflies going to sleep?"

"Yes," said Harding, looking after her, "like butterflies going to sleep."

Zuleika smiled radiantly and clapped her hands. "Then you are not cross, dear chap," she said, and ran lightly from the room.

Harding paced the room several times in silence, watched speculatively by McNeil.

"Love's only skin deep with these people, don't you think?" he asked finally. McNeil shrugged. "Apt to be," he replied. "But then, some darned queer things can happen, Stuart. You want to look out."

"Tell you what," Stuart burst, after a few moments cogitation. "If you're game, old man, I'd like to go on a lion hunt into the—interior. They're thick up in the Nairobi country where they're putting the railroad through. Just take the boat to Mombasa, hire a couple of guides, and there you are!"

"I thought you were going to take me down to call on Miss Carrington?" McNeil peevishly objected.

"I am, but we needn't stay a week," Harding assured him.

"But why shoot harmless lions?" McNeil perversely continued.

"Oh, just for instance, I suppose," Harding told him. "It would be nice to have my picture snapped sitting on my first lion-skin, you know."

"And the concession?" McNeil deftly suggested.

"The concession," said Harding slowly, "can go to thunder—or Frisby."

And he took down a couple of the latest examples of modern gunsmithery and began to manipulate an oily rag.

"All right," McNeil agreed. "Here's luck." He mixed himself an American Beauty. "Have one, in honor of the lion snap-shots?" he asked.

"No? Just a snifter?" He drank it off regretfully. "I suppose Zuleika does get rather on your nerves. She's sort of demonstrative," he threw out.

"She's adorable. But she *is* rather —demonstrative," said Harding with the air of imparting a secret.

"I don't suppose she means a thing by it," McNeil said.

"Of course not." Harding looked intently at the end of his cigarette. "But just imagine any well brought up girl acting that way! Why, she's forever flinging herself at my feet and embracing my none too slender ankles," he finished in a tone of considerable surprise.

"I notice she doesn't confine herself to your ankles," McNeil said. "But that's no reason why you should go and shoot lions."

"I'd like to know what they taught her in the convent," Harding meditatively remarked.

"And I'd like to know what they taught you at West Point. You two are the most exquisitely innocent specimens I've ever run across," McNeil chuckled. "Why not take what the gods give you?"

Harding flushed slightly. "That's where you're wrong, Mac," he said gently. "But I happen to know what I'm capable of—and what I'm not. That's why I'm going to stir up a little excitement among the lions in the Nairobi country. Are you with me?"

"Oh, the follies of youth," McNeil declaimed. "Yes, I'm with you, old fire-eater." The two young men exchanged a glance of understanding.

"Thanks," said Harding simply.

CHAPTER IX.

The Moonflower Entertains.

FOLLOWING a succession of loud knocks at the street door somewhat later in the same afternoon, Harding looked up from the maps he was studying of the Nairobi country.

"Where's that fool nigger, Bakaru?" he asked impatiently.

"Making a few social calls, I suppose," McNeil returned. "Or perhaps he dropped in at his club."

"Bakaru!" Harding shouted for the third time. "That chocolate boy's going to suffer for this."

"Great guns! A whole raft of people outside" McNeil claimed.

"Mac, it's the party from the yacht."

Harding walked toward the door and flung it open with an air of nonchalance that McNeil recognized as entirely assumed. McNeill followed to back him up if necessary. He was curious and elated at the idea of meeting Miss Doris Carrington and the owner of the yacht Sylph, who was always figuring in the Sunday supplements.

Freddy Dalrymple, a slim, dark youth with a perpetual thirst for excitement in hazel eyes under very black brows that slanted downward from the middle of his forehead, was the first to enter.

"You're McNeil, the consul, I believe? Heard of you at—" He stopped short on catching sight of Harding.

"Stuart Harding! What in the name of the seven saints are *you* doing here?"

Harding wrung his hand, and at the same time explained in a low tone that it was owing to a misunderstanding between himself and the commandant. Dalrymple whistled understandingly.

"Mother," he said, addressing a portly, young-looking woman, "isn't it great? Stuart Harding here, inspecting things for the government—forts and mines and things, you know. The harbor's full of mines, it seems, and owing to the high cost of torpodoes in the States—"

"Good gracious! Not really. You poor boy," Mrs. Dalrymple murmured vaguely.

"Very glad to see you, Mrs. Dalrymple," said Stuart somewhat hurriedly, and added in a frantic whisper to Fred Dalrymple: "Introduce McNeil to your mother, Dal. Introduce 'em all round."

Then he turned to greet Miss Carrington, who smiled at him charmingly, and told him that it was so perfectly wonderful to see him in such an odd corner of the world.

Harding managed to extricate her from the rest of the party, consisting of her aunt and cousin, an Englishman named Fitzmaurice, and a pretty girl, who was Miss Anise Allen.

"It's ever so much more wonderful to see *you* here," he told her. "Did you get my letter telling of the abrupt cutting off of my career in the army?" he asked rather anxiously.

"Such a sad, blue letter," said Miss Carrington with a little laugh. "But I don't quite understand. You don't mean that you were really permanently expelled?" she asked, knitting her delicate brows.

"Exactly. That is it," said Stuart.

"Why, but, Stuart—" Miss Carrington said reproachfully, "I don't think that was nice of you, considering our engagement. I wanted a military wedding so. Kitty Drisdale's was perfectly stunning."

"I'm sorry, dear," said Harding contritely. "I wouldn't have had it happen for a thousand worlds."

"Well, what did you do to get expelled?" Miss Carrington asked finally.

"The charge was 'conduct prejudicial to military discipline,'" Stuart answered.

"Oh, Stuart, how could you do anything so dreadful?" Miss Carrington fairly shuddered.

"Being translated," Harding explained gently, "it was for drinking a lady's health."

"What lady?" Miss Carrington demanded.

"You, of course."

"Oh, that's different," Miss Carrington conceded. "But why?"

"Well, you see, one of last year's class came back—one of the best men we ever had," Stuart explained patiently.

"He had a flask that he was flourishing around. One of the men told him that we were engaged. He asked me about it, and I said I hoped to be—as long as it wasn't announced that's all I thought I had the right to say. But he promptly congratulated me and drank my health. He invited me to join him in drinking to you. You can believe I didn't refuse."

"I'm so glad. I think it was delightful of you. It's against the rules, isn't it?" Doris Carrington asked excitedly.

"Of course," Harding replied. "A few moments later, though, the officer of the day got a whiff of the faint, lingering aroma of Three Star as he passed me—I was in for a court-martial."

Miss Carrington gasped.

"But that's a disgrace, isn't it, to be court-martialed?" She gazed at him with wide, troubled eyes. "Stuart, do you think our engagement had better—continue?"

Harding went rather white. "Do you feel that way about it, Doris?" he asked her.

"You know I don't want to be horrid," she reproached him. "Only it makes it rather awkward. Even if it's not announced, quite a lot of people know."

"I see," said Stuart slowly. "It's not quite fair to you. I'm under a cloud at present. But just the same, Doris, I want you to understand that I haven't done anything that either of us could ever be ashamed of. And I'm over here to make good; that's why I didn't go home. You know, dear," he added in low, earnest tones, "it's up to you, of course; but six months' grace and you—if you want to—would do wonders for a career that seemed to have turned turtle when I left the Point."

Miss Carrington smiled undecidedly. "That's nice of you to say those things about me," she said. "But you know how careful a girl has to be. Still—I think—I shall keep your ring, if you want me to."

Harding looked at her without smiling. He felt vaguely hurt, even rather angry, and as though something was oddly lacking.

"Are you sure you want it?" he

asked rather stiffly. But she had turned away with a smile to the Englishman, who was making some absurd remark to nobody in particular —a habit he had.

Meanwhile Mrs. Dalrymple had obtained possession of McNeil, who was now deep in the throes of polite conversation.

"So you and Stuart have been keeping bachelor hall together, Mr. McNeil?" she chatted pleasantly. "That must be so very jolly. But don't you find the womanly touch sadly lacking?"

"No ma'am, not at all. That is—I wouldn't recognize it if I came face to face with it in broad daylight," said McNeil. "You see, I was always an orphan. I was brought up by six uncles. They lived in Jersey," he further elucidated.

"How extraordinary!" Mrs. Dalrymple put up her lorgnette as though to locate the six uncles. "But do tell me what Stuart Harding is doing over here. My son was trying to explain—something about inspecting the mines in the harbor—"

"Oh, didn't Harding tell you?" McNeil innocently inquired.

"You see, he's in the secret service, and it's a great secret. Connected with the diplomatic service—and with the Interstate Commerce Commission. Not the United States, but the Interstates. You follow me?" he fabricated with great rapidity.

"Oh, perfectly—so interesting," Mrs. Dalrymple murmured with a puzzled expression on her plump, carefully massaged features.

Here McNeil seized the opportunity to dash into a group composed of Harding, being towed about by Miss Allen, while Doris Carrington vainly endeavored to distract her friend's attention from her lover.

"You don't know what you've missed being away off here. There are about a million new steps to the tango!" Miss Allen was saying.

"Honestly? Thank Heaven—" Harding ejaculated.

"Oh, they're fascinating," Miss Allen declared. "There's the subway slink—and the tanglefoot glide—oh, and the dromedary trot! It's perfectly simple, too—you just—let me show you—"

"No, dear, let *me* show him. You go and play for us. You play rag divinely," Miss Carrington insisted.

"But, my *dear,* you play exquisitely," Miss Allen returned sweetly. "But only classical music. Herr Rumpelup says syncopated things spoil the artist's touch."

"Never mind the artist's touch, Miss Allen," McNeil, who had been an amused spectator, intervened. "I think ragtime's great. And I bet you're the best little pianola in the world," he added with real enthusiasm.

Miss Allen laughed gracefully and crossed to the piano at once.

"Shall I play 'Too Much Mustard'?" she asked.

"Too much what?" Harding asked in amazement.

"Poor dears—they don't even know 'Too Much Mustard,'" Miss Allen sympathized.

Then she started to play, but stopped a moment afterward and burst out laughing at the tones which clashed out from the battered piano. But McNeil encouraged her to continue with all possible advice, hovering about his instrument with an affectionate pride. "That's all right, Miss Allen," he declared. "It'll go in a minute. The gears are a little stiff—just give her some more gas."

Miss Allen declared it a perfect medium for her musical expression and continued to play with the utmost good nature.

"If you don't mind," Dalrymple interjected, "I'm going to have a stinger myself."

"Beg your pardon." McNeil reluctantly left the piano. "Let me make you an American Beauty. One of my specials. It's as harmless as a breakfast-food and twice as nourishing."

Dalrymple watched him mix it and then said dubiously that he hoped it was not as pink as it looked.

Mrs. Dalrymple was heard in a quiet interval to ask Fitzmaurice if he "liked the modern dances?"

"Oh, ripping, ripping," he answered enthusiastically. "They're completely demoralizing society. Society needs to be demoralized occasionally. Otherwise civilization wouldn't go on."

"Very true," Mrs. Dalrymple agreed. "But don't you think they rub off some of the girlish bloom?" she asked seriously.

"Undoubtedly, dear madam," he admitted. "I've often noticed that to be the case after dancing with a young girl." And he flicked a dab of imaginary powder from his coat-sleeve.

At this moment a high treble voice was heard singing with joyous abandon in the room above. Harding and McNeil exchanged glances. A look of swift consternation lighted Harding's sternly regular features. McNeil alone retained his gay imperturbability. For there had been a subtle change in the atmosphere of pleasant good humor that pervaded the room. Then Dalrymple's voice was heard falling on the stillness.

"I say, Harding, who's the canary?" he asked.

McNeil rose to the occasion with elaborate carelessness.

"Oh, that's our housekeeper, a great big Swahili," he explained.

"That's Piloola. Has a funny name—charming voice. She's as big as a dog-house—as two dog-houses."

He laughed in an embarrassed manner. The others were looking at him with fixed smiles.

"Where are those two niggers, Ali and Bakaru?" Harding demanded. "Are they still out?"

"I guess so," McNeil answered. "But I heard Piloola singing—singing just like a lark," he finished almost in desperation.

"I told her to go to the market for tea," Harding continued, in hopes of deceiving their guests, who were merely somewhat puzzled by the turn of the conversation. McNeil murmured something about telling Piloola to go to the Highlands, and Mrs. Dalrymple brightened up and said, "Yes, I think I require tea."

"And I require another drink. Not an American Beauty, thank you, a real drink this time," Freddy Dalrymple remarked.

"I shall speak to Piloola about some tea," said Harding, starting for the door. "Piloola!" he called cheerfully.

"Ye-es, dear chap, I am coming to you," replied a voice from off stage. "There is no one else at home. What is it I can do?"

Zuleika appeared at the doorway in a fresh and charming costume, and a sensation was immediately noticeable among Harding's guests.

Dalrymple's cool, cynical voice had a note of amused wonder in it. "Are many of the natives on this order? No wonder—"

Miss Carrington gasped an incredulous something about "size of a dog-house indeed"; and Fitzmaurice remarked appraisingly that she was "a bit off color, by gad."

"Extremely familiar for a servant, *I* should say," was Mrs. Dalrymple's contribution.

But Harding and Zuleika regarded each other as though the situation were habitual. Zuleika smiled bewitchingly at Harding and seemed to see no one else. They might have been quite alone.

"As long as the boys are out, could you get us some coffee or sherbet or something?" Zuleika nodded quickly.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Dalrymple, but I'm afraid we don't own any tea," he added, turning apologetically for an instant.

"And some little—little—'ow you say, caks?" Zuleika asked in a kind of ecstasy of confidence.

"Simply great—if there are any," Harding answered.

"But certainly, dear chap!" Zuleika

exclaimed happily and left the room. There was a loud burst of merriment from Dalrymple.

"Why didn't you introduce us? Housekeeper indeed! Stuart, you're some speed king," he gasped delightedly. Fitzmaurice slapped him on the back heartily. "Didn't know you had a harem, old chap! Gad!"

Harding glared helplessly from one to the other.

"Now, listen a minute, please—" McNeil was beginning in a soothing tone, when Mrs. Dalrymple, putting up her lorgnette, demanded icily who the young person was. "Remember, I'm chaperoning two young girls," she added unmistakably. The "young girls" rose and went to her.

Again Dalrymple shouted with glee. "Yes, remember she's chaperoning two young girls!" he entreated. "Is your friend the sort of person any nice girl can safely introduce to her chaperon?"

"Shut up, Dal," Stuart addressed him with a baleful glance. "There seems to be some sort of misunderstanding," he continued pleasantly to Mrs. Dalrymple. "The lady is Miss Zuleika Moonflower—and my ward."

Every one looked rather blank. Miss Carrington gave a little "Oh!" of enlightenment, and then looked at Miss Allen.

"But what on earth are *you* doing with a ward? Good gracious, Stuart!" Mrs. Dalrymple burst out excitedly.

Harding regarded her innocently. "I'm—what does any one do with a ward?" he asked. "I'm—bringing her up, of course."

"I bet you are," Dal commented briefly.

"You see, the sultan is a great friend of Stuart's," McNeil further explained. "He entrusted Stuart with the girl's education. He wants her to have a strictly—military education. Stuart teaches her tactics, you know."

"Dear me, how odd," Mrs. Dalrymple remarked in tones which implied her helplessness to comprehend.

In fact, there was noticeable a certain expectant expression in the faces of his guests, as though everything had not been definitely settled. It troubled Stuart until he looked into the sweet eyes of Miss Carrington.

"Stuart, won't you show me the view?" she asked suddenly. "I hear it's marvelous." He gladly led the way to the little veranda overlooking the harbor, with a glance over his shoulder at McNeil who responded with a large, intelligent wink that Harding devoutly hoped passed unnoticed by the others.

Once on the veranda, and surrounded by comparative privacy, Stuart was about to take enthusiastic possession of Miss Carrington's slim, sunbrowned hands. But she drew herself up coldly.

"Perhaps you can explain your disgraceful conduct," she said in a low, indignant tone.

"What do you mean, Doris?" he asked quietly.

"What do you mean by having a Turk for a ward?" she countered.

"She's not a Turk. She's half Arab and half Irish," he returned.

"*I* don't care if she's half Welsh rabbit!" Doris Carrington flung at him angrily. "You have no right to. It looks simply horrid."

"Don't get excited, Doris. She was wished on me. You heard what McNeil said. She's a perfectly harmless girl."

"I don't see why the sultan should give you a ward," Miss Carrington tearfully continued.

"I don't either. It's a way he has though, dearest."

"Why didn't you refuse to take her? It's the most absurd thing I ever heard of."

"You don't understand, Doris," said Harding with masculine superiority. "The circumstances were peculiar. I can't offend the sultan. I'm trying to get an important concession out of him. It's going to mean a lot if I succeed."

"Concession!" Miss Carrington ex-

claimed, rage in every line of her pretty face. "What has that to do with me? Really, Stuart, you're dreadfully inconsiderate. Will you send the person away and never see her again?" she asked with an alluring pleading note in her voice that thrilled Harding tremendously.

"Doris! I can't do that," he said distractedly. "I told you I must not run any risks with the sultan. Besides—the girl has nowhere to go. The sultan has all her money and we want to get it back for her.

"If she's nothing to you—you ought to let her go when I ask you to," she cried angrily. "You see what they all think."

"They're beasts!" cried Harding, a dark flush overspreading his face. "I can't be held responsible for their rotten thoughts and their rotten jokes and their rotten bad taste.

The girl looked moodily out over the bright waters of the harbor and saw nothing.

"Doris," he burst out suddenly, "you don't believe that? I know it *is* awkward, but I counted on your understanding."

"Then you won't let her go?" Miss Carrington asked with a watchful, controlled look in her eyes.

"No—I can't," said Harding quietly and with a touch of stubbornness.

"Very well. Here's your ring."

Miss Carrington tore the ring from her finger and handed it to him, with bright-red spots burning in her cheeks.

"Do you mean our engagement is—broken?" Harding asked.

She looked at him furiously for a moment. Then a shrewd thought flashed into her mind. She smiled pensively.

"Until you can do as I ask, Stuart, I think it had best be postponed—indefinitely," she replied.

He looked at her slowly, with a curious expression that puzzled her.

"All right," he said quickly, then turned and held the casement window for her to pass inside.

Zuleika was carrying about a tray of glasses with a cool-looking, green liquid, ice-filled. And she distributed them more in the manner of a hostess than of a serving maid. Harding noticed with admiration her air of smiling composure.

She seemed to be doing something quite accustomed—was very evidently dispensing favors graciously and yet with a certain graceful Oriental deference. She met Harding's eyes for a fleeting instant and smiled happily.

CHAPTER X.

A Toy Watch.

McNEIL was looking on at Zuleika with an air of mingled amusement and pride, something like that of the delighted parent of an attractive though forward child. Evidently he was interested in Zuleika's social success.

"And what sort of a beverage is this, my dear? I have to be so careful of my digestion," Mrs. Dalrymple was saying.

Now that her status in society had been determined upon, the lady was quite willing to be gracious to the divorced wife of the sultan. For during Harding's tête-à-tête on the veranda with Miss Carrington, McNeil had been busy telling romantic tales about the parentage and prospects of the beautiful ward.

According to McNeil, she was the heiress of untold wealth, whole plantations, entire islands, and fabulous jewels. Her father had been an Irishman of noble but impoverished family who made a fortune in manioc and cloves and married into a leading Arab family of Pemba. Zuleika had been carefully educated in a convent and taken to the sultan's palace after the good sisters had pronounced her pluperfect in all branches, but there had excited so much jealousy that the sultan, seeing she was not in sympathy with the Eastern mode of living, had

transferred her to the American legation.

Well, it had helped to while away the moments until Harding's return, at least, McNeil told himself. Of course, if they wanted to believe it that was no affair of his; and it might even make them behave more decently to the poor kid, as McNeil styled Zuleika. But perhaps the poor kid could look out for herself on occasion.

"I should love to see you dance, Miss Moonflower," Miss Allen smiled encouragingly at the lithe, graceful girl with the wistful eyes.

"Yes, do. I'm sure you're a dancer," said Doris Carrington languidly as she entered the room with Harding.

Zuleika smiled deprecatingly.

"Oh, nevaire. I dance nevaire, miss," she said.

"Really? Why not?" Miss Carrington asked her.

"Oh, it is not possible in this country. It is not permitted that a lady of rank dance," she said modestly; then added, with a sort of sweet reluctance, "But I do not mind; oh, no. It is so much more amusing to watch others dance."

There was the slightest possible accent on the word others and the merest flicker of eyelids demurely cast down.

Miss Carrington flushed up quite unaccountably.

"Gad! She's good," said Fitzmaurice under his breath. "I like your ward, Harding," he added, and went over to where Zuleika stood with Dalrymple, who was making remarks in a low tone of voice and looking at her across an untouched Scotch and soda.

"Miss Moonflower," Fitzmaurice began, "I can show you something more interesting than a lot of people making donkeys of themselves. Come out on the veranda for but a moment."

"Ah—so!" Zuleika smiled up at him slowly. "You think you will show me *one* people making a donkey!" and she laughed elfishly.

"That's one on you, Fitz, old man," Harding laughed out.

"Now, *did* she mean *me* or herself—and that she was not going to be one, you know?" Fitzmaurice asked of no one in particular.

"You're perfectly right, *mademoiselle,*" Dalrymple spoke approvingly. "Who wants to go out on a stupid veranda? Come out on the yacht tonight and we'll follow the path of the moon together."

Zuleika clasped her hands to her breast.

"Oh, that will be love-ly! That path of the moon—I shall so like to follow it," she breathed out. "But you must first ask my guardian—naturally."

"Oh, yes—naturally," said Dalrymple in a tone of deep disappointment.

The others laughed.

Here Miss Allen came up and entered into the conversation again. "I understand you were brought up in convents and harems and all sorts of interesting places," she commented. "You must have a great many accomplishments!" she added, with a spark of malice.

Zuleika looked anxiously at Dalrymple as though to be prompted.

"Accomplishment? What is it, this accomplishment?" she asked in a hesitating manner.

"It's something no girl should be without," he replied gravely.

"Ah—yes!" Zuleika exclaimed in sudden enlightenment. "I am very sorry I do not have one. But I think yours is lovely."

She gazed admiringly at Miss Allen's gold vanity-case, to which she had been having recourse at frequent intervals, a point that had not escaped Zuleika. It swung from a slender gold chain and had her initials in jewels on the cover.

Miss Allen laughed, but looked slightly annoyed.

"I shall ask my guardian to buy me an accomplishment, too. Did your guardian buy you that one?" Zuleika innocently inquired.

Dalrymple looked rather nervous at

this, and Miss Allen told Zuleika somewhat coldly that she had no guardian.

"Zuleika, you're coming on every day," McNeil whispered.

Then Doris Carrington caught sight of the large guitarlike instrument that Zuleika sang to as though it had been a baby, fitting little verses that she had learned to the simple native airs that she knew. Often she would translate some bit of poetry or even a nursery rime into one of the Zanzibar dialects, or sing a native verse transposed into English—strange-sounding things that caused Harding and McNeil to realize how far out of the world they knew this girl lived most of the time.

Miss Carrington took up the instrument carelessly. "Do you play serenades on this lovely thing, Mr. McNeil?" she inquired.

"I? Play serenades?" McNeil asked excitedly. "They'd have to put me in the funny-house first," he asserted. "But Zuleika does—like a lamb. Will you put on a record for the lady, little sister?"

"I should be charm—charming," Zuleika murmured graciously.

"Of course you would," McNeil agreed.

Zuleika played a simple, gay little melody and sang softly.

"She plays with a great deal of feeling," Mrs. Dalrymple observed, as she always did after hearing an amateur perform.

"People always do who don't play accurately," said Doris Carrington.

The men were not listening. They were looking at the way she held the queer instrument in the curve of her arm and the way her lips were gently parted while her voice from between them floated off into space.

"I hope it was nothing—nothing—you know how it is, these foreign songs always sound rather suggestive somehow," said Mrs. Dalrymple at its conclusion.

"By Jove, I thought it was ripping!" Fitzmaurice applauded loudly. "What if it *was*—"

"Yes, what if it was—more interesting than select?" Dalrymple wanted to know.

"Perhaps you can explain what the words are in English, Zuleika," Harding said with a curious smile. "They won't enjoy it half as much, but it's their own fault."

"But certainly, dear chap," Zuleika answered gladly. "In English the words were some I have learn' long ago. They tell of a cat and a fiddle and of a foolish—foolish cow jumping over the moon."

She laughed amusedly at the faces of her audience and put down the instrument. "And now I must go direc'ly," said she. "If you will all pardon me, please. I have some du-ties to attend." Zuleika rose gravely.

Harding found himself going to the door and guiding it open for her to pass through.

"Zuleika's made a hit," McNeil whispered as he went by.

Mrs. Dalrymple showed signs of going at this juncture, and Harding crossed hurriedly to her son, intending to "have it out with Dal," as he would have expressed it.

"See here, Dal, have you any influence at all with your cousin?" he asked abruptly.

"You refer to your fiancée?" Dalrymple asked in his cool, cynical voice.

"Fiasco is more like it," Harding replied with a scowl.

"What's the matter; been scrapping?" Dalrymple appeared amused.

"The engagement's off, I guess," Harding gloomily conceded.

"That's all right. Every well-regulated engagement should be broken off occasionally," Dalrymple stated.

"She's postponed this one—indefinitely," said Harding crossly.

Dalrymple laughed. "My dear fellow," he said, "Doris always does that when she's making up her mind to throw a man over. You're well out of it, if you ask me. I'd hesitate a long time before marrying Doris. Then I'd jump into the Suez canal."

"Do be serious, Dal. No one asked you to marry Doris."

"I'm perfectly serious. Never was seriouser. Doris is as pretty and dainty and about as calculating as a toy-watch made in Geneva."

Dalrymple looked at Harding with a quick, level glance from his eyes which appeared to be lighted with a genuine spark of affection for the boy. Harding returned the glance as directly.

"Suppose I happen to want a toy-watch?" he asked. "Dal, you go and tell Doris it's all right about Zuleika being my ward. She thinks you're a man of the world, and will take your word for what's *au fait*. And after this keep your degenerate opinions to yourself or it's going to be a case of coffee and pistols for two. By Jove, if you weren't my guest—"

"There, there, keep your hair on," said Dalrymple soothingly. "Here comes the fair Doris now. But I'm afraid she's absorbed," he added sadly.

Doris Carrington and Fitzmaurice did appear very much absorbed.

"Of course, she's doing this to punish you," Dal told his host.

"What a gorgeous sunset!" Miss Carrington exclaimed, pointedly ignoring Harding and gazing at Mr. Fitzmaurice with a charming smile. "Don't you adore sunsets?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed. And the twilight hour that invariably succeeds," he replied.

"Twilight always reminds me of Whistler," said Miss Carrington softly.

"Or dinner," supplemented Fitzmaurice.

"I'm afraid you take no interest in art," Miss Carrington said reproachfully.

"Ah, you wrong me. I'm always sketching and painting," Fitzmaurice protested.

"Really? How lovely! Do you do water-colors?" she asked, brimming with enthusiasm.

"Oh, dear no, only fast colors," said Fitzmaurice, fully aware of the game they were playing.

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand," Miss Carrington said gently.

"Of course not. That's just as well. Come and see the view. They say it's superb," he suggested.

"When any one talks to me about the scenery, I always think they mean something else," said Miss Carrington sweetly.

"You show great perspicacity for one of your years," he observed. "Girls should always show perspicacity. If they didn't, we should lose our faith in the old-fashioned, womanly qualities, and the men would be forced to do the real work of the world."

"Ass!" Harding muttered.

"Doris, my dear"—Mrs. Dalrymple looked anxiously after the departing backs of her niece and Mr. Fitzmaurice as they passed out on the veranda—"I think we had better be going," she said lightly and smiling vaguely at Harding.

Harding and McNeil cordially invited the party from the yacht to come up again for tea during their stay, and Dalrymple asked them to dine on the yacht that night.

"Is your ward *out?*" Mrs. Dalrymple inquired. "We should so like to have her, if so. She seems such a charming girl," she added.

McNeil looked puzzled; then, as though he was about to explode in a burst of laughter.

"Oh, no. Yes she is. Very good of you. I'll ask her about it," Harding promised. "At any rate, McNeil and I shall be charmed," he finished creditably.

There was a little chill in the air when they went out on the veranda. The sun had dropped into the Indian Ocean. Harding felt a little thrill of loneliness—or was it a kind of presentiment?

At any rate, it was a strange, wistful sort of feeling, of which he was

barely conscious. He said good-by to his guests rather absent-mindedly.

CHAPTER XI.

In the Abode of Felicity.

THAT night Harding and McNeil dined aboard the Sylph. Zuleika had declined to go, saying that she could amuse herself perfectly well at home, and that they must not mind leaving her. To console her for any possible feeling of neglect, McNeil promised her a gold "accomplishment" like Miss Allen's.

He would send to Paris by the next steamer, he vowed.

Harding said in a burst of generosity that he would teach her to run the car—an occupation that had always fascinated Zuleika. "And I shall get your jewels back and the papers and everything, if I have to bombard the palace to accomplish it," he finished.

Zuleika looked a trifle anxious at this. "Dear chap, you must not think of such a thing!" she exclaimed reproachfully.

Harding laughed. "Can't you see me training that one old prerevolutionary relic over at Jesus Fort on the sultan's harem?" he asked. McNeil could not.

"You could never, by any possibility, get the jewels except from the sultan," Zuleika explained further. "The jewels and important documents belonging to the women are in the abode of felicity."

"What's *that?*" Harding asked nonchalantly.

"Ah, it is the apartments of the women of the sultan's household," Zuleika told him. "And everything is in the care of the khazuahdar. You could not approach to him."

"He's a sort of treasurer, you see," McNeil elucidated. "It's simply the name for the second eunuch. I guess you'd better not rifle the harem for those jewels, after all. It's certain death for any man to be found in the abode of felicity."

"Don't worry. I'm no amateur cracksman; and I hope I shall always leave other people's abodes of felicity alone," Stuart said cheerfully.

It was shortly after midnight when Harding and McNeil left the Sylph and came ashore in the tender. Apparently they had spent a gay and profitable evening, judging from the sweet smiles of satisfaction with which both gentlemen regarded the moon. And then McNeil was apt to break out into fragments of song at intervals.

"Mr. Booze, you mischief maker,
You will be my undertaker"

he chanted roguishly. He was affecting an exaggeratedly precise mode of enunciation, together with an English inflection borrowed from Fitzmaurice for the occasion.

"How d' ye like s-well way I'm talking?" he asked Harding with a languid smile.

"Talk 'zackly like a Spanish omelet," said Harding with solemn disapproval. McNeil looked hurt.

"See here, Harding! Just 'cause your girl don't treat you right—that's no reason why you're gonna be permitted—make light of my mode of 'spressing myself. *Is* it, old chap?" he questioned.

The crew of the tender accompanied them on to the dock with solicitous care when they landed.

"Would you like me to come a piece of the way with you, sir?" one of the men asked good-naturedly.

"Cert'nly not," McNeil answered with dignity.

"Let's go find Zuleika's jewels," Harding proposed after they had set gaily off down the street. "Zuleika's very nice girl," he added. "Always did like Zuleika."

McNeill agreed.

"Much more 'preciative 'n *some* people," said Harding darkly.

They walked down the thoroughfare as far as a small fountain. Then

Harding insisted on exploring a small alley.

"Wish we had th' automobile," he said to McNeil after they had threaded the narrow and dirty streets along the water-front for some time.

"Damned lucky—haven't got it," McNeil returned with a happy grin.

They turned a corner abruptly, and the palace wall loomed up almost directly in front of them—a blank expanse of cement-covered stonework, on which the moonlight fell softly. There was one archway on this side with a beautiful, heavy, wooden door, thickly studded with brass nails.

"This entrance to 'bode of fel—felicity," Harding declared amiably.

"How you gonna get inside?" McNeil inquired with interest.

"Don't see any bell anywhere," Harding complained.

"Wish I had—vaulting-pole with me. I'd show you. Very—very careless," McNeil mourned.

"Oh, I say; here some nice chaps can help us out."

Harding had caught sight of some stealthy, dark forms that were approaching with catlike quiet through the moonlight. The palace was built on a sort of esplanade on the water's edge, and was raised considerably above the harbor. McNeil ran to the edge of the escarpment.

He returned with an air of importance. "Our noble confederates have 'rived entirely," he announced.

Harding went and looked over at a fleet of canoes moored close to the sea wall and not visible from a few yards back. "Noble confederates 'rived entirely," he corroborated.

A horde of black warriors were approaching, the light falling on their polished shoulders and sinewy backs. They were fully armed with spears and round, heavy shields, and rather scantily clad. Harding went up and bowed to their leader.

"This way," he said. "You just follow me," he explained with elaborate politeness.

"They're Bantus from the interior; came down river," McNeil told Harding.

Harding led them to the door in the palace wall with many gestures.

Then he turned and smiled courteously at the leader. The leader thought he was being invited to enter the door and an incredulous grin lighted his dark countenance. He advanced, followed by his men, and then looked up inquiringly at Harding towering solemnly above him.

The Bantus are a wiry, muscular people, but small in comparison with a well-formed white man.

"This is the fores' primeval — th' murmuring pines an' th' hemlocks," Harding quoted with deep feeling. The Bantu chief waited patiently for the door to be thrown open.

"'Twas brilling and the slithy toves—" he continued. McNeil gave him a stern look. "Well, what you gonna do 'bout it?" he asked peevishly.

"Don' int—" Harding stopped and looked sadly at McNeil. "Interrupt," he finished.

"How 'bout them—those jewels?" McNeil persisted.

The little Bantu chief went up to Harding and poked him gravely in the chest with a stubby forefinger. It seemed to affect Harding strangely. He gasped and blinked. "Wants me to open th' door," he said.

"Well—whadda ye gonna do 'bout it?" McNeil asked.

Harding pondered a moment. "Have a brilliant idea," he announced. "We're going t' have a testudo—just like Cæsar."

McNeil looked on with interest while Harding went through a pantomime that showed the Bantus the formation of a testudo. They placed their shields on their backs, others stood on the shields and held their shields so that they formed a roof. Harding was then jostled from one shield to another until he found himself level with the top of the wall.

"Fines' little elevator in th' world," said McNeil, looking on admiringly at the clever work of the men with the buffalo-hide shields. Harding leaned over against the top of the wall, then scrambled onto the top which was wide and planted with carefully watered grass, coconut palms, and acacia trees in bloom.

"Ah—" said Harding with a long-drawn sigh. "'The rose-red acacia that mocks the rose';" and he paused to pluck one of the flowers. He kissed it and placed it tenderly in the lapel of his white pongee coat.

After glancing down on the other side of the wall, he came back to the outer edge and reported conditions to McNeil, who sat on the ground at the base of the fortification to the abode of felicity and looked dreamily at the stars.

"There's the biggest coon out of a side-show—direc'ly below — right on other side," Harding announced.

"Knock 's block off—bash 's silly head quite in—bash 's silly head—" repeated McNeil gently.

Harding took a spear from one of the Bantus. He swung it from above and there was a sound of the contact of solid wood with bone, something like the noise of a croquet-mallet hitting the ball. Then the keeper of the outer gate fell stunned on the ground without another sound. Harding swung himself by the branch of a palm-tree growing near the wall down into the garden below. A moment later the gate was thrown open and several hundred of the Bantu tribe swarmed in.

McNeil still continued to gaze at the stars.

It was considerably later in the day, although the morning was yet young, when Harding sat at breakfast on the veranda of the American consulate and sipped coffee brewed by Zuleika. He looked pale and thoughtful, and although he was freshly tubbed and shaven, and smelled of a popular brand of talcum powder, his clothes appeared to be sadly in need of pressing, and in the lapel of his white coat a faded acacia blossom drooped.

It was very annoying to find that Bakaru had not returned his morning suits from the laundry. He could not quite account for the way this one had been creased and wrinkled. "It must be due to the sea air," he said aloud.

"Eh, dear chap? The sea air?" Zuleika inquired calmly.

"I think the sea air has taken the creases all out of my clothes—out on the yacht last night, you know," he explained. Zuleika shook her head reproachfully. "But the grass stains—and your pocket ripped off and a great tear like a door in the leg of your trou—"

Harding looked down in embarrassment. "By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I wish McNeil were here. He could tell me where we went," he added under his breath.

Then he looked down at the acacia dying on his perfectly correct lapel. "'The rose-red acacia that mocks the rose,'" he quoted for the second time that day. And then in a flash he remembered.

"By God, I'm a raving lunatic!" he exclaimed. "Where's McNeil?" he demanded of the startled Zuleika.

"I do not know. I think he has not return' yet," said Zuleika quietly. Harding groaned and put his hands to his head. Then he suddenly dove into his pockets.

He brought out two small leather boxes that had come originally from Regent Street.

"These are your jewels, Zuleika," he said. "Couldn't find the papers. He probably has them himself—they weren't with the khazuahdar."

Harding might have been handing her the morning paper.

Zuleika went very white. She took up the boxes and pressed the little spring releasing the cover of each. A fortune in pearls and rubies was revealed. Zuleika wept unreservedly.

Harding had seen her cry before, but it had not been like this.

"What did you do to get these, dear chap?" she asked later.

Harding smiled wanly. "The Lord only knows," he said.

A few minutes later Bakaru and Ali entered the room with an air of suppressed excitement. Either terror or a sense of their own importance almost overwhelmed them.

"You tell Harding bibi," said Bakaru to his companion.

"You tell him—he no make cross," Ali replied reassuringly.

"What's it all about? What have you been doing?" Harding questioned them.

"In the harbor are many—many—" They stopped and looked at each other.

"For Heaven's sake—what's the matter? Can't you tell?" Harding burst out.

Bakaru looked at Ali gravely. "Yes, but hell—" he began.

"Oh, get out then," Harding exclaimed wearily.

Zuleika spoke to them rapidly. "Wait yet one moment — what is in the harbor?" she asked anxiously.

"In the harbor are many Bantus in small boats. They steal, kill—my God, they are terrible, those Bantus!" Bakaru cried shrilly.

"The bazaars are full of it! It is even said that they have gone to the palace—"

"And this is all my fault," Harding muttered.

"Dear chap, you must not stay—you are in very great danger," said Zuleika, rushing over to where he stood and prostrating herself gracefully at his feet.

"Don't be absurd — there's no real danger—you know the British regiment is here," he told her, and lifted the girl in his arms.

She smiled and half closed her eyes.

"No soldiers here now — all gone away," Bakaru yelled and danced up and down in an abandonment of glee. Harding looked at him closely.

"You're lying," he said shortly. A part of the King's African Rifles was always kept in barracks at Zanzibar.

"No—no—" Ali cried, shivering with nervous excitement.

"All go up to Uganda country — fight with people who do not wish railway. So Englishman's shikari tell," he insisted.

Then Harding vaguely remembered hearing about some trouble with the natives along the route of the new Uganda Railway. Evidently it had been necessary to call out the troops stationed at Zanzibar to quell the uprising.

He was convinced now that the Bantus had learned of this in the mysterious way that news flies about Africa. Their landing in the city last night had been deliberately planned. This was their first chance in many years to get back at their hereditary enemies, the coast people.

And he saw the part he had played in the protection of the city. He cursed himself for a double-dyed ass and a consummate villain.

"We've got to put a stop to this," he said aloud.

"Dear chap — you must try to go out on the white yacht with your friends. These people may burn—destroy and kill. There is no one in this city who can fight. They are fat and lazy, all. Such cow*ards!*" Zuleika stamped her small feet with indignation.

Harding took the field-glasses and looked out over the harbor.

"Ye gods! There must be a thousand canoes coming out of that delta over there," he exclaimed. "The mango and copal trees in the swamps make a fine ambush for them—must have been only an advance guard last night."

Zuleika tried to read his face, but the dominating expression was one of scientific curiosity.

Suddenly he caught sight of something else as his glasses veered about the horizon.

"Quick, Bakaru—the devil wagon!" he exclaimed blithely.

"Zuleika, you do just as you're told—you'll see—be a good girl. We're going to have some fun. We're going to give those boys from Jungle Town the surprise-party of their lives," he promised.

CHAPTER XII.

The Battle with the Bantus.

HARDING ran the devil wagon through the narrow and filthy streets between the consulate and the wharfs at reckless speed, the horn squawking defiance at short intervals. In the tonneau Zuleika and the faithful Piloola were carefully stowed away, with the curtains hiding them from the vulgar gaze.

Harding had equipped the machine with a variety of patent rhinoceros-hide curtains warranted to turn aside a .32 rifle-ball fired at a distance of a few yards. A German had persuaded him to invest in them months ago, and now he had put them on for the first time, feeling that there might be fighting in the streets.

But the few Bantus who had landed the night before were evidently confining their activities to the Shangani quarter near the palace. Perhaps the guards had even succeeded in throwing them out by this time, and they had taken once more to the canoes.

When he stopped the car at the wharf, Harding drew a sigh of relief at sight of the small tender from the Sylph bobbing up and down on the waves near at hand. He stood up on the seat and waved frantically. A moment later McNeil leaped ashore while the crew were tying up to the dock, and ran toward the machine.

"Mac! Lord, I'm glad to see you! What the—" Harding greeted him.

"Well, you old Billy-off-the-pickle-boat," McNeil returned; "you deep-sea soused mackerel, I didn't know you had it in you. Don't you know you ought to command the battle-ship Booze in the Swiss navy? Honest, I've never seen such a gulerious, squifflified—"

"Shut up, Mac; you know you weren't so worse yourself," said Harding, slightly embarrassed. "The point is—" he continued, then interrupted himself to ask: "How in thunder did *you* get here Why, I left you outside the wall—"

"I know. Outside the wall. Exactly," McNeil returned. "I sort of came to after that," he went on as though recalling something with difficulty. "I thought it was good night, Irene, when I saw you starting to invade the sultan's harem at the head of the Bantu regiment."

"Then I did really do it!" Harding murmured incredulously.

"You sure did. At which I awakened a fisherman asleep on his private yacht, and got him, for a consideration, to take me out to the Sylph."

"Good old Mac!" Harding interjected.

"Don't mention it," returned McNeil. "We came over in the tender to reconnoiter; found the palace in an uproar; but evidently you had escaped, likewise the Bantus. Just a scouting-party. Plenty more coming out of the swamps on the other side of the harbor. They've been getting together since daybreak.

"I know," said Harding quickly. "Then they're not running amuck about the city?" he asked.

"Don't think so," replied McNeil. "We went over the ground pretty thoroughly last night. Had the whole crew armed. We looked like a walking arsenal."

"Any chance of Dal putting up a fight?" Harding asked excitedly.

McNeil's eyes twinkled. "Come out and talk to him," he said briefly.

Harding put the automobile in an old warehouse, then embarked on the tender with his ward and her handmaiden.

"I'm with you," Dalrymple replied

when Harding asked him about his ideas on naval warfare. "The crew is ready to stick guns out of the port-holes at any minute—or whatever it is they do. We have two men who used to be gunners on the Arkansas. Went to a tin school myself, you know," he added.

"Good!" Harding exclaimed. "Then we'll sail straight into them. They'll probably resent that, and we can fire in self-defense."

"This is terrible. We should never have come to such an outlandish place," Mrs. Dalrymple mourned.

"My dear mother, it's a mere bag of shellac. You should have been with us when we were chased by pirates off the coast of Algiers," Dalrymple remarked as a means of comforting her.

"Are you *sure* there's no danger?" Mrs. Dalrymple persisted, turning to Harding for an impartial verdict. "Remember, I'm chaperoning two young girls."

Harding gravely murmured something of a reassuring nature.

And then Dalrymple had Captain Dorkins up, and the work of superintending the putting up the two six-inch guns was started. The rest of the party arranged along the rail and contented themselves with peering across the water at the enemy.

"Gad! Just look at 'em. The harbor's quite black with them!" Fitzmaurice exclaimed.

"Isn't that the usual color-scheme observed by negroes?" Miss Carrington asked tartly.

"And it's about time we gave them the high sign. Just pot a few of the advance guard and the others are going to get green about the gills, and bolt for the jungle," McNeil suggested.

"I say, aren't those guns through being manicured yet?" Dalrymple asked impatiently.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Dalrymple," Captain Dorkins began in long-suffering tones, "but the crew were all down in the hold matching each other as to who'd shoot off the guns, instead of putting them up. Consequently—"

"This is the limit!" Harding exclaimed in annoyance. "Any one would think it was a jig-saw puzzle the way those fellows go about it."

"Where are the two men who used to be on the Arkansas?" Dalrymple inquired.

"Under arrest, Mr. Dalrymple," the captain replied. "Of course, I can't have discipline interfered with for an afternoon's pleasuring," he added conscientiously.

"No, of course not," said Dalrymple, evidently annoyed.

"Of course not," the captain repeated self-righteously.

"I *said* of course not," Dalrymple asserted with some heat.

"Look here," said McNeil confidentially to Harding; "who's going to fire the guns when these mud-heads get them up, if they ever do? Don't you know they'll be bombarding the sky-line half the time and the palace the other half if we're not careful?"

It was with considerable difficulty that Harding and Dalrymple together finally persuaded the testy old captain to let the two former gunners on deck for the fray.

"That's what I call *finesse*," Dalrymple remarked with a sigh of relief when he had won his point. "Dorkins certainly has his own ideas about owners' places," he added with an attempt at a chuckle.

"Cheer up. He thinks we've all gone mad," Harding remarked.

The gunners, consisting of a huge Swede and a slim Irish lad with a wide grin, came up soon after, and the six-inch guns were handled lovingly. Then a gun-crew was rapidly licked into shape.

The girls took great interest in all this.

"Why can't we fire one of them a few times?" Miss Carrington asked with her most persuasive smile.

"Oh, do let me. I'm simply crazy to," Miss Allen chorused.

"I can't allow it!" Mrs. Dalrymple burst out excitedly. "I'm your chaperon and I absolutely forbid it. Why, you might kill some one!"

She took her duties as a chaperon seriously, it was evident.

"I don't see why we can't help. An English officer on the Fear Not once showed me all over a big gun. He was the most fascinating man!" Miss Carrington persisted.

"You're thinking of a conning tower, with a cute little spiral stairway running up the middle," Miss Allen remarked in superior tones.

"Here goes; we've got to pick out a crew right off. One crew for each gun, you know," said Dalrymple, disregarding the lady candidates and turning to Harding as the military authority.

Fitzmaurice laughed aloud. "Aren't you becoming a bit mixed, dear boy?" he asked.

"What's the matter now?" McNeil wanted to know.

"You know you've only *got* one crew," said Fitzmaurice triumphantly.

"Pshaw! You didn't understand me. One crew for the yacht, of course, and then the gun crews. Crews within crews, you see?"

"I should suggest that you stop cruising now, and stand by to come about. A broadside or two scattered judiciously among the nearest canoes," McNeil advised in the manner of an expert.

"That's about right. Will you give me a crew for each gun, captain?" Harding asked in deeply respectful tones.

A number of the men were invited up on deck, and it was decided that the Swede should have charge of one gun and the Irish boy manage the second gun.

"Just give me an idea of what men are best qualified, captain," Dalrymple asked.

"I should suggest Snyder, Mr. Dalrymple. He used to be on an American cruiser. I think he swabbed the deck or made pies, I forget which; not that it matters. About the others, I've no idea of their fitness or unfitness," Captain Dorkins spoke in resigned bitterness.,

Snyder was told to step forward, which he did with a proud and sheepish grin.

Harding laughed with pure excitement. It seemed that they were really going to have a fight and not a comic-opera representation of one.

"How many of the rest of you have ever fired a daisy air-rifle?" he asked seriously. "All who have answer aye!"

"Me—I," replied the crew to a man.

"They qualify," said Harding briefly. "Dal, take half the bunch and I'll take the other half."

They picked three men for each gun as though choosing sides for a game of some sort.

"War's declared—clear the decks!" Dalrymple shouted cheerfully.

"How about the ladies? Shouldn't they get into the scuppers or batten down on the hatches or something?" McNeil asked thoughtfully.

"Some day, old man, I'll give you a nautical dictionary. Too busy now," Harding told him.

"Girls—mother—*mademoiselle*—all go below, please. Captain's orders," Dalrymple announced.

"Why can't I stay here and hand you the bullets, Freddy?" Doris Carrington asked her cousin.

"Go below and get the first-aid kit—you know we may be wounded before this is all over," Harding suggested. And the girls departed in a flutter to become impromptu Red Cross nurses.

"Where's the enemy, sir? Just give the word an' we'll pump it into 'em!" an overenthusiastic member of the crew exclaimed.

"Silence in the ranks!" Harding commanded. "Every man to his piece!"

"Every man to his piece!" Dalrymple echoed him.

"Range at a thousand yards!" Harding commanded.

Dalrymple glanced inquiringly at him.

"Got it already—what the—" he demanded.

"Ready—*fire!*" Harding snapped out.

Dalrymple repeated the order; the crew working under the Swede followed suit and fired.

There was a tremendous crashing report, and the crew rushed delightedly to the side of the boat. They scanned the water excitedly for the results of their work.

"What the devil are you doing? Get back there!" Harding roared.

The crew got—in considerable chagrin.

"Do you think this is a confounded Mexican revolution—every man for himself? Or maybe you imagine you're at a Coney Island shooting-gallery—hitting glass balls for a cigar," he went on with elaborate sarcasm.

They hung their heads like ball-players ordered to the bench.

"Now give 'em some more of the same stuff, boys," Harding added a moment later in a new tone.

"Every man to his piece!" Dalrymple cried. "Oh, you are already! Well—go on—ready, fire!"

"What the blazes—say, Dal, yours are firing too soon!" Harding complained.

"Sure. But yours are too slow," Dalrymple remarked cheerfully.

"My word!" Fitzmaurice chortled, with the spy-glasses screwed tight to his right eye. "That went home right enough! By gad—they do look funny sprawling in the water like that!"

"Did we hit something?" Harding asked delightedly.

"You bet we did—look over there—that canoe—a shell went right smashing into her bows. She absolutely spun clean round—the entire crew spilled into the water!" Dalrymple exclaimed in amazed, joyous tones.

"And the beggars are now enjoying a luxurious bath," Fitzmaurice concluded.

"Can't they swim, though—look at them! Regular water-rats!" Harding gazed out over the intervening sheet of water at the luckless Bantus whose canoe they had incapacitated.

"Say, they're all paddling their own canoes to the other shore—notice that?" McNeil asked.

It was true. The canoes from the interior had met with unexpected opposition. They were now rapidly retiring to the plantations of mango and copal trees that grew in rank luxuriance in the delta of the river.

A moment later, to the amazement of those on board the yacht as much as the savages in the canoes, there was another dull roar—and the dilapidated gun on Jesus Fort emitted a single shell. It skipped harmlessly over the blue waters from one wave to the next; then there was silence as before.

"Took them some little time to get wise to the situation," McNeil commented.

Harding laughed.

"That's like these people—after it's all over," he said.

"Ha! Whoop! Victory is ours!" Dalrymple shouted. Then he went and repeated it at the door of the saloon. "All right, girls and lady mother! Battle's all over," he announced.

"Why not follow this up—grapple with the canoe fleet hand to hand at closer range?" the Englishman wanted to know.

"Let 'em go. All you'd grapple with would be the bottom of the harbor. It's precious shallow over there," McNeil advised. "But keep a sharp lookout. They're treacherous devils. Only I don't think they were expecting *this*. We've got their wool scared straight as a string, I bet."

Harding was looking off moodily in the direction the Bantus had taken. He seemed as though he would have liked them to come back and finish the skirmish.

"This may improve your drag with

the sultan, Stuart, old top—saving the fair city of Zanzibar and all that," McNeil said, going up to him. He had divined the trend Harding's thoughts were taking.

"I'll tell you this," Harding began soberly. "I'd sell my drag and the whole outfit for a plugged dime if I could be back on the reservation. I'd walk the area all night and stay awake through chapel thanking the Lord for 'hell-cats' and 'slum.' I tell you, Mac, it's in my blood. This farce we've just been through has been exactly enough like the real thing to wake it up. It's all I've ever thought of being all my life, and—"

"See here, boy," McNeil said kindly; "can that stuff. Here come the girls and old Lady Killjoy. Remember, you're the little hero. You've just won a battle—fierce encounter with savages, *et cetera, et cetera.*"

He flung an arm across Harding's shoulder and walked with him across the deck to where Mrs. Dalrymple and the "two young girls," also Zuleika, stood in an excited group asking rapid-fire questions about the battle."

"Tell us all about it. We want to know all about modern warfare," Doris Carrington demanded.

"This was warfare de luxe," Harding told her.

"Exactly," Dalrymple agreed. "I told Stuart to say when—then the crew poured high explosives into the bright-blue water. A passing shell happened to collide with the bow of a canoe—"

"My dear Freddy, spare us the brutal details," Mrs. Dalrymple begged, covering her face with her hands.

"But, sweetest mother, there were no details to speak of, brutal or otherwise. It was simply, bang! Nothing doing. Bang! No. 2, a canoe turns turtle, and the whole army ran—paddled away into the bulrushes, just like Georgy Porgy," her son reassured her.

"My dear chap, aren't you becoming a bit mixed—sacred and profane history—" Fitzmaurice began, then left his sentence hanging in the air.

"You're just trying to pretend that we didn't miss anything," Doris Carrington pouted prettily. "And not one of you had the grace even to get wounded."

"It was most inconsiderate," said Miss Allen reproachfully. "There I sat on the edge of a chair with "First Aid" open in one hand and a yard of moist linen gauze in the other." She laughed gaily.

The young men protested that they would have got properly wounded if only the Bantus had given them a chance.

"They were haughty and kept their distance," Dalrymple explained.

"Lucky for us they were—if you once got a spear or a Bantu arrow in you, nothing would save you but strychnin injected at once. They smear their weapons with the juice of poisonous herbs," McNeil told them.

"Quick, Watson — the needle!" Miss Allen said, and the others laughed.

A few moments later, Zuleika, who had been strangely quiet, merely looking quietly at Harding as at one delivered from some great danger, was seen to fix her eyes on something floating in the water close to the yacht. Immediately she lost her dreamy tranquillity, and the languid gratefulness of her glance was changed to one of intense watchfulness.

"See—the branch of the copal-tree which floats in the water!" she exclaimed in a low tone of suppressed fear.

"It's drifted over here from the opposite shore where the Bantus are," McNeil replied. "The tide would naturally bring it this way."

"They may be camping there. We'd better keep a lookout," said Harding. "But there's no harm in that branch out there," he added, and turned so as to get a better look at it.

"Dear chap — I am afraid of that branch—no branch of a copal-tree or of another tree moves like that. It is coming toward the boat!"

She ran to the other side of the deck and shaded her eyes with her hand as she scanned the water again.

Harding followed her.

"It does seem to be moving of its own accord—by Jove! It's not straight with the current — the current would take it to stern of us."

"Curious—" Dalrymple, who had followed them, commented. "Come here and see this thing, Fitz—"

"Go back, dear chap; I can see!" Zuleika screamed a warning, then flung herself against Harding, who was nearest the rail and in direct line with the floating branch. A short spear or javelin whistled through the air, aimed straight at Harding's breast. But the girl had hurled herself in front of him and clung to his neck. The Bantu javelin grazed her arm and left a straight red scar in its wake.

Then it plunged into the deck, and quivered there for several seconds like a live thing. The women screamed and the men seemed to be turned to stone, such was the quick horror of the thing. Zuleika had half fainted, and Harding carried her across to a *chaise longue*. "Good God—the branch —she was right!" he said rapidly.

"But how— Such a damnable—" Fitzmaurice spluttered helplessly.

"Get the strychnin — never mind how — could you, Miss Allen?" McNeil asked quietly. He was examining the wound in Zuleika's arm.

"Poor kiddy! Poor kiddy!" Harding kept saying mechanically and with a very white face.

"Those dirty niggers — one of them swimming under the branch, of course!" McNeil explained in answer to a small avalanche of questions.

"Oh, how dreadful if she should—" Miss Carrington began.

"She's not going to," Harding said firmly.

"Keep on slapping her wrists, Stuart," advised McNeil. "Why isn't that girl back?"

"I knew we shouldn't have this battle!" Mrs. Dalrymple said. "You see, we've roused all their savage instincts—I was sure that a battle was entirely out of place. I should have insisted—"

Mrs. Dalrymple suddenly grew rather faint. Her niece applied violet salts to her most patrician feature. No one thought to tell her that she was "entirely out of place."

Then Miss Allen returned breathlessly with bandages, strychnin, antiseptics, *et cetera*.

"Here's the stuff. Do you want to use an antiseptic first?" she asked in businesslike tones.

"That's the right dope." McNeil took the proffered articles.

"Here, hold it for me—now—"

McNeil went through the operation of injecting the strychnin and cleansing and bandaging the wounded arm with the assistance of Miss Allen.

"They always use that same poison," McNeil told the others. After a skirmish with them the British army surgeons go over the field, injecting strychnin right and left. They say some of the soldiers are more afraid of the doctors than of the Bantu arrows."

Harding was busy shoving more cushions under Zuleika's head, fanning her, fussing with the awning so that no ray of the hot sun could possibly reach her. Zuleika accepted all this with meek gratitude. It was only when Dalrymple asked her if she wouldn't like a glass of lemon and soda that she laughed enough to bring the color into her pale cheeks.

"I do not care for limonade things —thank you so much," she then said with perfect politeness.

"Anyway, you've behaved splendidly—awfully plucky of you," he declared.

"A true heroine—I'm so glad it wasn't one of you girls," Mrs. Dalrymple added.

"If I hadn't been so cock-sure there was nothing deadly about that branch I wouldn't be obliged to accept your sacrifice, Zuleika. Will you forgive

me—if you can?" Harding asked in a low, earnest tone.

"But, foolish one, of course! It was all perfectly natural," Zuleika said slowly, and with a little smile.

"You couldn't help it, Harding. Want a drink of water, Zuleika?" McNeil asked briskly.

"Thank you, no," Zuleika replied. "You are so ver' kind. Everybody is kind. I have never been quite ill before—I am nearly glad to be hurt in my arm."

Zuleika smiled at Harding as she said this, in a way that made McNeil feel that she had forgotten the others were there.

"You're right, *mademoiselle,*" Fitzmaurice asserted didactically. "Never regret a new sensation — and you'll grow old disgracefully."

"That will do for you, Fitz," Dalrymple remarked. Now the point is, why should we let this son of Satan with his poisonous arsenal concealed in a bamboo-tree, or whatever it is—why should we let him escape us? Let's chase him around the harbor in the tender."

"All right—give him a run for his money. I like your proposition," McNeil agreed.

"I'd like a crack at his woolly head — sweet is revenge!" Fitzmaurice blithely caroled.

"Harding, coming along, or—"

"I've got to look after Zuleika. Remember — don't stop till you get the fellow—if it takes all night," Harding replied promptly.

A moment later Dalrymple was heard asking the captain for a particularly bloodthirsty crew to man the launch. And the captain accepted the situation ungracefully as usual.

Mrs. Dalrymple and the two girls went below to discuss the proper fitting out of the tender on its mission of vengeance.

"I wish they'd go clear across the Indian Ocean and back," Harding exclaimed fervently. "All of them—every one," he repeated firmly. Then he dropped on one knee and bent above Zuleika. And gradually her lips and eyes drew him to her.

"Tell me—what made you do that? He might have killed you." Harding questioned her in a very low voice.

"I cannot tell you that—again," she said faintly.

He gave a sort of cry, and then his lips met hers.

A moment later: "Zuleika—do you care—honestly?"

"Yes, dear chap!" she answered.

"Funny — I never thought I loved you before," Harding mused. "It's been like shouting between continents in the dark until now."

"But there is now a most beautiful light!" Zuleika exclaimed happily.

"Then you're the light, Zuleika. And you've got to keep right on shining and twinkling *always,*" Harding said, and kissed her lightly.

"That was most lovely twinkle, dear chap," Zuleika laughed in her elfin way. "No — not any more—I must go now to my little room with the porthole window. The chaperon lady will expect to see me there. But I shall think many lovely thoughts of you," she promised seriously.

"Poor kid—of course you must go to your stateroom. You're all in."

"Yes, I am, as you say, shot to pieces, dear chap."

Zuleika made a pathetic little face, and Harding picked her up as though she had been a tired child and carried her below.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Abduction.

IT was long after the luncheon hour when Dalrymple, McNeil, and Fitzmaurice returned from the pursuit of the Bantu swimmer. He had, of course, abandoned the copal branch and struck out for the shallow water. He had almost succeeded in eluding them altogether and reached the part of the harbor not navigable even to

such a small boat as the tender. But they had overtaken him in an exciting spurt.

"All we did was to tow him round the harbor at the end of a rope," Dalrymple answered the questions of those who had not left the yacht. "But we let him understand that if any more javelins were thrown we'd blow their whole village up," he continued. "The poor boob was almost drowned. But I rather admire his nerve, coming over into the enemy's country that way. It would have been sort of a shame to hurt him," McNeil remarked in excuse for the anticlimax of having let their quarry go.

"I only hope that it hasn't stirred these savages up against us again," Captain Dorkins remarked ominously.

The captain's remark was not without foundation as was proved that same evening. It was a sultry, moonless night. Every one was on deck—the cabins and even the saloon, with an electric fan going continually, were stifling. Dalrymple had ordered the longest, coolest drinks that the steward could concoct, and the men sat around sipping them and puffing listlessly at their cigarettes.

"I wish the moon would come out. I want to go in for a swim," Doris Carrington announced, yawning behind a slim hand.

"'Twould be ripping. I feel as though I were melting down like a Camembert cheese," Dalrymple agreed.

"Suppose you met a shark — or a Bantu," Harding suggested.

"Then I should expect you to jump down the shark's throat to save me or let the Bantu brain you while you smiled heroically, Stuart," Miss Carrington returned, smiling insolently at him and then glancing coolly at Zuleika.

Harding flushed slightly.

"I sincerely hope you'd recover from the bitter blow if I didn't," he said pleasantly. Miss Carrington bit her lip, then turned away languidly, saying that she would see them later.

"This is getting altogether too exciting for me," she announced as a parting shot.

A few moments later she appeared on deck in a green taffeta bathing-dress and cap, both of which were exceedingly becoming. She ran out on the bowsprit with a little reckless laugh and prepared to dive.

"By Jove! I didn't think she was in earnest!" Fitzmaurice exclaimed.

"Doris—you can't do this foolhardy thing," Dalrymple shouted in considerable excitement.

"Doris—I can't allow you to do this—such a ridiculous hour for going in bathing—I never heard such nonsense. Fred—go and bring that crazy girl back," Mrs. Dalrymple commanded in distracted tones.

"Really, you shouldn't, Miss Carrington. I don't think it's safe," McNeil said quietly.

Harding did not speak. He knew that if he did she would be just contrary enough to wish to refuse what he asked. Doris was like that! She had considered Harding her inviolable property for so long that it upset her considerably to notice how his interest in the little Irish-Arab girl, or whatever she was, had grown.

And just when she had resolved to punish him.

"Wait for me, then — I'm going with you," Dalrymple called in desperation.

But he was too late. Doris Carrington stood poised for an instant with her white arms above her head, then dove gracefully. She struck the water as straight as an arrow. The girl *could* dive.

McNeil, who had never seen this accomplishment of Miss Carrington's displayed before, gasped admiringly.

Dalrymple smiled cynically. He knew his cousin so well.

"This is Doris's daredevil pose, and that was her trump card," he said, and glanced over at Harding.

The girl struck out from the yacht as soon as she appeared at the surface

of the water, with long, even strokes, swimming on her side. One white arm flashed regularly and a phosphorescent wake showed where her body cut the water.

"We've got to follow that girl in the tender. Want to come?"

Dalrymple drew recruits from among his guests and the crew, and hurried below in great exasperation at having his delicious after-dinner languor, as he expressed it, interfered with.

Before they had succeeded in getting the tender under way a scream—followed by a succession of screams—echoed across the water. The last ended in a wild shriek that was cut off abruptly, then silence fell over the dark waters of the harbor.

All those on deck looked at each other, dumb with consternation. Finally Mrs. Dalrymple shrieked out, announcing the fact that she was sure to go insane if anything else happened!

This did not help the situation any, and Miss Allen led her to her stateroom and put her to bed, seeing that she had something to calm her nerves meanwhile.

"That Miss Allen's the right sort—do you know that?" McNeil said to Fitzmaurice later.

The Englishman looked at him blankly.

"She's a girl with a head on her—practical and smart," McNeil repeated.

Fitzmaurice looked as though an inspiration had sprung up in his mind unawares.

"By Jove! so she is," he agreed. Then he blushed violently.

After scouting about the harbor for a half-hour they gave up the search for the canoe that had carried Doris Carrington off.

"It's doing no good mooning round in the dark this way. They'll probably go back to their camp with her right away. They may even take her inland to one of the villages," McNeil told Dalrymple.

There wasn't a canoe in sight on the entire harbor, and the tender drew too much water for them to venture into the river delta.

"Do you think they're after a ransom?" Dalrymple asked.

"H-m—probably. Of course it must be that," said McNeil evasively. But he knew that it was probably nothing of the sort.

"I say we go for the automobile and come around by land—it's not more than six or eight miles," Harding proposed. "Have we got those new, solid rubber tires that were ordered from Paris a month ago?" he asked McNeil.

"Sure—but what good's that going to do when you don't know the roads to their nasty little villages—or even to the camp in the delta?" McNeil inquired.

"Don't you suppose I've surveyed every inch of this beastly island in the past four months?" Harding loftily demanded. "While you've been sitting out on the veranda nights, batting mosquitoes, I've been making a Baedeker to take along to-night." They ran the little boat over to the dock, then rapidly made their way to the warehouse and got out the automobile. "You see, it's right about *there*."

Stuart pointed out a pencil cross on the map of the island which, together with a map of the city, he kept in a pocket of the car.

They went to the consulate first and gathered together all the food, firearms, and whisky that they possessed. McNeil also made up a first-aid kit with remedies against snake-bites, fever, and bullets.

It was almost ten o'clock when the big machine started from the shack that Harding and McNeil called home, and the moon was now shining in a cloudless sky. They had that at least in their favor.

But the Bantus had more than an hour's start of them. They must go all through the city, cross the bridge over the Unguya, then strike out on

the proposed railroad route. If the Bantus went toward their chief village the automobile would be on the longest side of the triangle.

Granted that they caught up with the savages, they could not tell what they would do to recapture Doris Carrington. If they should not find her in any of the Bantu towns they must abandon the machine and with guides penetrate to the swamps of mangroves, reeds, and tall grasses with which the deltas along the coast were adorned. If Miss Carrington did not take the fever, all might yet be well.

The young men felt almost sure that the black men, having stolen her in revenge for the damage done by the yacht, would hold their captive for ransom. These Mohammedan negroes were extremely mercenary.

"What are we going to do if she's been sentenced to the harem of one of their chiefs?" Harding asked McNeil so that Dalrymple could not hear him.

McNeil was more reassuring than he felt he had reason to be.

"They'd hardly dare do that," he answered Harding. "They'll either try to ransom her or sell her out of the country. They want to make something on this. If they intend to ransom her they'll take her to the chief village, but if they think they can get more for her by selling her out of the country to some of the traders of the Swahili coast, they'll be likely to take her to one of the coast towns, to Lindi or Kilwa, probably. They're the nearest ones to this part of the country."

The railroad route ran first along the coast towns, then struck inland through Diumbi northward. They determined to take this direction.

Harding had procured some of the guides that accompanied them once on a shooting trip into the interior, men who knew the country even better than he did. Two of these Swahili gentlemen were put into the tonneau of the car. They occupied the small chairs, while Dalrymple and McNeil lolled luxuriously in the cushioned seat.

They had now crossed the bridge over the Unguya, and were going at as fast a clip as they dared along the railroad route.

All the curtains were down, Stuart was driving. The curtains might prove valuable in an ambush; being of a heavy kind of patent rhinoceros hide, they might be useful in stopping bullets. Stuart was glad that his windshield was not of glass but of some transparent kind of celluloid.

Half way to the town of Lindi, while the car swayed and bumped along over the stumps of coconut trees and copals which would have speedily put ordinary pneumatic tires out of commission, a native rushed at them out of a thick covert of vines, shouted something, and disappeared.

"What did he say?" Dalrymple asked. The Swahilis were appealed to and declared that he had shrieked a warning to his companions, saying that the "devil wagon from the capital was out to-night."

"Were they Bantus?" Dalrymple asked further.

He was told that they were peaceful natives who cultivated fields of cloves and worked on the coffee plantations as coolies.

"But they will try to inform the Bantus of our coming. They delight in running miles to tell some piece of news, just for the joy of telling it, apparently," said Harding.

"Well, I think we can beat them to it, anyway," McNeil remarked.

"Which remains to be seen," said Stuart rather grimly. "Do you realize that we're chasing a whole army to capture its latest spoil? And that we have a handful of men and a handful of guns against all their savagery and cunning? If this weren't Africa it would sound as fantastic as it is."

They passed through the towns of Lindi, Kilwa, and Nomboola without finding any trace of the Bantus, although they sent out the two Swahilis as scouts, and themselves questioned the few Europeans to be found at that

hour. The dawn was breaking through the sky now, and the red sun had sent up a broad shaft of light, which slashed the sky and covered it like a flaming sword.

They struck inland, rather silent now, and settled down with a grim determination on the execrable road cut out of the jungle to find the girl they were after. They felt safer from attack now that the light had come. Every one looked gray and haggard in the early morning light. There was a dampness and a creepy chill in the air at this hour in spite of the tropical climate.

Suddenly the car came to a dead stop.

"What's the matter?" McNeil asked.

"Don't know," was the enlightening response from Stuart, who proceeded to get out and look the parts of the car over. He lifted up the hood and looked at the cylinders. The hard, rubber tires had behaved splendidly, and now here was trouble from an unknown quarter.

The men looked at each other in incredulous disgust.

"The devil!" said Stuart fervently. Suddenly the Swahili who looked the least intelligent lifted up his grinning face and pointed down his own throat. "Give it a drink," he advised.

The others broke out into a mirthless kind of laugh which first seemed to cackle out on the morning air in an unaccustomed manner, then, gaining strength, developed into a respectable guffaw.

"What chumps we are! Of course it needs gas and probably water, too. Though where we're going to get the last-mentioned *I* don't know," Stuart finally expressed himself on their predicament.

He got out the can of gasoline and a funnel and started to pour in the life-giving liquid.

"I think we all need a drink," said Dalrymple, and took out a silver flask, which he passed around, and another which he gave to the boys.

The second bottle was a weak, cooking sherry that Harding had brought for them so as to prevent their getting under the weather.

"How about the water, though?" McNeil asked a moment later. "We'll need it pretty soon even if we don't this minute."

"Here, you boys," Stuart began, addressing the two Swahilis. Look around; go find some water. Take a bucket. Here, bring back for devil-wagon. Devil-wagon say he must have some. Quick!"

The two negroes grabbed the pail and made off with it. It appeared that they knew where the water could be found, or at least how to go about finding it. The others waited impatiently for them.

"It seems to me I hear something that might be a brook in the distance. It's a kind of murmuring noise," said Dalrymple. "Don't you hear it?"

McNeil thought he did, but Stuart could distinguish nothing beyond the impenetrable silence of a tropical forest. The boys had now been some time, and they began to get anxious.

"Just the kind of a place for lions," Stuart remarked. "It was this kind of a little grove that the fellow I got came out of last week. We were out in the open, on a little plain covered with short grass."

And just then the boys returned running. They carried the bucket of water between them, but they were in such a hurry to tell their news they splashed it right and left.

"Well?" said Dalrymple.

"Tell him savvy quick," Harding admonished them. The eyes of the Swahilis fairly started from their heads as they began to gabble and point in the direction from which they came.

"Many Bantus over there—near the stream of water. And very many of their women. Also a white woman is with them," one of the boys explained.

"Do you think?" began Dalrymple excitedly.

"It would be right on their trail—if they slipped out of the harbor and went up the coast, then into this stream, which is probably nothing but a shallow brook," McNeil ventured.

"Now, suppose we reconnoiter first and see if it's really Miss Carrington. Then we can figure better on how we're going to separate her from her escort, don't you think?" Stuart spoke rapidly and took out a revolver which he loaded for action.

He and Dalrymple, with the two boys, set out to explore the Bantu encampment, while McNeil started the motor and was to be in readiness for immediate flight if the others succeeded in bringing Miss Carrington back with them, or if an alarm was sounded and the Bantus attempted pursuit.

For, of course, if it was found that the odds were greatly against them in numbers they would stand no chance in a fight in the open.

What they had counted on all along was that the majority of the canoes had remained in hiding near the yacht ready to make a sortie, and that Miss Carrington had been removed to one of the native villages with a comparatively small escort.

Some of the Bantus carried firearms, but their muskets were of a primitive design; and there were not enough to go around even of those. Spears and other varieties of hardware formed the only weapons of defense which some of them boasted.

The two Swahili guides walked ahead with pantherlike caution, parting the branches noiselessly, crawling from beneath the underbrush, and slipping in and out between the tangled vines with perfect ease. Harding and Dalrymple struggled after them as best they could.

Suddenly the foremost Swahili turned and held up a black, warning hand. Through the parted branches the two young men looked and saw a group of Bantu warriors sitting in a circle on the ground. They were on the other side of the stream of water. In their midst were the women and children and the household goods of a number of Bantu families.

Harding and Dalrymple both thought they could make out Miss Carrington's slim figure and startling red hair. Surely she would not be asleep at such a time? But perhaps, worn out with fatigue and excitement, she had fallen exhausted.

For she appeared to lie at full length upon the ground.

Harding had a fleeting thought that she might be dead and that the warriors were watching over her body. But she moved restlessly once or twice, without rising from the ground, and that idea was dissipated. He was glad he had not mentioned it to Dalrymple.

Dalrymple must feel bad enough as it was.

"If we could only signal to her and let her know that we're here and working to rescue her," said Dalrymple.

How to wake her without alarming the camp—that was the problem!

The old warriors appeared to have fallen asleep sitting there. Harding looked for guns and saw only five or six antiquated pieces. One was a little air rifle, two were heavy, old shotguns at least five feet long, and one was an old flint-lock musket that some ambitious Yankee trader's ancestor must have carried in the Revolutionary War.

"After all, what do you say to our rushing the camp?" Dalrymple suggested. "There aren't so many of them with arms. We could pick up Doris and run."

"We'll warn her by tooting the automobile-horn, then run it full tilt right through the camp!" exclaimed Harding.

The summary daring of the plan appealed to him.

"How are you going to get it across the water? Besides, the road is certain on this side; on the other side of that brook there isn't anything," Dalrymple observed scornfully.

"Then the only thing to do is to wade across the brook, crawl through the grass, and whistle to Doris," said Harding decisively. "Unless you want to go?" he added.

But Dalrymple waived the honor. "I can't stand cold water in the morning—never could," he explained.

And so Stuart walked down-stream a way, then waded into the brook until the water was up to his armpits. The bottom of the stream was muddy, and he felt himself sink in a foot or so at every step. It was slow work, but he finally forded the brook and scrambled up the bank on the opposite side.

Then he propelled himself along through the long grass on his stomach until he was within a few yards of the Bantu warrior who nodded in fatuous ease. He could have reached out and tickled the old boy with a straw in another moment, he reflected. But instead he whistled very softly, "Bob-white."

Now no bob-whites exist in the heart of an African jungle, and besides, Doris Carrington was only pretending to be asleep. She had guessed all along that her friends would do everything in their power to rescue her, and had done everything in her power to delay the Bantus in their hasty retreat. So she pricked up her delicate, pink ears and cocked her head on one side. "Bob-white," sounded even more plainly again.

This time she replied very softly indeed.

The first bars of "The Star-Spangled Banner" was whistled in answer; and she whistled back, "By the dawn's early light."

Then Harding retreated a short distance, stood up and waved. Doris Carrington was sitting up now, and she smiled desperately and nodded her head at him. They were only a distance of ten yards apart. And he saw that she was tied with cords about her ankles and arms.

Harding blessed the luck which had made him put a jack-knife in his pocket, and, taking careful aim, threw it to her. He had hurled it through the air with the blade open, and it struck into the ground a few inches from where she sat.

A foot to the right or left would have sent it into the flesh of one of the Bantus who guarded her.

With her teeth she grasped the knife and sawed at the cords, lying face downward on the ground. Then, when she had hacked the heavy cord through, she quickly cut the cords that bound her ankles and stood up, stretching luxuriously. But only for a moment.

Miss Carrington stepped outside the charmed circle made for her by her captors and walked as noiselessly as possible toward Harding. He suffered torture waiting for her. Every minute he was afraid one of the old men would wake up. Finally he strode toward her, caught her by the wrist, and rushed with her through the forest.

Their one chance was in reaching the automobile before the Bantus were roused.

Harding ran through the forest with Doris Carrington, through the coconut palms, in and out among papaws and wild thorn-trees. Miss Carrington said afterward that she felt like the *White Queen* and *Alice*. When they reached the shore of the stream, a short distance below the temporary kraal which the black men had made, Harding lifted Miss Carrington to his shoulder and waded in. They were half-way across, Harding stepping carefully through the squdgy mud at the bottom of the creek, with a stick which he had cut in the thicket to steady him. His other arm balanced Miss Carrington's slim form on his left shoulder while she waved his revolver aloft delightedly.

Suddenly a dozen dusky forms appeared out of the woods on the shore they had just left.

Most of them carried spears, a few clutched at the antiquated muskets Stuart had seen lying about, and one

hoary savage waved an umbrella above his head. They made no sound, but in another second a spear splashed in the water near the escaping party. A few shots went wild.

Stuart's revolver was loaded in every chamber.

"Can you fire it?" he asked her.

The Bantus had plunged into the stream by this time. For answer she cocked the pistol and pulled at the trigger. But she did not have strength enough to move it all the way back. They were in more shallow water now, and Stuart swung her down from his shoulder, gave her the heavy stick to hold on by, keeping the other end himself.

Then he turned and fired into the pursuing ranks. One Bantu fell on his face into the water, another howled with pain and clutched at his shoulder. Several of them turned back, but one wiry negro took steady aim at Harding from where he stood in the muddy water. His shot went through the arm that was holding the stick.

Doris Carington gave a cry as she saw his arm drop limply at his side. With one arm disabled, Harding could not very well stand in water up to his hips and reload the revolver, so he told the girl to run, and quickly made his way onward, disregarding the Bantus, who were still firing at intervals and following them through the water.

Harding dragged Doris Carrington up the bank just as Dalrymple and McNeil appeared. Dalrymple had heard the firing and made his way back to the car to get help. They carried a whole arsenal with them, and one of the Swahili boys shivered in the background with an extra supply of loaded revolvers and ammunition of all kinds.

"Come on—never mind firing at them," Stuart called to the others. "Our cue is to get away. Can't tell how many more may be skulking round!"

They all made their way back to the car with the Bantus yelling and firing wildly after them. The Swahili ran with greater enthusiasm toward the car than he had shown before that day.

Harding found a shield of buffalo-hide dropped by one of the Bantus. This he picked up and carried along, thinking it might be useful. Dalrymple opened the door of the car as soon as he reached it and thrust Miss Carrington inside.

"Here you boy Googli, turn handle on devil wagon. Start at once!" Harding called out to the Swahili who had been keeping guard over the car.

"Yes, bibi," the boy replied respectfully and jumped out of the tonneau where he had been hiding under the cushions and started to crank the motor. The powerful engine purred, then awoke with a fierce snort.

Harding vaulted into the driver's seat, speeded up his motor, put her in gear, and they shot out on the trail. The Bantus gave them Godspeed with a shower of bullets that rattled harmlessly on the top leather curtains of the car. McNeil held the Bantu shield over Harding's shoulders, while he guided the car skilfully with one hand. And Harding, his eyes fixed grimly on the road ahead, his left arm aching and throbbing, and his teeth gritting in time to the whir of the motor, wondered in his soul how they had ever accomplished the rescue that had actually taken place.

"Thank God, that's over with," Fred Dalrymple exclaimed piously. "Do you realize what a sweet time we had getting you out of that?" he asked his cousin. Doris Carrington's big eyes instantly filled with tears.

"It was frightful—frightful," she sobbed. "I—I didn't—I shouldn't have gone in—that way."

"Never you mind all that now, Miss Carrington," McNeil said. "We're mighty glad to get you back. Only it gave us an awful fright, you know. And you're darned lucky nothing worse happened to you."

"Thank you, Mr. McNeil," said Miss Carrington humbly, trying to dry

her eyes on the short skirt of her bathing suit. Dalrymple had put his white Norfolk coat on her—her hair fell in a straggling, wet mass that she had vainly tried to braid into a semblance of order. Here was Doris Carrington without pose or artificiality. But even in her disheveled condition she had a kind of spirited prettiness. And Miss Carrington was *game!*

"You've all been perfectly splendid to me—and thanks," she said in a sincere, adorable way, her voice a note or so lower than usual. Then she caught sight of Stuart's drawn face.

"Stuart, come right back here; I'm going to drive the car," she announced, just as though the young man she was commanding had not lately rescued her from African savages. "I'm the only one here who understands this kind. We have one like it at home," she explained rapidly. "Don't you know you'll faint dead away if you keep on? Fred, one of the Bantus got him in the arm!"

And Miss Carrington started to climb over the back of the seat.

"Move over and give me your seat, Mr. McNeil, pull him over—look out for his arm." Doris Carrington grasped the wheel firmly.

"Don't you see he's going to—"

Harding remembered smiling at her in a sort of ghastly way. The pain in his arm was unbearable. This was not acting like an ordinary bullet wound. He tried to rouse himself but couldn't. McNeil's arm was around the back of his neck. He was lifting him, or something. That was all.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Letter of Thanks.

WHILE Dalrymple, Harding, and McNeil, with their Swahili boys, tracked the Bantus back to their encampment on the Unguya River, not far inland from the delta, the party left aboard the yacht had not been wasting time.

Miss Allen had appealed to Fitzmaurice soon after the departure of the tender and asked him to speak to the captain about having a search-light play continually over the water. "Then we will be warned in time, if anything else should turn up," she told him.

The Englishman agreed with her and seconded the motion. "You're quite—quite right, Miss Allen," he declared and hurried off to execute her order.

Mrs. Dalrymple was peacefully snoring in her berth, owing to the sedative administered by the firm, capable hand of Anise Allen. Captain Dorkins smoked a pipe in peace—all was serene on the deck of the Sylph. Miss Allen watched the yacht's powerful search-light dart here and there until the moon rose.

Finally, Fitzmaurice came on deck again. "Have you been watching?" he asked her. She nodded in reply.

"I saw the tender put in at the dock over there. I'm afraid they've had no success," she said quietly.

"Frightful, isn't it?" he asked. "That absurd girl. I suppose they'll get her eventually, but—"

"I think they'll take the machine and try to go round by land."

"Fancy what the roads are like here. Enough to jolt one's lungs out."

They made conversation for a few moments longer. Then both dropped into a strained silence. They were horribly anxious about the fate of Miss Carrington and the entire rescue party, but did not wish to give in to nerves.

Anise Allen was fighting for control, but one would never have guessed it from her bouyant, easy pose and inscrutable gray eyes that looked steadily across at the tanned face and unexpressive good looks of the Englishman.

"Where were you all that time—before you came back on deck?" she asked. It was the most personal question she had ever put to him—so far as he could remember.

"I've been down in the engine-room

talking to the disagreeable Scotch engineer," he answered conscientiously. "Engineers are always Scotch, and always disagreeable, I've discovered."

Miss Allen laughed lightly, but it sounded a trifle forced.

"Do come over and see the view, Miss Allen. The view on this side of the boat is really superb," Fitzmaurice burst out.

Miss Allen looked as though she thought this a rather extraordinary remark. But she only said obligingly, "I think so too, only I know it like my prayers."

Fitzmaurice gloomily replied that she also probably knew what he was going to say to her like her prayers.

"The fact is, Miss Allen," he continued boldly. "I'm going to propose. How do you like yours done?"

Anise Allen wanted to laugh, but she didn't.

"That's very thoughtful of you to ask me. I'm sure I consider it very straightforward," she said, her eyes twinkling.

"Now, if you'll only indicate—some sort of a preference—you see, I want to get it over with—I mean—begin," he stopped helplessly.

A little ripple of laughter greeted this effort.

"Go on," said Miss Allen demurely.

"Thanks. At any rate, I think you're ripping—ripping—just the way you whipped out those bandages, you know. Don't you think we might take the hurdle together, you know?"

Fitzmaurice tried miserably to meet her cool gray eyes. He wanted to—but he felt as though turned to ice with shyness. All his usual nonchalance had deserted him. Some Englishmen are built that way.

Then he heard her saying in a perfectly composed voice:

"Certainly, Lionel. I've always meant to marry an Englishman ever since I was six years old."

He went over and put his arm about her shapely shoulders.

"That's awfully decent of you," he mumbled.

She laughed amusedly. "Of course it is," she said and looked at him affectionately.

"I'm such an ass at all the preliminaries always," he remarked a few moments later.

"I know," she said gently. "What makes you?"

Her calmness and coolness always amazed and fascinated him. But before he could reply to this a disobliging boat whistle shattered the atmosphere. They turned and saw a small launch—not the Sylph's tender—headed directly for them. It was flying a blood-red flag.

Zuleika came up on deck at this moment. She caught sight of the small motor-boat that was coming alongside, and uttered a quick exclamation. "It is the sultan's boat—see—that is his private signal!"

"Now, what in thunder does that mean?" Fitzmaurice asked.

"I do hope we haven't got into any sort of trouble from firing on those blessed Bantus!" Miss Allen exclaimed.

"One never knows how they're going to take things in these black and tan countries," Fitzmaurice said, shaking his head gravely. "Of course, if the worst comes to the worst, I think I could make everything all right with the consul general—old Ponsonby's my mother's first cousin once removed," he added reassuringly.

"Look at that beautiful, shiny black boy in the red turban; he's standing there in the bow just like a figurehead!" Miss Allen cried out admiringly. The beautiful black boy was Bakaru.

A moment later he stood at ease on the deck of the Sylph.

"You Bakaru—speak—why you leave American Consulate all alone, come out here?" Zuleika asked him severely.

She had a way of making Ali and Bakaru keep their places, and it was

a known fact that she could get more work out of each one of them than Harding and McNeil together could get from both (which is a study in proportions).

"I bring Harding bibi salutations and appreciations from sultan," Bakaru answered gravely and with immense dignity.

"Oh, I say; is that a promise or a threat?" Fitzmaurice looked at Miss Allen inquiringly.

"Harding bibi is not here," Zuleika told the Swahili boy. "He make journey after Bantus."

Bakaru looked troubled.

"How did he happen to see the sultan?" Miss Allen asked.

"I am afraid and go to palace—when Bantus arrive," Bakaru confessed without a trace of embarrassment. "I say how Harding bibi and McNeil bibi go out to white boat for smash up Bantu intentions to steal and kill. Some one report my sayings to sultan who send for me. I go. Then sultan see how Bantus make quick depart. He send me in boat to give letter of thank."

Bakaru produced a large square packet with an official-looking seal.

Zuleika took it, gazing at it lovingly for an instant.

"Very good, Bakaru," she told him. "Now you are honorably excused."

"Too bad he's not here. I suppose it's just an official good-conduct mark—honorable mention," Fitzmaurice languidly remarked.

"Also small pink letter—not from sultan—come by boy in English uniform clothes," Bakaru continued in an injured tone.

Zuleika took this with a mystified air.

"By Jove, it's a cablegram! Must be from home," Fitzmaurice asserted.

"Well, we can't do anything about either. I think we'd better wait, don't you?" He appealed to Miss Allen.

She agreed with him. If there *should* be anything tragic or disagreeable—or otherwise important in the cable message, nothing could be gained by opening it.

"But he may be gone for days in that jungle, or—anything could happen!" Miss Allen exclaimed in sudden consternation. Zuleika went very white and Fitzmaurice glanced warningly at his fiancée. Miss Allen looked at Zuleika in quick sympathy.

"Come over here, dear, and sit down," she said. "The steward will get you something to drink. It's getting late and we're all a little overtired with all the excitement. I'm sure Stuart Harding will soon be back to claim his cablegram and the other message."

Zuleika gratefully sank into a roomy, cushioned wicker chair. Fitzmaurice inquired solicitously about the arm. Miss Allen was kindness itself—two big, bright tears stood in Zuleika's eyes.

Bakaru made known his continued presence by a respectful cough.

"What's that nigger boy doing—standing there like a bally monument?" Fitzmaurice asked.

"Bakaru, you may go now," Zuleika told him gently. "Tell sultan Harding bibi will call on him immediately at returning. Return then to the consulate at once—keeping all flies out if possible."

Fitzmaurice bestowed a small coin on him that produced a grin which bisected by a sudden flash of white teeth the ebony disk of his face. Then the boy darted away like a lizard and slid down the ladderway to the deck of the launch.

"Hi! Wait a minute, boy," Fitzmaurice called after him. "Tell his highness, the sultan, Mr. Harding's friends will do anything else for him, that's possible, you know. If he gets into any more trouble from the Bantus."

"That was diplomatic," Miss Allen commented. "Now we have *carte blanche* as it is—with his letter of thanks."

"Of course, it's up to our govern-

ment, really; but with the regiment away—hello!—what's that over there—do you see?"

The little launch flying the sultan's colors had left the channel by this time and had headed for the sultan's private quay. Miss Allen followed it with her eyes and soon caught sight of the objects of Fitzmaurice's solicitude.

A covey of canoes had suddenly darted out from the adjacent shore and was making for the luckless motor-boat. They were between the motor-boat and the dock for which she was headed, so it was not a question of speed.

"Now, how did they get over there?" Fitzmaurice inquired. "By jove, those Bantus are the very devil!"

"And we've had the search-light going all evening," Miss Allen exclaimed indignantly. "We ought to fire on them now," she added.

"Might blow up the palace if we did that. Besides, Dorkins wouldn't have it," Fitzmaurice answered her.

"Bother Dorkins," said Miss Allen, "We've got to do *something,* you know, after the sultan being so decent." And she started off to find the captain.

"I'll have them turn the search-light on the canoes," Fitzmaurice called after her.

Miss Allen again proved her resourcefulness that same night by succeeding in getting Captain Dorkins to say that *one* of the guns might be fired in order to cut off the Bantus and save the motor-boat from the perils of poisoned arrows.

A picked crew, consisting of the Swede, the Irish boy and Snyder, who used to make pies on the Minnewasco, was selected to man the forward gun. The search-light played cruelly on the canoe fleet, and the motor-boat was seen to have gone out of her course and was managing to hold off the canoes.

"If her injins ever give way or they run out of gas, oh my, wouldn't that be jam to them savage hordes?" the first gunner was heard to remark to the second gunner.

"Ay tank so, too," grinned the Swede And the gunner's mate, as he poured oil into the mechanism of the gun, declared that he wouldn't be aboard that "la'nch, no, not if you was to gimme twenty bucks out the cash register."

"Never mind that now—just lob a few over into the canoes—that'll send them back where they belong," Fitzmaurice directed them.

The little six-inch barked out a moment later and scattered shells among the huddled canoes. But the canoes put into the very quay that the motor-boat was aiming for, instead of running to cover on their own side of the harbor over by the delta.

"Now they'll land and perhaps attack the palace," Miss Allen said in evident alarm. The motor-boat had stopped her engine and was drifting about in mid-channel.

"How close in shore do you think we can get?" Fitzmaurice asked the captain.

"I believe it's deep water in there at the sultan's private quay, but I'd rather not risk going in — the British regiment might appear any moment. Then our interfering this way might be taken exception to." Captain Dorkins replied cautiously.

"Perhaps you're right, captain," the Englishman replied doubtfully.

They stood a moment irresolutely, watching the broad white path that the search-light made on the dark water. For, by this time, clouds had shut down on the sky and the moon, lately risen, was obscured.

Suddenly Miss Allen and Zuleika gasped in astonishment and the men swore softly. A rocket followed by two other rockets, at short intervals; went up from the palace. Three lurid streaks of fire across the black sultry sky, and then darkness again.

"What *can* it mean?" Miss Allen asked.

"Do you suppose they've reached

the palace?" Fitzmaurice looked at the captain.

"It may be a sort of signal to the motor-boat," Captain Dorkins replied impassively.

Again the rockets flared against the sky.

"See the little boat of the sultan—it goes in for the shore," Zuleika cried excitedly.

"Captain, can't we just run in a little nearer and see the fun?" Fitzmaurice wanted to know.

"That's all very well, you know, but—" The captain began disapprovingly.

"Go on, captain; be a sport," said Miss Allen with a laugh.

"The beggars are probably mixing it up beautifully by this time," Fitzmaurice added mournfully. Fervently they all wished that the owner were aboard. Zuleika smiled archly at the captain.

"Don't you see he is just dying to go in and lick all the stuffings from those Bantus!" She gazed admiringly at Captain Dorkins.

"You're right, miss," the captain replied to this adroit flattery. "If you don't think Mr. Dalrymple would mind," he continued weakly.

"No, indeed. Dal wouldn't care—not for an instant," Fitzmaurice readily answered him.

And so it chanced that the Sylph raised her anchor and started in on her adventurous voyage to the sultan's quay—a distance of half a mile away.

It all happened so quickly that afterward no one gave a very clear, coherent account of it. But, as the Sylph came close to the palace quay, the Bantus were hurriedly launching canoes from the dock almost right under the bows of the big yacht.

The crew of the sultan's motor-boat started firing at them from the terrace that overlooked the quay. Zuleika recognized Bakaru brandishing a huge express rifle that he had probably brought from the American consulate with him. It looked very like the one that Harding had got to shoot big game on the continent with—unless the palace guard had supplied him with an extra one.

Bullets were whistling over the deck in all directions. Some of the men from the motor-boat had very little idea of shooting and were aiming entirely too high.

"Go inside—take that girl with you," Fitzmaurice shouted at Miss Allen. She grasped Zuleika by the arm that was free and rushed with her into the saloon.

"Fine hornet's nest to get into!" Dorkins exclaimed angrily. "We'll put out of this double quick."

But before he could give the order to reverse the engines, flames shot up from the palace wall.

"The beggars have set fire to it! Can't we do something?" Fitzmaurice implored the captain.

"We've got a hose in case of fire, but I don't know whether it'll reach or not." Dorkins said.

"Try it!" the Englishman snapped out.

A part of the crew was detailed to get up the hose and start the pumps, and the gun crew, as they designated themselves, were told to fire a few shots at the departing Bantus to allay trouble from the harbor side.

Soon a three-inch stream of water was flickering over the wall into the abode of felicity. Clouds of steam now rose up, together with the shrieks of the startled inmates. The fire must have been barely started when the Bantu vandals had been scared off by the approach of the fireship, as the crew had begun to call it. For soon the flames died down and the columns of smoke and burning embers that had been pouring up from the walls and floating out over the deck of the Sylph cleared away.

Fitzmaurice, who had been racing around like an Indian gone mad—a monocle still glued firmly into his left eye—directing the men at the hose, egging on the gunners and throwing an

occasional cheering remark to the captain, now flung himself into the deck chair and wiped the smoke and sweat out of his eyes.

"Guilty of distinguished conduct in the first degree! Whew!" he exclaimed, and sat fanning himself and smiling at the captain.

Miss Allen came out on deck with her arm twined about Zuleika's waist. "Lionel," she said sweetly, "you'll be a candidate for a Carnegie medal yet, and get your family into the papers. Now go and take a hot tub."

She yawned delicately, said goodnight, then steered Zuleika to her stateroom and turned in for the night.

Fitzmaurice stared after the two young women. "Gad!" he said. Then he took Miss Allen's advice quite gratefully.

CHAPTER XV.

The Sultan's Concession.

HARDING lay in a berth on board the Sylph and looked at the ceiling with eyes that were unnaturally bright.

He discoursed with himself on various weighty and frivolous matters, he even sang snatches of "Benny Havens" and "Honey Lou," a song that had come out the spring before and had been played by the band at all the spring hops. He went through the entire set of signals used in the game with Yale, and then recited the part of *Captain Kidder* (with cues) from a play called "Brass Buttons" that he had played in when last home on leave —for the benefit of the library.

His temperature was at one hundred and four.

A clever English surgeon had removed the bullet from his forearm and the shattered member was then placed in splints, for the arm was broken in two places. The bullet, it had been thought, was a poisoned one, and Harding had been treated for this as well, but a fever had set in, and for the next few days his condition was critical.

Zuleika had asked to be allowed to take the case, and the English surgeon had said gruffly, "Yes, if you'll do as you're told!"

Trained nurses were not plentiful in Zanzibar. Zuleika had nodded her head violently in acquiescence. She did not dare speak to this doctor person who treated Captain Dorkins and Dalrymple alike as though they were flies. She would have done much more to be near Harding.

Fancy being permitted to do absolutely everything for the proud, firm, cool, self-sufficient creature! Fancy being permitted to sit in the room and ward all inquiring friends away—absolute mistress of the situation!

Zuleika reveled in the cunning little clock—everything must be done according to that little clock, for mysterious reasons — and then the small thermometer and the boxes of small white pills. Zuleika never doubted, never despaired of Harding's speedy recovery, was always self-possessed and cheerful.

When the doctor snapped at her she answered quietly. When Harding called to her in a seemingly rational voice and as she bent over him told her confidentially, "Do you know that I'm a poached egg and this toast is damn hot. I'm going to get up and leave it," Zuleika fed him chopped ice in a spoon and turned the pillow.

Everybody was sorry to hear of Harding's illness.

Dalrymple had to publish daily bulletins to ward off inquiring natives, and Bakaru did nothing but swagger around and talk about his master. The sultan sent flowers from the palace gardens, and the English consul-general, who had played billiards with Harding at the Sports Club, sent him a magnum of champagne.

"That's more than he ever did for me," Fitzmaurice complained. "And he's my mother's first cousin, once removed."

"You've told us that before, and besides, you haven't a temperature," his fiancée told him. All the men were somewhat jealous of Harding's temperature, they felt he had really done nothing special to deserve it and it got him so much attention and made him so interesting.

"I wish to Heaven I could work up a temperature and be thoroughly delirious for once!" Dalrymple ejaculated. "I could then do and say exactly what I pleased and not be held responsible. If a healthy man should air his true opinions or once do things the way he'd like to, they'd clap him into a strait-jacket. Lucky Harding!"

At which speech his cousin looked at him with cold disapproval and said it was fortunate Aunt Julie wasn't there. "You know you rave enough as it is," she added.

Really, Doris Carrington's disposition was often very horrid, in private at least.

"Do you know I've seldom been just as absolutely crazy as I could be—and some day I shall regret it," Dalrymple said, then he sighed. That look of thirsting for excitement had flared up in his hazel gray eyes and died again.

Then, one day, after talking incessantly about Rhine maidens who looked like green asparagus stalks and were "ripping lookers but wooden," and after telling Zuleika that he must "make good and grab the concession somehow," and then, when she agreed with this, laughing sardonically and saying it was "postponed indefinitely!" Harding fell into a deep sleep of pure exhaustion.

Zuleika watched his breathing, and then stopped fanning him at a critical moment.

When he awoke, small beads of perspiration stood on his forehead and his eyes were calm and clear when he looked at Zuleika. She gave a little gasp of joy—the first time she had been known to show any emotion since they had brought Harding on the yacht—and ran and thrust the tiny thermometer into his mouth.

Harding stared at it—then he burst out into feeble chuckles. "Zuleika a red-cross nurse!" he chortled.

Zuleika grasped the precious thermometer that he had cast aside.

"My God, dear chap, you are without temperature!" she announced, then the tears rushed into her eyes and streamed down her cheeks.

"Don't," said Harding huskily. Zuleika smiled at him with an April face.

"I shall not any more," she whispered.

"By Jove, you look stunning in those togs," he said admiringly, a moment later.

The English surgeon had required Zuleika to wear something as nearly approaching a uniform as possible. He said that he couldn't endure these heathenish trousers—it wasn't decent in a nurse. "Get her a neat, print frock," he ordered.

So Miss Allen and her maid together constructed a frock for Zuleika on approved lines. It was such a success that they went on with their dressmaking and Zuleika was soon the proud possessor of a wardrobe of two blue-and-white lawn frocks and a white crossbar.

Zuleika's small face glowed, but she composed her features demurely. "Now you must have some jelly and then go to sleep," she told him firmly. Being ordered about by Zuleika was a new sensation for Harding. He stared rebelliously. Then he smiled craftily. "I will on one condition," he said.

"What is that?" Zuleika asked unguardedly, her eyes round and serious.

"Come here," said Harding commandingly. She went.

"Do you still love me?" he asked her.

Zuleika knelt on the floor of the cabin and bent above the berth on which Harding lay. Evidently her answer satisfied him.

"You darling!" he said. Then, after another pause. "Have I been horribly ill—really? I had a feeling you were here. I knew it, subcounsciously, I guess."

"Even when you were a poached egg?" Zuleika inquired with a little dimple showing in the corner of her mouth.

"Oh, my soul! was I that, too?" Harding groaned. "Zuleika, why do you humiliate me so?"

Zuleika expressed her contrition, then sprang up guiltily.

"How have I been acting for a train nurse!" she cried. "Bad girl that I am, and you a bad boy, too. I must quickly get jelly from the chef and you will eat it—it is chicken jelly, beloved of my soul—then you must sleep."

She went noiselessly from the room and Harding closed his eyes. When he opened them a moment later it was to smile dreamily at the companionable ceiling.

Two days later Harding was on deck propped up with pillows in a deck chair. They brought him his mail that had accumulated since his illness. It included the large, flat package decorated with the seal of the sultans of Zanzibar. Harding took it and looked at it curiously before opening it.

"Do open it up, Stuart; and if there's any graft, let us in on it," said McNeil generously.

"Wait a minute!" Harding removed two gaudy-looking objects done up in tissue paper. "Many happy returns of the day! Lord! Look at this junk! What's it for?"

Every one gaped in astonishment. "Great guns! The order of Zanzibar and the order of Salme—the seven-pointed star *and* the five-pointed star," McNeil explained.

"They are lovely, is it not that you are fortunate, dear chap?" Zuleika started to pin the insignia on Harding's breast pocket.

"Oh, Stuart, you look so distinguished—and with your arm in a sling, too!" said Miss Carrington graciously and with a slight note of regret in her voice.

"You look like a Christmas tree!" exclaimed McNeil scornfully.

"Now read what goes with it," said Mrs. Dalrymple impatiently.

Harding glanced rapidly through the contents of the official communication indited by his highness's British secretary.

"Boys and ladies—listen to this—'Ali bin Hamoud bin Mahomed bin Seid greets me first off—in the name of the Prophet and all others in authority—heartiest thanks extended—according to this I'm the savior of life and property in Zanzibar! Nothing for it but to let the insurance companies go out of business."

"Stuart, I don't believe you take it at all seriously, one would think it was all a joke," Mrs. Dalrymple reproved.

"Certainly, it's too serious to be taken seriously for a minute," Fitzmaurice remarked.

Miss Allen looked at him reproachfully. "And you promised you wouldn't make another epigram today," she said.

"I know—I know," he stammered, "But that was before luncheon. One isn't responsible for what one says or does on an empty stomach."

Here an exclamation broke from Harding.

"Look at this—it's the concession!" He waved it above his head and beamed incredulously. "*Wh-at* do you think of that?" he inquired dumfoundedly.

The men crowded about to look at the impressive document and to slap Harding on the back until Zuleika protested at the treatment her patient was receiving.

Mrs. Dalrymple and the two girls made graceful, overcomplimentary speeches, until Harding blushed uncomfortably and smiled happily.

"It is a beautiful concession, dear chap, is it not?" Zuleika held it up at

a rakish angle and admired it as though it had been a new spring hat.

The rest of the pile of letters were doubtless of a more personal nature and Dalrymple and his guests strolled to other parts of the deck while Harding rapidly slit the envelopes, chortled over letters scrawled hastily by former classmates and grimaced at the bills.

But when he had galloped through a recklessly written and perfumed note from Miss Vandenheuven, informing him that the young lady was about to go to Egypt and would prevail upon her mother to bring her down to Zanzibar if Stuart was still horribly lonesome and would like to see her, Harding sighed with sheer relief.

"Thank the Lord, that's over with. I didn't answer and now she'll think I'm a cad and hate me forever!" he exclaimed.

And he made a mental note to write her that he had been ill—"which she won't believe. I never believe it when a healthy brute of a girl wires me she's ill and can't come to a hop or something," he commented to himself. "Then I shall tell her I'm up to my ears in work trying to catch up and that the climate is beastly.

"She'll read between the lines that I'm having the time of my life taking some other dame around—and she'll smile promptly and effectively at some other fellow. Girls are so fickle, anyway. Ugh! I'm sick of them—except Zuleika. Zuleika, are you fickle?" he asked her aloud.

Zuleika, unaware of the misanthropic thoughts Harding had been indulging in, blandly wished to know what to be fickle meant? When she heard Harding's labored explanation that it meant changing one's mind—liking first one person and then another—Zuleika dismissed the question as frivolous and unworthy her consideration.

"I? How can I tell? I have only started liking—people—very short time ago," she said simply. Then she smiled and looked at him with inscrutable eyes. "But you—some time you answer that question yourself," she said.

"Zuleika—you little wretch!" said Harding sternly. "Come here and do pennance for that *sassy* remark."

"Harding—did you get the—cablegram? You know it came the night you rescued Doris." Dalrymple came up with a serious face in which suppressed excitement struggled. "I opened it when I got in—you were raving by that time. I thought it might be from home—and by Jove I'm awfully sorry, but I never thought of it until now—it's from the secretary of your company, I fancy. It didn't seem to be especially important—at least not when you were ill. But I cabled back that you were ill from a bullet wound and would proceed as soon as you humanly could. I take it you were in wrong about something—"

"What's it all about?" Harding asked with a mystified air. He took the cablegram from Dalrymple and read it at a glance.

"Good Heavens! This isn't the company—*man,* it's the government. Read it! Cockrane's the Secretary of War— Oh, by Jinks! Do you see what it means?"

Harding had gone perfectly white.

Dalrymple took it and read it carefully. "Of course—congratulations, Stuart! I say, that's great! 'Reinstated former standing.' Why, it's a pardon from the President. Come here, people, what do you think's the latest?"

He raced off to tell the news to the others that Stuart Harding had been reinstated at the academy in his former class. "And he's to proceed at once," he added importantly.

The rest of the yachting party came up quickly to Harding, who again received their congratulations in his steamer chair. He did not notice that Zuleika stood strangely aloof with a still expression on her small face.

"Great!" and "Corking!" and "Say, you're in luck to-day, old man!"

Harding heard several times over—but Zuleika said nothing. "And to think—this Cockrane's the Secretary of War!" Dalrymple was saying in mild astonishment.

"Much you know about your country, Dal." Fitzmaurice laughed. "I know—this cruising around in tropic waters!" There was a note of regret in Fred Dalrymple's voice although he spoke lightly.

"Stuart, boy—you're not really going—are you?" McNeil asked Harding a few moments later.

Harding looked up in surprise. "Why, of course," he said.

Apparently it had not once occurred to him to do anything else. McNeil gazed off across the blue water.

"Oh, all right," he said. "Only—I'm going to—it's going to be damned lonesome at the American Consulate." McNeil smiled—a smile that was somewhat awry—and Harding noticed for the first time that his eyes looked tired.

"Mac!" he exclaimed suddenly and grasped his friend's hand. McNeil grinned, then looked ferocious. "It's my fault," he said. "I started the sob stuff," he growled out.

Later that afternoon Harding expressed his intention of leaving by the boat next day for the mainland. "I can get a boat at Mombasa that will take me to some Mediterranean port, then catch an H. A. P. A. G. for New York," he explained.

The others looked their consternation.

"Nonsense! You're not fit—not for three days yet—is he, Zuleika?" Dalrymple asked, deferring to the professional knowledge Zuleika was supposed to possess.

"It would be more wise for you to wait two—three days," said Zuleika quietly and in a lifeless voice.

"Certainly. I'll go and send a cablegram saying you're on your way," promised Dalrymple mendaciously. And he started to carry out his plan.

Harding looked up and saw that Zuleika was weeping unostentatiously over the side of the boat. He spoke to her, but she cast her eyes down and would not meet his. "Good-by, dear chap," she said faintly. "When you go back to your beautiful, great country—you take my love with you—all—all."

He barely heard the last words. But he understood, *now* he understood Zuleika's unresponsiveness when the others were congratulating him on the end of his exile.

"Zuleika—but you're coming with me—aren't you, dear?" he asked in quick alarm.

A sudden feeling of cold inertia descended on him. He was still weak from the fever. He wasn't aware of it, but he stretched his arms out to her—his breath seemed to have caught in his throat. He could not speak.

Zuleika came to him in a little rush. "Dear chap—it is not possible," she said miserably.

"Why not, Zuleika?" he asked.

"You will not like what I do," she sobbed. "The women there—they wear tight skirts—I could not walk so!" She sobbed unrestrainedly. "They—have accomplishments!"

Zuleika gazed at Harding pathetically through a perfect waterfall of tears. At least Harding said it resembled one. He told her that if they had one of like proportions in his country they'd call it "The Bridal Veil" and people would come miles to see it.

Then he said that of course he'd like whatever she did—and she could wear whatever she chose—and—it was only plain women who needed accomplishments! Harding said a great deal more than this to Zuleika. And finally she was smiling radiantly and saying, "I will go, dear chap, to the ends of the earth with you!"

Harding thinks that he will never forget *how* she said it, and how she looked when she said it. McNeil found them like that a little bit later.

"What the—" he began.

"That's all right, Mac," said Hard-

ing cheerfully. "Tell the others to come and drink our health in the consul-general's champagne. Zuleika and I are engaged."

"I always *did* like Zuleika," said McNeil after he had congratulated Harding.

That night the Sylph sailed out of Zanzibar harbor, New York her next port. Harding and Zuleika were on board. Dalrymple had insisted on that.

"It's the only thing for you to do," he had told Harding. "Now that Zuleika has become your fiancée instead of your ward. Does away with all complications—chaperons, you know, and all that."

Harding had not thought of this before, but he at once succumbed to the logic of it. He said good-by to McNeil and the shack of corrugated zinc. It was rather a wrench, leaving McNeil.

"Never mind me," said McNeil loyally. "If it's the sort of life you pine for, go to it. I'm glad you're taking the girl with you, too. I congratulate you for not standing on one foot trying to calculate how much worth of green trading stamps goes with a thing you want—just as though life were a five and ten cent store."

"Thanks. And you've got to be on hand for the wedding in June. You're best man, Mac," Harding told him.

"When the bridal-wreath is in bloom," McNeil promised with a mournful grin. They looked steadily at each other for a minute, then Harding turned and walked swiftly aboard the Sylph.

That night on deck Miss Carrington wore a circlet of diamonds and platinum instead of the army crest she had discarded some time ago. It was too conspicuous to pass unnoticed.

"Who's the lucky devil?" her cousin asked her rather casually. He was used to Doris's engagements.

"Isn't the design charming?" Miss Carrington smiled down at the ring as the facets caught the bright moonlight.

"Kemp Hotchkiss had it made for me—one of those little places in the Rue de la Paix. I cabled him my acceptance at once," she said.

"I hope it *takes* this time," was Dalrymple's laconic remark. "Because it would be unfortunate if you should decide to postpone it indefinitely."

"My dear Freddy—please don't trouble yourself too much on my account," Miss Carrington said languidly and walked away.

And Harding smiled and looked up at the southern cross, wondering at life and the exigencies of fate.

"Of what are you thinking, dear chap?" Zuleika asked him.

"*You, of course!*" he said.

(The end.)

DESIRES

BY AMANDA BENJAMIN HALL

WHEN I was a child (and it puzzles me still)
I greatly would wonder that I,
Who climbed to the top of the loftiest hill,
Could never lay hands on the sky!

But since—I've discovered, from reaching around,
That things are not near as they seem,
And Heaven is not to be touched, I have found,
Except from the heights of a dream.

The Heart of the Mutiny

by Maryland Allen

THE shipping firm of Gradon & Taintor, with offices in the Strand and warehouses on the West India Dock Road, awaited the arrival of the bark Cocohead — Captain Lage Dahlgren — with the anxiety of men who have a responsible duty to perform. It was their intention to send fifteen thousand pounds to the firm's representative in Sydney as payment of a certain indemnification.

Because of the wording of the bond the payment must be made in gold, and for certain private reasons they decided to send the whole fifteen thousand pounds in specie by the hand of Captain Dahlgren—a man without nerves and stone deaf to all but action —upon the stanchest and speediest of their clipper fleet, the bark Cocohead.

This momentous decision was a secret one. Only Snaith, the bookkeeper, was taken into confidence. And at first Taintor did not subscribe to this. But Gradon urged the necessity of expert assistance and the fact that Snaith had been with them for a long time.

"Besides," said stout Herbert Gradon, "look at the fellow; he's too thin to be tempted." And he laughed in his round, jolly way.

Taintor looked through the open office door at Snaith, lean, stooped, and haggard, in the shabby, wrought-iron bookkeeper's cage, and his glance was dubious.

"I should say it depended somewhat upon his private pursuits. To me lean men are always dangerous." Taintor himself was thin, gloomy, and conservative. "Who's that man talking to him?" he added.

"Seems to be a friend," replied his partner easily. "Saw them together in the park, Sunday."

"Looks a seaman by his build and carriage," remarked Taintor, still gloomily observing Snaith in the little cage and the man lounging against the window outside. "He's strong, that's plain enough, and he's an ugly customer in spite of that grinning face of his, or I'm no judge of men."

Herbert Gradon laughed again. "You were born with a liver, and no mistake. Plenty of seamen know Snaith and come here to see him, too. The fellow does look strong; he also appears the personification of good nature. Shall we have Snaith in here after luncheon?"

Taintor nodded. "It's a risk," he said pessimistically. "But the whole thing's a risk so far as that goes."

Snaith received the news so quietly and went to work so immediately that Taintor's partly smothered fears flamed out once more.

"That fellow's been spying around," cried he. "He knows all about our

plans. We will never see this fifteen thousand pounds again."

The first part of his statement was entirely correct. And if the partners had known it was the fever of gambling that kept their bookkeeper so lean and haggard they would, perhaps, not have confided in him at all. Also the last part of Taintor's speech came so perilously near to fulfilment that the firm never failed in a fervent expression of thanks for their escape whenever the subject was broached.

But Snaith was in the secret and the matter well forward when the Cocohead came to port with Mr. Hammond, the mate, down with typhoid fever from drinking bad water where he might have had good beer. This was a facer for the firm. Mr. Hammond was tough, close-mouthed, and reliable. But it was too late for regrets. The main thing was to find a mate and get the Cocohead to sea.

Snaith smoothed aside the first difficulty with a knock at Gradon's office door. He entered when bidden and at his shoulder there appeared the same upstanding young man who had leaned against the grating of the bookkeeper's cage several days before.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Snaith humbly, "but this is Mr. Crone. He was mate on the Rebecca—Loudon & Dodd—and she was sold for the South Sea trade. His papers appear to me to be all in order. Mr. Loudon might—"

Mr. Loudon did. At least he said: "Crone's a devilish clever, active seaman and knows how to handle men." He did not add what he thought: that Crone's good looks were too appealing, that too many wives applied tearfully for his pay, that his activity was nothing short of pernicious, and Loudon & Dodd were devilish glad the Rebecca was sold and they were peaceably rid of the fellow. Gradon merely asked if the man knew his business, and Loudon answered truthfully enough on that point. He certainly did.

By this time Captain Dahlgren had settled Mr. Hammond in a room at St. Luke's, secured a sensible nurse not too good-looking, and visited his eighteen-year-old daughter at the Convent of the Blessed Heart. He now appeared before his owners with brief explanations for his tardiness. He met the announcement that they had found him a mate with the news that he wished to take with him his little Jeanne-Marie.

The partners exchanged glances. Taintor arose, looked out the door and locked it. Then Gradon gravely explained that the Cocohead's real cargo was not steel rails and nails at all, but fifteen thousand pounds in gold. Captain Dahlgren heard him through quite calmly. He had been brought up with all the different kinds of men that go to sea, and action spoke the only language he could understand.

"Yes," said he. "I see nothing in this to prevent my taking my daughter. Thank you, sirs, for your kindness."

And three nights later the Cocohead dropped down the widening reaches of the river to the sea. Fair-haired, convent-bred Jeanne-Marie was asleep in the little cabin off her father's, and Dick Crone stamped the deck and shouted to the men he was adept at handling.

None in the secret knew where Captain Dahlgren put away the fifteen thousand pounds. The partners specially stipulated for this. On the last bustling day Snaith was wild-eyed and Dick Crone sulky. But there was nothing in the haggard looks of an overworked bookkeeper and a mate coming sulky from a long time ashore to excite comment. Four of the crew did not return, and the mate shipped four strangers in their places. This also was a common occurrence.

Jeanne-Marie was seasick for several days, and Dick Crone remained sulky. He did not propose to go to Sydney, and he knew that a real knowledge of the hiding-place of the fifteen thousand pounds would bring the rest of the crew about him as a simulated one had brought on board the four

men from the boarding-house kept by Snaith's brother.

But the confounded seasick girl made him afraid to prowl about the captain's cabin. The door into the little stateroom where she lay was always open and commanded an unobstructed view of the whole place. So he waited, cursing his luck and taking out his ugly humor on the men, who in their turn began to grumble.

Jeanne-Marie remained invisible for a week. By that time Crone solved to his own satisfaction what he had come to look upon as a rather fishy situation.

The captain intended to keep his daughter in there for the trip. She was the guardian of the treasure, and not such a bad idea for a born fool like Dahlgren. He set his clever, wicked wits to outmatch the man whom he despised. Then the girl came on deck and the mate knew his quickest route to the hidden specie lay through her unawakened heart.

Dick Crone was skilful at love-making.

He had a winning way with him, as the bookkeeper at Loudon & Dodd's, still repelling the tearful appeals of his wedded wives, could amply testify. Captain Dahlgren, receiving no warning of this impending danger, neither was he any help to Jeanne-Marie. He only knew he had his little girl back with him and it brightened his eyes and lightened his heart to see her once more about the deck.

If the new mate walked and talked with her—Mr. Hammond had many a time ridden her upon his knee. Sweet, ignorant Jeanne-Marie knew only one love-story, that of her father and mother which had endured until her mother's death and since in her father's heart.

She dreamed just such another for herself, and Dick Crone was the most wonderful man in the world with eyes as blue as the sea upon which she was born.

Do you see how easy matters were made for Dick Crone? Do you see how he searched the captain's cabin through the soft, love-bright brown eyes of Jeanne-Marie? And when he discovered the dear fact of their love and begged that it should remain their secret, their very own, until the Cocohead reached Sydney, do you see why the girl consented?

Jeanne-Marie lived in a fierce, sweet dream that burned in her bones like hot fever, while Dick Crone drew no nearer to the hiding-place of the canvas bags, for the very simple reason that the captain's daughter knew nothing whatever of the shipment of the fifteen thousand pounds. So the mate could only report to his fellow-conspirators that he stood very well with Jeanne-Marie. But this was not enough for them.

The Cocohead drove into warmer waters and the men grumbled more and more. The affair was thoroughly discussed in the forecastle, most of the crew having been won over. Only two remained silent and non-committal—the cabin steward and the bo's'n.

Crone, having won all but the hiding-place of the gold, felt a strong confidence that he could count upon these two when the time came. This was one of his two mistakes. It was the first one and small, but it rather flawed the pattern of his brave design that the other rent to shreds.

The restless, uneasy atmosphere of the forecastle spread to the cabin. Captain Lage Dahlgren, who never reflected upon what enriched his daughter's bloom and deepened the brightness of her eyes, was soon aware of the tension among his men, and speculated deeply as to the cause. He felt sure some wind of the gold had blown that way. After a time of brooding he spoke.

"Some kind of humor forward I can't quite make out. Have you noticed it, Mr. Crone?"

"Can't say I have, sir," replied the mate in his smart, respectful style.

The captain passed out of the cabin,

and Crone, seated and impatient for his supper, looked up and met the frank wonder of the steward's gaze.

"I sy!" cried the man; his voice expressed admiration.

"Better get in line," said Crone good-naturedly. "Something's going to happen to-morrow." He began to eat the food the man placed before him.

The steward lost no time in going to his friend, the bo's'n, with the news.

"You keep yer mouth shut," returned the bo's'n. "They's no service in carryin' tales. Cap'n's runnin' this ship."

The steward did as he was bid. So while the forecastle knew that Dick Crone had agreed to get the captain on deck the next morning and "take care of him," Lage Dahlgren only knew something was toward among his crew, and his daughter was completely occupied with the fact that she was in love.

That morning Jeanne-Marie was early on deck. Her brown eyes were bright, her fair hair curled in loose rings about her broad, white forehead; she was dimpled and rosy with love.

Crone took a turn about the deck with her, whispering in her little ear and laughing at her valiant attempt to match her step with his. There was more in that attempt than met the eye, if he had but known. They came to a halt close by the companionway and the mate lifted his face to the bright morning with a little, appreciative sigh.

"Eh, sweetheart; what a day!" he cried. "Call the captain, call him up for a mouthful of this fresh air before breakfast."

Jeanne-Marie stood on tiptoe and framed her red mouth with her little brown hands. She did not very much want her father at that particular moment, but she loved Crone the more for his thoughtfulness.

"Father!" she shouted. "Father, come on deck and see what's here."

Now, at that moment the steward completed the arrangement of the breakfast table to his entire satisfaction. He had forgotten Dick Crone's warning. The captain's strong, unruffled calm inspired him with too much confidence. Still absorbed in the problem of making the table attractive to Jeanne-Marie, he started out on deck. Crone, seeing the head appear, expecting only the captain, fired instantly from his hip. The astonished steward, remembering too late, staggered back into the cabin and made a bloody wreck of the breakfast preparations.

"Don't you go, sir," he gasped. "It's mutiny—it's—" He rolled under the table and died.

Dahlgren was just behind, moving in obedience to his daughter's happy call. He stopped and stared woodenly at the ghastly, twitching figure. His face was pale, his eyes showed the impact of terrific shock. He raised his hand as if to deny the horrid fact the steward's sudden death seemed to assert, and another shot rang out on deck.

Lage Dahlgren moved then.

Whatever agony his daughter's defection might cause him, his duty to his owners was very clear. He jerked open the locker where the money lay, seized the two black automatics Taintor had pressed upon him with gloomy misgivings and darted out upon the deck.

It was the bo's'n who fired the second time. And the shot stampeded the crew. For it showed Crone had lied and there were men to fight on the other side. They turned and fled for the forecastle, thinking solely of their precious skins, each man expecting to be knifed by his fellow. And while Crone raged, cursing them roundly for the cowards that they were, they dived down the hatchway like rabbits in a burrow.

The captain fired as he rushed up the companionway.

The bullet clipped Crone's ear and set him cursing to a different tune. The blood poured down his face and

flew wide upon the white dress of Jeanne-Marie. The mate was a brave enough man with a crowd of bullies at his back. But the sudden, unexpected turn of affairs shrieked treachery and the example of the crew was irresistible.

The clip upon the ear sent him staggering. Even as he recovered he shot the bo's'n and fled for the forecastle. There he crouched, shook the blood from his eyes with his left hand, shot down the man at the wheel and dropped beneath the coaming.

Captain Dahlgren, hard at the mate's heels, fired one beat of a second too late. The lock of fair hair the bullet clipped from Crone's disappearing head blew back along the deck to the motionless feet of Jeanne-Marie. The captain threw down the heavy cover of the hatchway and battened it securely into place. And then, upon his hands and knees, he looked along the deck and panted.

He saw his daughter, who all this time had never moved nor made a sound. The fair lock clipped from Dick Crone's murderous head, was caught upon the toe of her little white shoe and waved there softly. And the captain rose and came near to her.

"You called me, Jeanne-Marie," said he.

The girl closed her eyes, opened them again with a pathetic, pained surprise, as if horrified to find the violent scene still before her. There arose a shout from the forecastle.

"Jeanne-Marie! Open quick, here, Jeanne-Marie!"

It was Dick Crone. He knew the three men who were not down there were dead, for he had shot them all. Remained only the captain—and Jeanne-Marie, his sure ally, was on the same side of the hatch.

"Lift up the hatch, Jeanne-Marie." He made no effort to keep the triumph out of his voice. He had been mistaken about the bo's'n and the steward; he was very sure of the obedience of the girl.

"Lift up the hatch, sweetheart," cried he.

Captain Dahlgren regarded his daughter profoundly, and Jeanne-Marie did not stir.

"Lift up the hatch," cried Crone. "Knock out that brass pin, Jeanne-Marie. Take both your little hands to it. How can we get married if we don't get to Sydney, and how can we get to Sydney if you don't let us out to work the ship?"

Still Jeanne-Marie did not answer, but the captain stood away, giving her, with a gesture, free access to the forecastle hatch.

"You must use your own judgment," said he. "I am not the man to put my daughter in irons. But you may be sure of one thing," he added in the same quiet way. "It's Gradon & Taintor's money he wants, not you, my girl; it's that fifteen thousand pounds down there in my cabin. He made it up with that damned bookkeeper; I can see it all plain enough now.

"I knew something of his record when he was on the Rebecca, but I thought I was a match for him. And I am," said Lage Dahlgren. "But I did not look for such treachery from you, Jeanne-Marie. I would have told you where the money was without this. You understand, don't you, that he made love to you because he thought you knew?"

Jeanne-Marie regarded him with eyes that seemed to have dimmed and receded beneath her forehead. And she was silent. Only the loose blouse of her dress blown back by the wind showed the violent beating of her betrayed heart.

But Captain Dahlgren turned away unmoved. "One thing more," said he. "You cannot be spared now. You entered this game of your own accord"—Jeanne-Marie flinched back a little like a loving dog beneath a blow, and the black circles about her eyes took on a darker shade—"you must side with me or with Crone," said Captain

Dahlgren. "I will not have it said that I fathered a coward." And Jeanne-Marie shrank back further.

Dahlgren heaved the bo's'n overboard with small ceremony, cleaned the place where he had fallen, and performed the same offices at the wheel. He did not glance once again at Jeanne-Marie nor remark the way Dick Crone battered at the hatch and shouted. He brought the body of the steward from the cabin and cleaned up the mess there.

"Have you made up your mind yet?" he said to Jeanne-Marie. And she did not answer.

"Will you steer until you do?"

She nodded as if the movement were a painful necessity.

Captain Dahlgren spread out a chart. "I do not intend to be underhanded with you," said he, "however ignorant I have been in the past." His daughter made no reply to this, and he did not seem to expect it.

"Do you see this?" He put his big, brown finger down in the midst of a waste of white. "This is where we are. Do you see that?" He touched a small black dot. "That is the island of Taravao, where we are going to get help—if I still need it when we get there," he added grimly and folded up the chart.

He set the ship upon the new course. "Hold her there," said he, "until—you have made up your mind. There will be no one or plenty to steer after that. I will do what I can with the rest."

He left the wheel in the hands of Jeanne-Marie and went away to hoist a signal of distress and do—what he could.

The wind blew, the waves sang in monotonous harmony, the sun wheeled across the sky. Captain Dahlgren went to and fro along the deck; Dick Crone, in the forecastle, battered against the closed hatch and shouted; and Jeanne-Marie, white-faced and wooden, held the Cocohead upon her course for Taravao.

At noon the captain went into the cabin and brought out some biscuits, pickles, and a tin of beef. Jeanne-Marie glanced at the food and away again to the compass.

Dahlgren took the wheel from her hands.

"Eat," said he. His voice came to her bleakly, a call from the distant stars. "I do not expect you to make a decision as quickly as a man, but you will need strength when you do. Not Crone nor I will go down without a struggle."

Jeanne-Marie ate, and drank a cup of wine.

When she had finished the captain did not release the wheel. The girl made an irresolute movement toward the forecastle hatch, where Dick Crone beat and shouted. She glanced at her father's immovable, silent face and sat down in a forlorn huddle upon the deck.

Night came as it does in the tropics like a cap clapped over the eyes of day.

Lage Dahlgren looked at his daughter. "You have not made up your mind yet," said he. "I can see that. Will you take another trick at the wheel until you do?"

And Jeanne-Marie arose and stood once more with her hands upon the spokes well worn by a rougher touch than hers.

The captain brought a mattress and some pillows from the cabin and threw them down close by. He walked away and leaned upon the rail.

And there was silence on the Cocohead but for the sharp, staccato striking of the ship's clock, the battering on the forecastle hatch, and the hoarse, intermittent shouts of Dick Crone.

At last the captain came to the wheel.

"Four hours is enough," said he. "There is to-morrow, you know," he added significantly.

The two looked at each other—the daughter who could not explain and

the father who lived in a world where action was the only true means of communication—and the agony that they endured stood out from their white faces like a material thing.

Silently Jeanne-Marie released the wheel; silently she lay down upon the mattress her father had brought beneath the Cocohead's queer assortment of sail.

Once she started up as if to speak, but exhaustion bore her inexorably down and sleep closed over her like fainting. Toward morning her father's hand awoke her. She saw the wheel was lashed steady and he held a heavy sack in his hands.

"Come," said he; "I need you to help your friends."

The girl arose and followed him to the forecastle hatch.

"Stand clear below there!" the captain called; his voice was controlled and steady. "We have some food for all hands, and if I see so much as a spot of white I will fire. I don't intend to starve you to submission and risk your working the ship to Sydney. Much too easy, that! I intend to fatten you for the gallows, which is what you deserve. Knock out that brass pin," he said to Jeanne-Marie.

The girl obeyed.

"Lift up the hatch."

She tried, and did not budge the trap an inch.

"Put your back into it," ordered the captain. "This sort of work requires strength. Didn't you think of that when you called me to come on deck?"

Jeanne-Marie raised the hatch.

"Lower the sack," said her father. The ugly automatic was steady in his hand; his eyes were fixed upon the tense, silent blackness of the open hatchway.

The sack went over the coaming, the harsh rope began to run swiftly between the girl's slim fingers.

"Steady; don't let the thing get away; there's stuff in there that will break. You'd better keep that light doused!" he cried sharply.

And the sack of food went slowly down into the yawning darkness of the forecastle.

"Jeanne-Marie," shouted Dick Crone, "by your love for me I command you to draw up this gun I tie here to the rope and shoot that man through the heart. Are you listening to me, Jeanne-Marie? It is my life or his. By the kisses I have shared with you, by the things you have whispered when I held you in my arms, draw up this gun and shoot."

The girl's fingers ceased to pay out the rope, twitched, and began to draw it up. She looked across the open hatchway at her father's set, steady eyes.

The rope slipped, fell with a soft thump upon the sack of food down in that hostile blackness, and Dick Crone cried out sharply. The heavy hatch crashed shut, the brass bolt shot into place, and Jeanne-Marie fell with her face against the deck.

Lage Dahlgren went back to the wheel. And presently, as if in dreadful obedience to things as they were, his daughter arose, returned to the mattress, and lay down. At sunrise the captain summoned her to the wheel and himself lay down and closed his eyes with a stern, unrelaxed composure that bore no resemblance to sleep.

Jeanne-Marie held the Cocohead true on the course for Taravao. Her hands clung to the spokes of the wheel, her slim body bent and swayed. The sunlight glinted on the two black automatics at her father's sides. Out across the smooth, tropic sea the white horses rose and ran with a dazzling brightness that dimmed her eyes. The clamor of her lover's voice, pleading with her by the love that was her life for his, rose from the closed hatchway of the forecastle and filled her ears.

"Your father is a hard man," cried Dick Crone, "and you have betrayed him. What will you do in the streets of Sydney when he has cast you off? And me, your lover, your promised husband, are you going to betray me,

too? Jeanne-Marie, I know that you are there. Open the hatch, Jeanne-Marie; take one of those damned guns of his when he ain't looking, and shoot —shoot—shoot!"

Jeanne-Marie's wan gaze went down to those guns that glittered so ominously beside the still, composed figure on the mattress, and met her father's cold, level gaze.

"It is time to eat again," said Captain Dahlgren.

The frozen misery in his daughter's face did not change, nor did the stony calm of his.

And that day passed, and another and another. The trade-winds favored the sorely beset bark. Dahlgren and his daughter faded into drawn, gray-faced specters; the crew were completely cowed or kept down by some promise of the mate's, for not one sound was heard from those very faint-hearted mutineers. The voice of Dick Crone endured.

The sudden tropic squalls that fell upon the Cocohead shook her, and sped away across the sea, drowned it for a moment, and only for a moment. He was imaginative, Dick Crone, and he knew the girl, with the devilish, insidious knowledge of a man who had won many women.

He was pleading for bare life, escape from a shameful death. Also, he was perhaps threatened by the men he had betrayed.

And as the days went by and the Cocohead drew nearer to Taravao the burning power of his prayers flamed unceasingly upon the frail doors of Jeanne-Marie's heart.

Then one morning, in the dark hour before the dawn the girl lashed the wheel and bent down beside her father, who lay sternly composed with his eyes closed. Softly she pushed aside the tarpaulin and lifted Taintor's prophetic gift, the two black automatics, in her hands.

Quietly she tiptoed to the forecastle hatch.

Her father watched her and she knew that it was so. She unhooked the brass lock and raised the hatch cover.

"Dick!" she cried.

The woman who has gone down to Gehenna for the sake of love knows what was in her voice.

And there arose above the coaming in the whitening light the face of the mate of the Cocohead. Not the dear, blithe lover of Jeanne-Marie's dreams, but the ugly, baffled, furious scoundrel that was Dick Crone.

"Give me that gun, you hell-cat!" he snarled. "You've been a hell of a long time makin' up your mind what to do."

Jeanne-Marie gave back before the monster, and the stir in the forecastle below him might have been the snakes in the nest from which he had arisen. Over by the wheel Captain Dahlgren watched in silence and the foolhardiness of his courage and his shame. But Jeanne-Marie did not know that. She realized only that the philter of her love was truly broken, its precious contents thrown away; and where she had thought to find it she had raised a raging devil that she herself must quell.

Steadily she lifted the automatic, held it an inch before the ugly, snarling mouth, looked deep into the glaring pin-point pupils of the eyes.

"Get down," said Jeanne-Marie.

She had won through to her father's world where words were superfluous. And Dick Crone knew. With a roaring gust of curses he sank beneath the coaming.

The heavy hatch banged down, Jeanne-Marie fastened the brass hasp, and stood up to face her father in the victorious rush of the tropic dawn.

"Jeanne-Marie," said Captain Lage Dahlgren, "do you know your own mind now?"

"Yes, sir," said his daughter. "I —it was an accident, my calling you out that morning, sir, and I have been a good deal of a fool."

"I know now it was an accident," replied the other Dahlgren.

He would have caught the baby in his arms and comforted her; she would have wept out her broken heart against the refuge of his loving breast. But the thing had gone too long; the strain upon them could not be so easily relaxed.

He merely touched her arm and pointed. Filmy and iridescent in the early light of day, seen dimly through a mist like the vanishing land of dreams, something bulked upon the horizon that was not cloud. Captain Dahlgren said: "We have come to Taravao."

Dick Crone was hanged, but none of the other men.

It seemed that he and his friend, the bookkeeper, had planned an even division of the fifteen thousand pounds. Snaith, anticipating both success and failure, had resigned and disappeared long before the news came to the offices of Gradon & Taintor on the Strand. And on her next voyage to Sydney Jeanne-Marie displayed to the many friends she had found there a gorgeous diamond locket, a grateful gift from the owners of the Cocohead. But it was her doting father who told them the whole story, not Jeanne-Marie.

She was betrothed to Mr. Owen, who kept the James B. Lockley trading store at Tikihau, and had lifted her up insensible from the deck of the Cocohead by the opening in the reef before Taravao.

She denied she had ever been brave; she was very sure she had never been in love before.

ALLIES!

BY MAZIE V. CARUTHERS

A LOVER and his chosen maid,
One evening, all in vain essayed
To find a corner dark.
The house was all too brightly lit,
Which did not suit the twain one bit—
They wished (you'll see) to spark!

But, being a resourceful man,
At last he hit upon this plan:
They sought the libr'ry, where,
Close by, a brand-new reading-light,
Which made one's book a joy at night,
Was placed a huge-winged chair.

To this the twain repaired. In haste
His arm went 'round the lady's waist
(She cuddled up within it!)—
Then, reaching forth a cautious hand,
He pressed th' electric button—and
'Twas dark! Oh, blissful minute!

When father's step was heard, why, then—
The button pressed—'twas light again!
(N.B.—He must be stupid
Between these lines who cannot read;
Electric lights are friends indeed,
And allies great for Cupid!)

Blackmailed

by Arthur Applin

Author of "The Chorus Girl," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

SIR JOHN VESSIE, a very rich and happily married English gentleman, befriends a beautiful actress, Myra Berrington, by offering her the use of his compartment on the Homburg train. She accepts and they talk and dine together *en route*. Paul Duhardt, an unscrupulous adventurer, sees them, recognizes them, and seizes the opportunity to blackmail Sir John. Threatening to tell her lover, Ralph Humphry, of the trip with Sir John as train companion, and of another quite innocent but somewhat compromising meeting at Sir John's hotel, Duhardt compels Myra to ask Sir John for five thousand pounds, which he, though equally innocent, agrees to pay for the sake of his family. By appointment he goes to Myra's flat, where he pays the money in large notes, forcing her to give him a receipt. He knows nothing of the man Duhardt's share in the transaction, believing Myra to be acting on her own initiative, and so goes home considering the incident closed. Myra, too, thinks that with the payment of half the amount to Duhardt, she will be free; but at that moment the man himself appears, takes all the money from her, and, hinting that their blackmailing operations have only just begun, leaves her frightened and dismayed.

CHAPTER X.

Missing.

AS soon as Paul Duhardt got outside Alma Mansions he hurried. He walked to the end of the road, glancing over his shoulder once or twice in case Myra followed him. He almost expected that she would.

He was relieved when he got safely round the corner. He had never intended sharing the proceeds with Miss Berrington, but he did not know he was going to have quite such a soft job. Vessie had unconsciously played into his hands.

Once out of sight of the mansions, Duhardt commenced to run. There was not a cab to be seen in the streets; he thought he remembered seeing a telephone in the drawing-room of Myra's flat. If she had her wits about her she might spoil his game, though it was impossible she could have any conception what it was.

Still accidents will happen — especially over the telephone. So far, every accident that had happened was in Duhardt's favor. At last he found a taxicab, and, hailing it, he told the driver to go to the offices of the Ingénue Theater.

"And hurry!"

Duhardt lay back in the cab, and, taking off his hat, mopped his face. He was hot. He had been on the run ever since eleven o'clock, first chasing Vessie to the bank and back, and now—

He put his feet up on the seat facing him, and, taking the bundle of notes from his pocket, he counted them, and examined each one. On the whole, it

was a good thing Vessie had not given Myra a check.

Moistening the tips of his fingers, he carefully reshaped the ends of his mustache, plastered his hair into place, and, with the aid of the little mirror facing him, arranged his tie and polished up the diamond pin.

The cab stopped at the Ingénue Theater. Duhardt gave the chauffeur a shilling, the exact amount of his fare. Before going into the theater he crossed the road, and, entering a tobacconist's, bought a large cigar; from a flower-seller on the pavement a carnation for his coat—he felt that perhaps his appearance was slightly dusty, and wanted brightening up.

A minute later he was waiting in the clerk's office while his card was taken in to Mr. James Chagford.

James Chagford, or "Jimmy," as he was familiarly known in the profession, was sole lessee and manager of the Ingénue, formerly the Empress Theater, one of the smartest little playhouses in London. He also had an interest in two or three other theaters, but the Ingénue was his latest favorite toy.

Jimmy Chagford had a little axiom: "Fools produce plays, wise men 'present' them." A fool and a wise man were at that moment both waiting on him. It was wonderful the fascination theatrical speculation had for every type of person.

Jimmy Chagford saw the fool first. Even wise men accumulate more wisdom by waiting. There were two entrances to his private office, and he took advantage of this to prevent the men meeting.

"Ask Mr. Duhardt to wait a couple of minutes," he said to the clerk. "Phone down to the box-office and tell them to send Mr. Humphry up by the private staircase. He's waiting in the foyer."

The clerk quite understood.

"Well, sir, the gentleman of whom I spoke the other day is now waiting to see me," he said to Ralph Humphry directly the latter entered the room. "Are you prepared to put down a thousand pounds for six weeks' rent of the Ingénue in advance? I think that was the sum agreed upon."

There was a look of genuine distress on the frank, boyish face, but Chagford did not notice it. He was a business man, and sentiment was just as big a drug in the theatrical market as untried plays.

"I'm expecting Miss Berrington here every moment," Ralph stammered. "She promised to turn up at half past one, but phoned through that she might be late. I think it's all right, if you can just give me fifteen minutes, say."

Jimmy Chagford leaned back in his chair and shook his head. "I have already given you forty-eight hours." He pulled out a document from one of the pigeonholes in his bureau. "Here's your agreement, waiting to be signed directly you hand me the check. It should have been signed last Saturday."

He rose from his seat and held out his hand. "I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Humphry; but another time perhaps."

Jimmy had perfected the art of showing his visitors the quickest way into the street.

There were almost tears in Ralph's eyes as, fumbling for his hat, he unconsciously gyrated toward the door through which he had just come. He knew Myra's heart was set on going into management—the ambition of her life.

Jimmy Chagford had driven him into the passage; the door was closing. "Wouldn't you consider coming in on sharing terms with us? We have ample capital for that—and you admit the play is fine."

Chagford smiled benignly: "A fine play! I'm sure you'll have no difficulty in placing it. But sharing terms—my dear sir, I have a client at this moment in the next room waiting to put down cash for six months' lease of this theater."

The door closed. Chagford turned the key noiselessly. Then he touched the button of the electric bell on his bureau.

He had spoken more or less metaphorically, and he was slightly surprised when Mr. Paul Duhardt walked into the office, sat opposite to him, pulled out a crocodile leather case, from which he carefully extracted a bundle of bank-notes, and, counting three — to the value of two thousand pounds — placed them in front of Chagford.

"Give me a pen and I'll sign," he said laconically. "You've got the agreement and counterpart ready?"

Jimmy Chagford fingered the notes. He opened a drawer of the bureau, and laid a document before Duhardt. "That is the form of agreement I generally use. You had better glance through it."

"You bet!" Duhardt said, rolling the cigar between his lips.

A change, subtle and vague, had taken place in him. Except in appearance, he was not the same man who half an hour ago had left Myra Berrington's flat, and hurried, fearful of being pursued, up the street.

"I understood at our last interview you wanted the theater for six months?"

Duhardt nodded. "I'm giving you cash for three months in advance, balance on the 25th of November. That's good enough, isn't it? And look here, date the agreement from to-day. I want to enter into possession at once. Oh, I sha'n't interfere with you," he said quickly, taking the cigar out of his mouth and flicking off the ash. "But, having got the play, the leading lady, and everything all right, I want to start rehearsing almost at once."

Chagford began to make objections. Merely from habit, of course. He was naturally a conventional man. Duhardt brushed them aside as he had brushed the dust from his patent-leather boots.

A few alterations were made in the agreement, which was filled in and signed by both men. Duhardt suggested that Chagford's clerk should run round to Somerset House and get it stamped at once.

The manager of the Ingénue rose, and locked up the bank-notes in his safe. "Certainly you Americans can hustle when you like! You meant to get this theater, Mr. Duhardt. By Jove, the whole thing has been fixed up in about thirty-six hours! Almost a record!"

Paul Duhardt shrugged his shoulders. "I did a much bigger deal the other day in about thirty-six minutes."

And the cold, colorless eyes half closed, while he smiled. Picking up his hat he moved toward the door. The oak shelves with the pile of plays caught his eyes. He jerked his cigar in their direction.

"Have each of those masterpieces got an author?"

Chagford thrust his hands into his trouser-pockets and nodded: "Yes—or they had once upon a time. I expect some of them are in paradise now—the authors, I mean." He laughed at his own joke.

"I'd like to read them."

"If you've got the time to waste, you're at liberty."

"Haven't you read them?"

Chagford sighed. "Not yet!"

Duhardt blew a long cloud of smoke from his cigar. "Why, you may have missed a fortune."

Chagford pursed up his mouth.

"When a man once starts writing things," Duhardt continued, "he is no longer a responsible person. If it were not for pens, ink and paper half our prisons would be empty. Well, so-long, Mr. Chagford. I take possession from to-day?"

"Well, shall we say from to-morrow morning? Wouldn't you like to look over the premises?"

"I guess they won't run away," Duhardt said as he opened the door.

Leaving the theater, he walked to

the corner of Fleet Street and entered a branch of the Metropolitan Bank. He placed three thousand pounds to the credit of his account, and took the opportunity of having a little chat with the manager of his department.

"I've just take a lease of the Ingénue Theater—the old Empress Theater," he informed him. "Producing a new play there in a few weeks' time. If you would like a box for the first night for yourself and family, Mr. Jones, I shall be delighted."

The manager was surprised and flattered. Paul Duhardt's credit went up several points. It is always wise to stand well with the manager of the bank where one does business especially when a man wishes to use his bank as a reference.

Duhardt's next visit was to a bootmaker, and then to a hatter. And he afterward went to a West End tailor.

Meanwhile Ralph Humphry was hanging on to the wire of the telephone in one of the boxes at Piccadilly Circus Tube station. He had rung up Myra Berrington at her flat, and though the clerk had connected him, he could get no answer.

Again and again he spoke and rattled the metal holder of the receiver to and fro. At last the clerk answered him.

"Exchange—Who are you calling?"

"Western 0924. I understood I was connected. You must have cut me off. Connect me again," he cried irritably.

The clerk from the exchange spoke: "There is no answer from Western 0924."

Ralph swore. "There must be. Try again—" The clerk had cut him off.

He had no shillings to waste, but he took a cab and drove to the Hotel Regent. At the bureau the clerk informed him that Miss Myra Berrington had gone out with a gentleman that morning about eleven o'clock, and she had not returned since.

The flames of jealousy really flamed up now. She had not told him that Vessie was going to meet her at the hotel. Why couldn't she have done business there? He lit a cigarette and commenced to walk up and down the lounge.

She was keeping something from him. At the moment of their meeting the previous day he had noticed her manner was strange; he had put it down to fatigue. But in the evening she seemed more distrait than ever.

Humphry worked himself up into a state of nervous excitement and irritability. Everything had gone wrong. They had lost the theater for certain. The prettiest and cheapest theater in London. There was no chance of their getting another, even if they scraped a little more money together.

Perhaps she had found a backer in this man, Sir John Vessie, the sort of man who would be attracted by her beauty, and think because she was an actress—

His thoughts drove him into the street again. Calling another cab, he drove to Alma Mansions and rang and knocked at Myra's front door.

There was no answer. Scarcely knowing what he was doing, he listened at the keyhole. After some difficulty he found the porter in the basement and asked him whether he had seen Miss Berrington that morning.

"No, sir; she's away, I think; not expected back until to-morrow."

"She was up here this morning," Ralph rasped. "Why, she telephoned to me from the flat."

"Well, I never saw her, sir; and she was sure to have told me because my wife was going to help clean out the flat for her and put it straight."

Without another word Ralph walked away. He was really angry now and a little frightened. After all, he had no proof that she had telephoned from her flat. He looked at his watch. It was three o'clock. He had not tasted any food since an early breakfast. But he could not eat lunch until he had found Myra.

He walked all the way back to the hotel. Still she had not arrived, nor had she sent any message.

He sat down in the lounge, intending to wait. He noticed a man enter the hotel whose face seemed vaguely familiar. He looked at Ralph in a way that suggested that he, too, recognized him.

Humphry gave him no more than a passing thought. He found it impossible to sit still and do nothing, so he made his way back to the Ingénue Theater. He ran against Jimmy Chagford in the foyer and stopped him.

"It's too late," the latter said before Ralph could speak. "I've settled—"

"Hang the theater!" Ralph interrupted rudely. "I'm looking for Miss Berrington. She promised to meet me here two hours ago. Have you seen her?"

"No. If she had called I should have been told," Chagford said, and he passed on.

For a moment Ralph felt stupefied. He found himself walking up the Strand searching for her among the crowd that flowed to and fro.

Jealousy had vanished now; only a vague, nameless fear remained. She had gone, the woman he loved, disappeared. Something must have happened to her. She would never have left him in the lurch.

Something dreadful . . . an accident. Perhaps she had been killed. He commenced to hurry along, scarcely noticing the direction he took, searching blindly.

Afraid now to go back to the hotel —and wait.

CHAPTER XI.

Cat and Mouse.

MR. PAUL DUHARDT was kept busy shopping until closing-time. At six-thirty he returned to his rooms in Soho. As he opened the front door with his latch-key he ran into the arms of the fat German woman; and he swore at her in her native tongue. As a rule he was most meek and polite to his concierge-housekeeper; but now he suddenly found himself independent of Soho, and he could not help letting the German woman know it—in his own fashion.

Entering his bedroom, Duhardt threw a few things into the kit-bag which he had brought with him from Homburg. He locked up his bureau, poured himself out a whisky and soda, and then, locking the door of his apartments, he carried his bag into the street, and calling a cab drove to the Hotel Regent.

Walking up to the bureau without the least swagger, but with the air of a man who knows what he wants and means to get it, Duhardt engaged the suite of rooms which Sir John Vessie had occupied about twenty-four hours previously. Some parcels had already arrived for him, which he ordered to be sent up to his apartments.

Then he inquired for Miss Myra Berrington. He had already looked into the hotel during the afternoon, expecting to find her there; had seen and recognized Ralph Humphry, obviously on the same quest.

It was now seven o'clock, and Duhardt felt surprised that she had not already put in an appearance. With surprise there was also just a tinge of anxiety.

"When Miss Berrington returns, tell her I want to see her, and give her the number of my sitting-room," he said to the clerk.

Then he went up-stairs and, unpacking the kit-bag, dressed for dinner.

Then he smoked a cigarette in the lounge and watched the world, the flesh, and the stars of musical comedy file past him on their way to the restaurant.

He had reserved a table for two, but it began to look as if he would dine alone, or possibly not dine at all.

Perhaps Myra Berrington had run away? Or perhaps in a moment of

pique or anger or fear she had been tempted to take her own life! Women were inexplicable creatures. Paul Duhardt bit his lips, and the ferrety eyes grew almost red.

What would it matter, he asked himself savagely, if she had? Vessie was in his power now—the walking gold mine.

The circular revolving door at the entrance of the hotel suddenly spun violently round on its axle, and a woman fell rather than walked into the lounge.

For a second Duhardt failed to recognize Myra Berrington. She had looked particularly smart that morning when she interviewed Sir John. Now her clothes hung about her frame limply. She suggested the tired, hunted creature, seeking sanctuary. Strands of hair fell across her face, which was moist and colorless.

She stumbled toward the bureau, then hesitated, as if uncertain in her own mind of what she wanted. The clerk leaned toward her: "A gentleman has been inquiring for you, madam—"

Duhardt cut him short. He linked his arm through Myra's and led her toward the lift.

"I thought you were never coming. I was getting anxious."

She made no effort at resistance. There were heavy rings around her eyes; she was worn out, physically and mentally. He saw that at a glance. He guessed what had been in her mind, but he said nothing.

"I've reserved a table and ordered dinner. You're eating with me tonight. I've business to discuss after you've eaten—theatrical business."

He put her into the lift. Then he got in with her, and walked as far as her room. He repeated what he had just said in a quiet, unemotional voice. She looked at him in a dazed way.

"I thought you'd gone. Aren't you satisfied? You've taken everything; why don't you leave me alone?"

He patted her on the shoulder as if she were a naughty child. "Don't jump to conclusions. Do as I tell you. You'd better ring for one of the maids to help you dress."

Myra laughed, and drew her hand across her eyes as if trying to brush away a dreadful dream.

"I didn't think I should ever see you again. And I hadn't the courage to face Ralph, nor the courage to look my friends in the face again."

Her body stiffened. She drew herself up and clasped her hands together in a vise. "I tried to kill myself, to commit suicide. I've been walking up and down the Embankment, crossing and recrossing Hungerford Bridge for hours. But I hadn't the courage."

"It's lucky you hadn't," Duhardt laughed; but he felt a curious throb at his heart.

"You are meant for life, Myra; not for death. You shouldn't jump to conclusions. I told you I was going to play the game. When you've had some dinner and heard what I've got to say you'll be wanting to insure your life instead of trying to chuck it away. Now, then, hurry up and make yourself look nice. Only hurry up."

He had almost expected a scene and was rather surprised when, in less than an hour, she reappeared dressed for dinner. The pallor of her skin and the darkness of her eyes served to enhance her beauty.

Duhardt realized that all eyes were turned in their direction as they walked through the restaurant. He let her eat her dinner in peace, talking about anything that came into his head, giving her no opportunity of speaking and trying to prevent her from thinking.

She was famished, and after a half-hearted refusal of the first two courses nature had her own way, and presently Duhardt saw the color coming back to Myra's cheeks and the light to her eyes.

They took their coffee in the lounge adjoining the restaurant. Duhardt chose a secluded corner. He was surprised when Myra opened the attack.

"Well, I suppose you've some explanation to offer me, Mr. Duhardt. That's why you've brought me here."

Duhardt smiled craftily. For the last forty minutes he had been feeling and behaving more or less like an ordinary man; looking like one, too. Now all at once the suggestion of an animal, a ferret, returned. He sank lower into his seat, thrusting his head forward, fixing his colorless little eyes on Myra.

"I suppose that means you're going to ask for your share of the swag?"

She looked at him, but she could not meet his gaze for long. Her eyes dropped, her cheeks burned. "Are you a thief as well as a blackmailer?"

"Merely the predominant partner," he smiled. "You've too much imagination, Myra. I suppose it's the artistic temperament. And you must learn self-control."

"If you don't give me back half the money you took this morning I shall expose you," Myra whispered. Her strength and vitality had returned. She had her back against the wall again and was prepared to fight.

Duhardt was not in the least perturbed. He sipped his coffee with the air of an epicure.

"You don't flatter me," he said; "but there's only one thing you can do to hurt or annoy me; and as a mark of confidence I'll tell you what it is—to take your own life. Now, if you had committed suicide I could have stuck old Vessie for any amount I chose to ask; but it wouldn't have made up for the loss of you. You're going to prove almost as profitable an investment as he."

Myra half rose from her seat. "If you think I'm going to help you again—"

He stopped her with a gesture. "You're going to help yourself. You are going to help your lover, Ralph Humphry." He drew his chair closer to hers. "I'm gambling on you—just as you gambled on Vessie in the Homburg-Ostend express."

He stopped to see the effect of his words. At that moment a boy appeared with a card, which he handed to Myra.

With a word of apology Duhardt stretched out his hand and took it. "Mr. Ralph Humphry."

"The gentleman wants to see you at once, miss," the boy said to Myra.

Duhardt dismissed him. "Say Miss Barrington will come." Then he turned to Myra, who had risen to her feet. Her face was the color of parchment again. "My Heaven, what am I to say to him?"

Duhardt rose, too, and took her arm. "I suppose he's been looking for you all day, eh? Tell him you've been busy hunting capitalists—that you've found one; a charming and eccentric American who is looking for talent and a really good play. Then bring him along and introduce him."

"I don't understand," Myra faltered.

She had realized that afternoon when she tramped the streets alone, tempted to kill herself, how completely she was in this man's power. If she refused to obey him he could destroy her.

Ralph still believed in her. If once he met Paul Duhardt she would never know a moment's peace day or night.

"Why do you want to see him?" she whispered. "Leave him alone—leave him to me."

"I want to produce his play, if it's good enough," Duhardt replied. "Now get a move on you."

He led her toward the outer lounge, then returned to his seat and ordered liqueurs and cigars. He had to wait nearly half an hour before Myra returned with her lover.

He smiled as he watched them coming. Certainly theatrical managers in London did not know their business, or Myra Berrington would have been a star of the first magnitude. She only wanted running; and he was going to run her.

"Glad to make your acquaintance,

sir," he said to Ralph in the approved American fashion as soon as Myra introduced him. "Miss Berrington was just telling me all about you and the very fine play you've written her. Now I know Miss Berrington's work, but I don't know yours. I'd like to read your play if it's still free. Have a drink?"

Ralph swallowed a liqueur brandy. He had found Myra, and nothing else seemed to matter for the moment. He did not know what had happened during the afternoon. Myra had begged him to wait for her explanation.

"Yes, I've written a play," he replied unsteadily. "We hoped to produce it ourselves, but at the last moment—" He broke off and looked at Myra. "The theater was taken over our heads."

"Which theater?" Duhardt asked, inhaling the smoke of his cigar.

"The Ingénue. There was some other fellow after it who possessed more capital than we did, I suppose—"

Paul Duhardt broke into a peal of laughter. "Say, that's too bad! Why, I'm that fellow. I signed the agreement this afternoon. And to think that I froze you out!"

"You!" Myra stared at him, fascinated.

Duhardt nodded. "Queer, isn't it? It belongs to me right enough. And I'm looking for a real good play with which to open my season there—with Miss Berrington as my leading lady."

Ralph was too surprised to speak.

"I don't suppose you happen to have the play with you?"

"Miss Berrington's got a copy," Ralph replied. "I could let you have one to-morrow."

Duhardt turned to Myra. "Got it handy? Could Mr. Humphry read it to me now?"

She nodded, wondering what was coming next. Was Duhardt only playing with her or was he in earnest? Anyway, she knew she would have to fall in with every proposal he made.

"Then let's go up to my sitting-room, and if Mr. Humphry can spare the time he shall read it to me now." He turned to Ralph. "I'm a bit of a hustler."

They went up-stairs. To Myra's horror, she found herself in the sitting-room Sir John Vessie had occupied. To sit there opposite Duhardt, feeling his evil, hungry eyes fixed on her face while the man she loved read his play aloud—the play written for her and which they were to have produced together—was the most exquisite torture she could conceive.

She knew Duhardt was in earnest. He had not lied. He had taken the Ingénue Theater—and with the money she had blackmailed out of Sir John Vessie.

He would with that same money buy her lover's play and produce it. With that same money he intended buying her, too. He was like some horrible octopus stretching his tentacles out in all directions, fastening them everywhere, on everything she loved and respected.

She writhed in agony. She wondered why she didn't shriek aloud. But Ralph Humphry, all unconscious, finished reading his play and, laying it down, he looked anxiously at Paul Duhardt for his verdict.

CHAPTER XII.

The Blackguard's Weapon.

DUHARDT made no attempt to criticise the play which Ralph Humphry had just read him. A considerable silence elapsed before he spoke.

Myra had her back turned on him; her face was hidden. Ralph was hot and flushed with the exertion of reading his manuscript. He tried to hide his excitement.

Duhardt, chewing the end of his cigar, watched him through half-closed eyes. He had summed him up correctly.

He was head over ears in love. With

Myra as a lever Duhardt could do as he liked with him.

"Yes, the play's all right," he said at length. And then he yawned. "What about terms?"

Ralph was ready to agree to anything, as long as his play was produced at once—with Myra in the leading part.

There and then Duhardt wrote out a contract letter for him to sign. The amount of Miss Berrington's salary and other important details were left for decision until the following day, when Duhardt took formal possession of the Ingénue.

"We'll get preliminary notices and bills out at once," he said. "Engage the company right away, and start rehearsals in a couple of days.

Ralph hardly knew how to express his gratitude. Suspicion had left him. From the depths of despair he had been raised to the seventh heaven of delight.

He, an unknown author, was to be produced. The woman he loved was going to play the leading part. He was as happy as if they were going to run their own season at the Ingénue. When he bade Myra good night in the lounge he kissed her, careless who saw.

"Our chance has come after all," he whispered. "Nothing matters now. You must tell me to-morrow how it all happened."

A shiver ran through Myra's body. Lies and deception would soon come easily to her.

Ralph walked back to his lodgings with his face turned to the sky and his heart beating wildly with excitement. He was to receive eight per cent of the gross weekly takings. That might mean anything from fifty to a hundred and fifty pounds a week.

In his pocket lay Duhardt's contract letter to that effect. But, better than that, he would have in his pocket in a few days' time a special license to marry Myra Berrington, "the leading lady."

But if at that moment he could have looked into Paul Duhardt's private sitting-room at the Hotel Regent, where the future manager of the Ingénue Theater was still talking to his leading lady, his faith in her and their future might have received a rude shock.

Sir John Vessie had made urgent business, connected vaguely with affairs of state, the reason for his sudden return to London the very morning following his arrival home. Lady Vessie knew her husband was worried, but she refrained from trying to discover the cause.

As a rule, he told her all his troubles; they had never had secrets from each other. This was something he could not tell her. She was satisfied.

But she did ask him about Miss Myra Berrington. The incident at dinner over the telephone had appealed to her sense of humor.

Her John having an "affair" with another woman, an actress. She laughed at the dea.

Sir John answered her questions satisfactorily and laughed with her. But his laughter was forced. And his conscience was stained with a lie. A lie to his wife. He had sooner cut off his right hand.

He returned home from his interview with Myra Berrington a poorer man by five thousand pounds, but a richer in sympathy and in his knowledge of human nature.

The affair was closed and finished. He would not be troubled again. But he found a new text which henceforth he metaphorically nailed over his front door:

"Judge not, that ye be not judged."

The week crept away, and he had two or three good days with the partridges. He was really beginning to feel himself again; to hold up his head before his guests, his servants, and his tenants without feeling a whited sepulcher, when a bombshell exploded at his feet.

It was Sunday morning, and he had just retired to his study after breakfast to smoke a cigarette and glance through his correspondence, when there was a knock on the door, and his son entered the room, carefully closing the door behind him. He held a letter in one hand, which he fingered nervously.

"Can I speak to you, dad, for a few minutes?"

Something in Reggie's voice made Sir John look up and knit his brows. "Of course, my dear boy, of course—nothing wrong, I hope?"

A twinge of conscience prompted the question. Hitherto his children had not caused him an hour's worry. Of course, Reggie had been extravagant. Got into debt once or twice. Nothing serious.

Reggie cleared his throat nervously; he gave a boyish laugh. "Oh, no—that's to say, this letter—"

He held it out between his finger and thumb, gingerly, as if it were something unclean. Sir John looked at it, the frown on his forehead deepening. But he did not take it.

"Yes?"

"Well, I received it this morning. Can't understand it." Again he laughed, more awkwardly. "Stupid hoax, probably; only it couldn't have been meant for me. D' you mind reading it?"

Sir John took the letter. A square envelope with the stamp embossed upon it—such as can be purchased at any post-office. The address was written in a shaky, uneducated hand:

Mr. John Vessie,
Napperley Hall,
Sussex.

Inside the envelope a half-sheet of paper. Sir John read the letter. His son walked to the window and stood looking out across the lawn. The sound of church bells came softly across the valley. It was a long time before Sir John spoke.

"Shut the window, Reggie; those bells are rather distracting."

Reggie obeyed, and, turning, faced his father with a brave attempt at nonchalance. "What d' you make of it, dad—a hoax, or can it be—"

Sir John was putting the letter back into the envelope. His head was bent.

"Anonymous communications—" he commenced unsteadily.

Then he stopped. A waste-paper basket stood at his feet. Obviously, the right thing to do would be to tear up the offensive missive and fling away the pieces.

"It's funny being addressed to Mr. John Vessie," Reggie continued. "Of course, my second name is John, but no one ever uses it. D' you think it is intended for you, dad?"

Vessie moistened his lips. "What makes you think that?"

Reggie changed his position. He was obviously feeling ill at ease. "Well—the 'John' for one thing. Then that woman's name—and the Hotel Regent. It's all so—queer."

Sir John turned the letter over and over. "Yes, yes, that's so. It looks like an attempt at blackmail." His voice sank to a frightened whisper.

There was a prolonged silence in the room. Though the windows were closed the church bells could still be heard ringing a tuneful peal.

"But there's no demand for money, and no address on the letter," Reggie said eventually.

"True." Sir John rose. "Of course, you haven't shown it to any one else—not to your mother, I mean?"

"Not to a soul, dad; is it likely?"

Sir John tried to look his son in the face—and failed.

"Leave the letter with me. I'll lock it up. It's sure to be followed by a demand for money. But you must forget all about it. One has only to give these brutes rope enough and they hang themselves. The next communication we'll give to the police! Now, you'd better get dressed for church."

"Right you are, dad. But if we can trace the authors, I hope you'll let 'em have it hot! The—the blackguards!"

Sir John waited until his son had left the room. Then he gave a sigh of relief. Reggie still believed in him and trusted him. He knew that from the tone of his voice.

But for how long?

He took the letter out and read it again:

I know everything that's been happening. I know you traveled from Homburg with a certain well-known actress called Myra Berrington. I know that you allowed her to share your wagon-lit. On reaching London you went to the Hotel Regent. She followed you there. That same night there was a scene in your room. A woman had been heard to scream for help. The manager was called, but nothing was discovered. Because you were hiding the woman, the thief! It was Myra Berrington. Two days later you were seen to enter her flat in Kensington. You were alone with her for a considerable period. I know everything—but there is more to follow. . . . Be careful, you are watched by many eyes.

X. Y. Z.

There was a gang at work! He had been watched and followed and spied upon ever since boarding the train at Homburg. It seemed impossible that Myra Berrington, an actress well known in the profession, could be at the bottom of it—one of the gang.

He was no longer safe. That letter had been purposely misdirected to "Mr. John." Soon they would be writing to his wife, his daughter.

Vessie staggered to the newspaper file and took out a copy of Saturday's *Times*.

The thing must be stopped at once. At any cost. It would be fatal to apply to the police.

It must be stopped secretly.

He ran his eyes down the columns of the first page until he came to an advertisement he remembered reading long ago with mingled feelings of curiosity and disgust:

I am private investigator to the Aristocracy. If you are in legal, social or any moral difficulty consult me. French, Russian, and German system of espionage. Secrecy!

JUSTICE VANDIKE.

There followed the address and telephone number.

Taking a pair of scissors Sir John cut out the advertisement and put it in his pocketbook. He was scrunching the newspaper into the waste-paper basket when Lady Vessie entered the study.

"Aren't you coming with us to church, dear?"

He shook his head and picked up a bundle of documents. "I really can't. I've a fearful amount of correspondence. If people ask where I am, you must find some excuse for my absence."

Bending down, Lady Vessie kissed him. "Poor old man. I wish I could only stay at home and help you."

He waited until the closing of the front door told him that the family had started for church. He stood for a few moments with his hands clasped over his face, his body quivering. Then he dropped onto his knees before the bureau, and clasping his hands together he falteringly commenced to pray.

"If I have sinned, smite me for my shortcomings. Let me pay—but spare my wife and children. O Lord, let not the innocent suffer."

CHAPTER XIII.

Mr. Justice Vandike.

THE first thing that Sir John Vessie did on Monday morning was to read once again the letter which had fallen into his son's hands. He wondered what form the next missive would take; how long an interval of peace would be allowed before it arrived, and to whom it would be addressed.

They would strike next at his wife; then at his daughter Jane, just developing into glorious womanhood—as in-

nocent and pure as the white lilies floating in the water of the lake. Even his younger son still at Eton would not be safe.

Sir John took the newspaper cutting from his pocketbook and read it carefully. There were two advertisements—the first, which had so often arrested his attention and aroused his disgust—six weeks ago he would have refused to believe that any innocent man or woman required the services of a private detective. The other attracted him by its brevity:

> Are you worried? If in trouble, no matter the cause, ring up Strand 2036, and we will get you out of it!
>
> ARTHUR BESTWOOD.
> 129 Bedford Street.

Sir John had quite made up his mind to seek advice. For many reasons it was impossible for him to take the letter to his family solicitors and tell them the whole story. That was the course of action he should have pursued in the first place—when he had originally suspected Myra Berrington.

Now it was too late. He had been successfully blackmailed. He had paid up. Why, his own solicitors, even the head partner, who regarded him in the light of a small deity, would be shocked beyond expression, and probably feel convinced in his own mind that Sir John had at least been guilty of some grave indiscretion.

Undoubtedly there was only one thing to do—to seek private advice. He had not only his family, he also had his party to consider.

As soon as he was sure of not being disturbed he went to the telephone and rang up Mr. Justice Vandike. While his house was full of guests, with shooting and picnicking parties every day, it was absolutely impossible that he should again go up to London.

He asked to be put into communication with Mr. Justice Vandike himself. A high-pitched female voice demanded his name. Sir John hesitated. He was in such a state of nervous suspicion that he did not trust telephone, telegram, or pen, ink and paper.

"Put me on to Mr. Vandike himself. Say the matter is urgent."

"You won't give your name?"

"No!"

There was a long interval. Now and then a queer sound came over the wire as if some one were beating a tattoo at the other end of it. At last he heard a man's voice:

"I am Justice Vandike. Who is speaking?"

Vessie experienced the sense of relief a sick man feels when a physician enters his bedchamber and takes his hand. The voice he heard surprised him. It did not suggest the private detective. There was nothing of mystery or secrecy about it. Rather it was cheery and friendly.

"I am speaking to Mr. Justice Vandike himself?" Vessie insisted.

"You are. There is only one Justice Vandike. I am he. Tell me your name and your business, please. My time is valuable."

The voice improved on acquaintance. It sounded mild, almost benevolent. It belied the spoken words, for there was no suggestion of haste in it.

Vessie lowered his voice. "I am Sir John Vessie, of Napperley Hall." He paused, not quite certain how to proceed.

At that moment Bowles, the butler, crossed the hall. Seeing his master at the telephone, he padded very quietly past him. Vessie watched him out of sight.

"Yes, Sir John," Vandike's voice said at the other end of the wire. "What can I do for you?"

He might have been a tradesman taking orders or a commission agent ready to make an investment on Sir John's behalf on a horse he was running in the Leger.

Vessie cleared his throat. "It's rather a difficult matter. I would like to see you personally."

"I am quite at your service, Sir John."

"Unfortunately it's impossible for me to come up to London. We're entertaining for the shooting, and I've only just returned from my cure at Homburg."

"Quite so, quite so!" the cheery voice said. "I saw your name in the *Times*."

Sir John started violently. "Eh?"

"In the fashionable intelligence column," Mr. Vandike said reassuringly. "'In and Out of Town.' You had a big bag on 'the First.' Partridges are strong and plentiful down your way, eh?"

Sir John hardly knew whether he was relieved or disappointed. This unknown, unseen man was, as a man, reassuring. But he hardly suggested the secretive, cunning inquiry agent.

"Would you like me to run down and see you, Sir John?"

"Yes—I see no reason—I think that would be the most convenient way. And the sooner the better. When can you come?"

"About midday, after lunch. Or before if the matter is urgent."

Sir John glanced at the hall clock. "I'm afraid that's impossible. The train service here is very awkward."

He heard Justice Vandike laugh. "I have a sporting little car, forty-five horse-power. I can be at your front door within a couple of hours."

"Shall we say half past two?" Vessie suggested. He felt quite sure now that he had applied to the right man. "There's one little thing, Mr. Vandike. I hope you won't feel offended — but you advertise rather largely; your name is probably well known."

The pleasant voice at the other end of the wire interrupted him. "Exactly! At half past two your butler will bring you a card, bearing the name of Mr. Arthur Brown."

Sir John hung up the receiver with a sigh of gratitude. He was inclined to believe that his prayers had been heard and would very shortly be answered. He announced at lunch that he had a busy afternoon before him, and that he would not be visible again until tea-time.

He was the first to rise from the table. He told Bowles that he was expecting a Mr. Arthur Brown at half past two. He was to be shown straight into the study, and Sir John would not be at home to any one else.

Bowles bowed. "Very good, Sir John. I understand."

The discreet butler had probably made the same remark a score of times before. But every little thing now seemed terribly significant to Vessie. Perhaps his servants had already begun to suspect that something was wrong.

Vessie ordered coffee and liqueurs to be ready. He opened a new box of perfectly seasoned Coronas.

The study-clock was just chiming the half-hour when Bowles opened the door and announced in what seemed to Sir John to be a stage whisper: "Mr. Arthur Brown."

Sir John advanced with outstretched hands, then stopped. He wanted to make a good impression, to avoid all formality or stiffness; but when he saw Mr. Brown he believed a mistake had been made. Mr. Brown, seeing his hesitation, also looked surprised.

"Sir John Vessie, I believe?"

"Yes, yes! Are you Mr. Justice Vandike?"

Vandike smiled deprecatingly, slightly elevated his shoulders, and spread out his hands. "Shall we say Arthur Brown for the time being?" he smiled. "Probably my appearance somewhat belies my name. But, Sir John, surely experience has taught you that we can't judge from appearances."

"Of course not, of course not!" Vessie said hastily, again holding out his hand. "But I wanted to be quite sure that I was really talking to the principal. Naturally, in your business you employ many—er—agents. Let me give you a cup of coffee and a liqueur?"

"I never touch either."

Sir John motioned him to a seat and handed him one of his famous coronas. Justice Vandike, *alias* Arthur Brown, refused that also.

Sir John wondered how he was going to begin. He also wondered how much he was going to tell this extraordinary man, for Justice Vandike was far more surprising than even his voice had been. The only thing about him that seemed suitable was his pseudonym, Arthur Brown.

He was a short, fat, little man, with round, clean-shaven face, ruddy complexioned, which suggested sunshine and fresh air. His nose was not quite straight, his mouth large and kindly; he possessed the bluest of blue eyes—the eyes of an innocent, wondering child. Very fair hair, almost golden, which, in spite of being cut short, curled gracefully about his temples. His hands and feet were rather large. He was dressed in a light-gray lounge suit.

"You're looking at me and thinking I ought to be an estate agent rather than a private detective, Sir John," he said with a merry chuckle.

Vessie blinked his eyes. "By gad, you're right! That's just what I was thinking."

Vandike rubbed his hands together. "I was articled to a firm of architects. I ran away to sea, and got all the nonsense licked out of me there. I was on a tramp steamer when the crew mutinied. The captain and I against a score of European mongrels. We won! Now, Sir John, tell me your trouble."

Vessie took a deep breath. He felt like a little boy again. Undoubtedly this man was wonderfully tonic; self-confident, optimistic—but was he any good in an affair which required the utmost tact and delicacy? Vessie's spirits rose—the next moment his heart sank.

"It's not easy to begin. I think it's a case of blackmail."

Justice Vandike laughed. "Is that all? Unpleasant, I'll admit, for the moment. But running a blackmailer to ground gives me just as exquisite pleasure as getting a rocketing pheasant the man on my right has just missed with both barrels."

Sir John Vessie unlocked a drawer in his bureau, and, taking out the letter his son had given him, he handed it to Vandike. The latter took out the half sheet of paper the envelope contained, and put it on the mantelpiece. He examined the envelope carefully, holding it up to the light.

"Addressed to Mr. John Vessie, I see. Your son?"

"My son's name is Reginald John. Quite naturally he opened the letter."

"Then you know it was intended for you?"

Those innocent blue eyes were very keen, like the eyes of an eagle.

"I think the mistake was intentional. Will you read the letter?"

Vandike picked up the half sheet of paper, opened it, turned it over, and felt the substance of the paper with his fingers, then held it up to the light.

"Heron's Court, Antique"—he was reading the water-mark. He muttered something else thoughtfully. "Do you ever put up at the Hotel Regent, Sir John?"

"Yes—always. The other day on my return from Homburg. But how on earth—"

"You mustn't question me, please."

He read the letter, replaced the sheet of paper in its envelope, and handed it back to Sir John. Putting his hands into his trouser-pockets, he smiled benignly.

"Now, Sir John, there's only one way in which we can work. Complete and absolute confidence must exist between us. You must trust me as you would not trust any other living man; otherwise you're wasting my time and your money. In a manner of speaking, I must be your conscience, your soul. If you can't do this tell me so." He gave a fat laugh. "I sha'n't be offended, and you'll be under no obligation for this little visit."

Vessie wondered if those keen and innocent blue eyes had seen into his soul. He was wondering how much he dare tell this man.

"Go on, Sir John; better make a clean breast of it or else show me the door. If I were a physician, now, you'd be anxious to tell me all your symptoms. In fact, I'd lay odds you'd exaggerate them in your anxiety to hide nothing. You've got to look on me as a moral doctor. That's what I am. I don't mean that I've got any morals myself, but I know how to look after other peoples'."

Vessie's cigar had gone out. He relit it. "Just give me a couple of minutes. Let me think it over."

"Certainly." Justice Vandike walked to the French windows and stared out into the garden. He had a keen eye for beauty; he loved trees and flowers and the open air. Vessie heard him sigh.

Somehow or other, he could never tell to his dying day why that sigh decided him. He made a clean breast of everything that had happened since he first set foot on the express-train at Homburg. And Vandike listened without once interrupting, still standing, looking out of the window, his back to Sir John.

When the latter had finished he allowed thirty minutes to pass before he swung round and spoke. "It's no use moralizing, but really sometimes my sympathies are with the blackmailer! Innocent men make it so easy for them. Now, Sir John, I'm not going to give you my opinion; it wouldn't help you if I did. I'm just going to get to work. But I'll tell you one thing: This is not an ordinary case of blackmail. It's really interesting, most interesting."

He rubbed his big hands together and looked at Sir John with a benign smile. "I suppose you know Myra Berrington is a talented actress? I might almost say famous. As I motored through London I saw her name glaring at me from every hoarding."

Vessie tried to smile. "I suppose I'm paying for those hoardings."

Vandike shrugged his shoulders. "Might I see your son, Mr. Reginald John?"

Vessie frowned. "If it's absolutely necessary. But I want to keep him out of it. It was bad enough his receiving the letter. He's young, impressionable. My principal desire is to keep my family out of it; above all, to avoid publicity."

Vandike pursed up his lips and stroked his red cheeks. "I may be wrong, but I don't think you can keep your son out of it. I think he's at the bottom of the whole affair, Sir John."

Vessie leaped to his feet. "My son—my boy! My dear sir—"

Smilingly Justice Vandike shook his head. "Remember, Sir John, absolute and complete confidence. Please send for your son and let me question him. I'm quite sure he's as innocent as you are. Nevertheless, I fancy he'll be able to give me very valuable information, and probably open your eyes, too, which, if you'll pardon me, have been closed as tightly as those of a newly born puppy all your life."

Sir John touched a button of the electric bell. Bowles entered the room.

"Send Mr. Reginald here. I think you'll find him playing tennis."

Bowles bowed. "Very good, Sir John. I understand."

CHAPTER XIV.

Reggie Makes a Call.

"DASH it all, I'm in the middle of a set!" Reginald Vessie cried when Bowles delivered Sir John's message to him. "Love—thirty! What on earth does he want with me?"

"Shall I say you're coming almost at once, sir?" Bowles suggested.

"I supose so, but I must finish this set," the heir to Napperley Hall replied carelessly.

The butler crossed the lawn toward

the study. Sir John had opened the French windows again. Justice Vandike was questioning him about his garden—the soil, and which were his favorite roses. Vessie waxed eloquent. Rose-growing was one of his hobbies.

Bowles reappeared and delivered Reggie's message. "While we're waiting for my son perhaps it would be as well if we discussed—er—discussed terms," Sir John suggested. "I presume you'll take up the case and act for me?"

"Delighted! Delighted!" Vandike cried breezily. "You must know that the game of running a blackmailer to earth when once you've got into his clutches is nearly as expensive as being blackmailed! Sometimes the best we can do is to compromise. But it altogether depends who the blackmailer is. Generally he's a member of a gang. There are really only two smart gangs working in London just now It's the wrong time of year for them, too."

Confidence was returning to Sir John Vessie. The confidence a sick man often feels when he hears his doctor discussing his disease as if it were a new growth of artichoke. "But you can give me a rough idea of your fees?" he asked.

"I am paid by results. If there are no results, then just out-of-pocket and office expenses. Even they may be high, Sir John. I may have to put half a dozen men on espionage work. May have to bribe a paper or two."

Vessie felt a sudden sinking in the pit of his stomach. "You don't think it can possibly get into the newspapers?"

Vandike ran his fingers through his golden hair. "There's a little rag, which you must have seen on the bookstalls, called the *Weekly Wash*. Its cover is generally a photograph of a pretty lady with a pretty taste in lingerie. Its columns are supposed to deal with the turf, the drama, society, and art. You may not believe me, but many of its contributors wear coronets. Now you must not be surprised, Sir John, if one morning you receive a copy of that newspaper, possibly marked. And I guarantee that you'll probably find a paragraph under this heading:

"'We want to know: . . .

"'If Sir John enjoyed his trip from Homburg to London? And Miss Myra Berrington's opinion of the German State Railways; whether their wagons-lits compare favorably with those supplied by English railway companies?'"

Sir John glanced hastily toward the open windows. "Good Heavens—you haven't seen that?"

Vandike raised his hand deprecatingly: "No, no—not yet! But you mustn't be surprised. Still, I hope I may be in time to prevent it."

Vessie dropped into a chair and mopped his forehead. "Good Lord! But they daren't do it. It's criminal."

"Another form of blackmail, that's all. The *Weekly Wash* is run by one of the gang to which I refer."

"But it must be stopped," Sir John cried hoarsely. "At any cost."

"Then you'll give me carte blanche?"

Sir John wrung his hands. "I don't see what else I can do."

Justice Vandike rubbed his hands together. "Absolute and complete confidence. It's the only way we can work together."

Steps sounded on the gravel path outside and Reggie Vessie entered through the open French windows.

He was wearing flannels and a soft silk shirt. His boyish brown face was flushed with the exertion of the hard game he had just played.

"Hullo, dad, what do you want?"

He stopped short as he saw a stranger present, looked Vandike up and down, then gave him a curt nod.

"You had better close the windows," Sir John said.

"But it's as hot as—as hot as an oven."

Again he looked at Justice Vandike, more closely and curiously. Vessie closed the windows himself. Then he introduced Vandike — he was careful to call him Arthur Brown.

"He is a detective I have employed to try to discover the author of the letter you received on Sunday. He wants to ask you a few questions, Reggie."

"Right-o, fire away," Reggie replied carelessly. "I don't know anything about the beastly thing except that it came by post in the usual way. If I could find the beggar who wrote it I'd give him the soundest thrashing he's ever had."

Vandike was standing with his back to the fireplace, his hands clasped together.

"Why?" he asked suavely.

"Why?" Reggie flung the word back at him. Then halted and stammered: "Dash it all, wouldn't you? Beastly anonymous letter, making rotten suggestions."

"You think a man wrote it, then?"

"Don't think," Reggie replied bluntly. "I should hardly think a woman would stoop to a low trick like that."

Justice Vandike nodded pleasantly. "Stripped of their conventions, men and women are very much alike, Mr. Vessie. I needn't ask you to be perfectly frank with me, and you mustn't object to any questions I ask."

Reggie Vessie nodded. "All right. Go ahead."

"You know the lady mentioned in the letter, Miss Myra Berrington?" Vandike asked.

"I am quite sure that my son—"

Vandike stopped Sir John with a gesture. He apologized. And he waited for his son to answer.

"What the deuce has that to do with this beastly letter?" Reggie asked after a moment's hesitation.

"You know the lady?" Vandike repeated.

Reggie plucked his mustache. "Yes and no. I believe I ran up against her when I was at Sandhurst. There was a bit of a rag. She was playing at the theater at Aldershot; she made rather a hit. I remember we escorted her back to her hotel."

Vandike nodded. "Yes, I remember. I happened to be in the town on business and I visited the theater that evening. Very clever actress, isn't she?"

Reggie did not reply. He was looking at Justice Vandike now with frank contempt in his eyes. He had taken a dislike to the man.

"And when did you meet her again?" Vandike asked.

Reginald Vessie began to grow fidgety. He looked at his father, but Sir John's face was hidden.

"I object to being questioned like this," he blustered.

"Tell Mr. Brown all you know, my boy," Sir John said huskily.

Reggie frowned and his cheeks took an added color. There was a note of pathos in his father's voice he had never heard before.

"Well, I met her again in London once. You see, I knew her. She was playing then at the old Empress Theater—it has been rebuilt now."

Vandike smiled, and Reginald Vessie longed to kick him.

"Of course, the incident at Aldershot happened some years ago now. You've grown up since then. You're a man of the world. So you won't mind confessing that you fell in love with this fascinating actress?"

Again Reggie hesitated before replying. "Good Heaven, no! she amused me, that's all. I mean she was interesting," he added, "and a jolly sight more intelligent than the silly girls one had to dance attendance on and talk rot to at Sandhurst."

"When did you last meet her?"

"I don't know. It was a long time ago." Reggie took a couple of steps toward Vandike. "Look here, Mr.—"

"Brown, Arthur Brown," Vandike said gently.

"Look here, Mr. Brown, are you

trying to imply, because I happened to have met Miss Berrington and said 'How do you do?' to her, that this beastly letter has anything to do with me, or is the result of my acquaintance with that lady?"

Justice Vandike gave a little shrug of the shoulders which seemed to be a habit of his. "I never make implications, Mr. Vessie. I'm seeking information which may help me to discover the author of the letter to which you refer. When I've found him—" he clicked his finger and thumb together suggestively. "I needn't detain you any longer. I'm sure you're anxious to get back to your game of tennis."

Reggie turned his back on him promptly, and going over to his father, laid his hand on the latter's shoulder. "Hope you're not worried, dad. And you don't think that I—"

"Of course not, my boy. I don't want you to give the affair another moment's thought. I've placed it entirely in Mr. Brown's hands, in whom I have the utmost confidence. It's simply a vulgar attempt at—blackmail."

Reggie Vessie nodded, and moved slowly toward the French windows, which he opened. "All the same, I wish it hadn't happened just now, when I've got to go back to town. You see, my leave is up to-morrow."

Sir John forced a laugh. "My dear boy, all I ask you to do is to forget it. You won't be worried again. Of course you won't mention it to your mother or sister, or to any one." He turned to Vandike, "That's the worst of being a public man; one is never safe from one's enemies."

"Never," Justice Vandike laughed. "When a man is brave enough to enter the political arena he simply stands up to have mud thrown at him. The middle of the Strand on a wet day is a cleaner place in which to stand than certain places we need not mention."

Sir John Vessie watched his son out of sight. Then sitting down at the bureau, he took out his check-book and opened it. "I would like to pay you something in advance—on account of out-of-pocket expenses."

Justice Vandike shook his head. "I would rather you didn't, Sir John." He laughed. "Confidence must be on both sides. Oh, no, I'll render you a statement from time to time, and if you think I'm spending too much money you've only got to say so. And before I start operations may I give advice without being impertinent?"

Sir John managed to smile. "Surely that's what I'm paying you for."

"This is advice you won't pay for, and I'm afraid you won't take. But I want you to make a note of it; I want you to remember it."

Justice Vandike had grown suddenly serious; the expression on his face had entirely changed. He stood by Vessie's side, and looked him straight in the eyes.

"Go to Scotland Yard, see the chief of the C. I. D. department. Tell him just what you've told me. Put the matter in his hands."

Vessie shook his head. "It's too late. I ought to have done that in the first place. I feared publicity then. Now I have far more reason to fear it. I know it's good advice," he said with a heavy sigh, "but—I daren't take it."

"It's the fear of publicity which gives the blackmailer his hold on you," Vandike said slowly. "He dares not come out into the open and fight you. If he knows you daren't fight him—well, he can continue to empty your pockets."

"But surely you — you're going to sift this affair to the bottom. I imagine you'll see Miss Berrington, find out if she has an accomplice and who is the author of this letter. You can tell them I'm going to institute legal proceedings."

Vandike nodded and held out his hand. "When I've run 'em to earth, when I've discovered the gang, I'll do my best to bluff them, or if the worst comes to the worst I'll buy them off. The only thing is to play their own game."

"It's funny that a woman like Miss Berrington—"

"My dear sir," Vandike interrupted, "I know an eminently respectable gentleman with a handle to his name, who keeps up a fine country estate almost entirely by blackmail. Of course, he doesn't take any active part; he merely supplies information on which others act. A most paying game. If you get any more communications send them to me. Keep me informed if anything happens."

He picked up his hat and moved toward the door. Sir John stopped him. "About my son and this woman. You don't suppose—"

"Merely a boyish indiscretion," Vandike replied easily. "You see I happened to know they had met. Leave everything in my hands and don't worry. Good day."

Sir John Vessie walked to the front door and waited while Vandike took his seat in the car. He drove himself, but he had an exceedingly smart chauffeur with him.

"She'll lap her seventy miles an hour at Brooklands," Vandike said, referring to his car.

He released the throttle, the engines commenced to race. The car kicked violently, then slid down the drive, and in a few seconds was out of sight.

Sir John Vessie walked slowly across the lawn and watched the game of tennis. Next morning he saw his son off at the railway station for London. Reggie rented a suite of rooms in Duke Street.

"Come up and see me now and then, dad; we'll have a night out together." He lowered his voice. "And let me know when you've run these brutes to earth—you know what I mean. For goodness' sake, don't let that detective chap persuade you that Miss Berrington has anything to do with it. She's a lady and as straight as a die."

On reaching London, Reggie drove straight to his rooms, unpacked his luggage, changed, and then, going to Wellington Barracks, reported himself. On his way up Whitehall he noticed a new hoarding; on it, in enormous letters beneath the name of the Ingénue Theater, Miss Berrington's name. He walked along the Strand until he came to the theater; at the entrance there was a large portrait of Myra.

He looked at it for a long time; then he went round to the stage door. He was informed that Miss Berrington had been rehearsing, but had left an hour ago.

Calling a cab, he drove to Alma Mansions. The servant told him Miss Berrington was not at home, but was expected shortly.

"I'll wait," Reggie said. He left his hat and stick in the hall and was shown into the drawing-room. A silver box of cigarettes stood on a side table; opening it, he took out a cigarette, lit it, and, flinging himself into an armchair, he picked up an illustrated paper. Presently he heard the front door bell ring; voices and footsteps outside. He rose to his feet expectantly.

CHAPTER XV.

A Threat and a Promise.

PAUL DUHARDT had given Myra to understand that she would not receive one penny in cash out of the five thousand pounds she had obtained from Vessie. He had told her this the evening Ralph read his play. He told her several other things which were not likely to help her toward a sound night's rest.

He had a very happy knack of attacking his victims just at the moment when he knew that their powers, physical and mental, were at their lowest ebb.

Myra Berrington fought in a half-hearted way. She called Duhardt a thief; she threatened to expose him, to give the game away to Sir John, and to go to Scotland Yard herself.

Duhardt let her talk, knowing she would do none of these things. As

soon as she was thoroughly exhausted he told her that he would expect her at the Ingénue Theater at ten o'clock the following morning to discuss terms and consider the cast of the play.

In spite of what she had gone through, Myra slept soundly, and it was half past ten before she arrived at the theater. Duhardt had already installed himself in the offices. Probably to pay Myra out for being late, he kept her waiting.

There were many other people waiting to see him, too. Clerks, male and female; representatives of big printing firms; costumers—all sorts and conditions of people connected with the theater.

Myra Berrington was only one of a crowd. It was no use feeling resentful. It would be worse than useless to lose her temper. Duhardt had it in his power to humble her. He had already installed fear in her heart, and shame.

When she was shown into the room he had chosen for his private office he glanced at the clock and greeted her by saying that she was an hour late.

"I have been waiting half an hour down-stairs," she replied. "If you treat your leading lady with so little ceremony, I pity the rest of the company."

"The rest of the company will keep their appointments or get the sack," he replied curtly. "Sit down. Now, then, listen. The play's all right. I even think there may be money in it. I'm going to star you. Given an order for the advance printing already. In forty-eight hours, more or less, every omnibus and every hoarding will be shouting MYRA BERRINGTON to a gullible public. Now, what about the cast? I know the names of most of the London actors and actresses; but I want brains, not names. You can help me there."

"Hadn't you better consult the author?"

"When I've had your advice. There must be scores of clever people who know how to act, but who do not know how to advertise. Those are the people who are generally cheap, too. Make out a list."

Myra knew what Duhardt meant. She knew what he wanted, too. She hated and feared his cleverness.

Duhardt looked at the list. "I suppose any of those will come at about ten pounds a week—or less?"

Myra shrugged her shoulders. She felt as if she were betraying her friends, betraying the profession which she loved.

She looked at Duhardt; she knew how he would beat them down; how he would craftily point out that he was giving them the chance of a lifetime; that they ought practically to come for nothing.

Well, she would be crafty, too. She would write them privately and put them on their guard.

"And how much do you want a week?" Duhardt asked, leering at her. "You'll have to dress well on and off, as they used to say in the provinces. Oh, you look all right as it is, I know. But when you're leading lady here you have got to make a splash. I can start booming you, but you've got to attend to details."

She felt that in Duhardt's hands she would soon cease to be a woman or an actress—she would simply become a proprietary article.

"I can get your pictures in the daily and weekly press—a new photograph every week. You must get it in the academy, in picture-galleries. You'll want a motor-car. You can try all the latest on the market and be photographed driving them in the park. In the same way some one is always sticking a new corset on the market—you can get all your clothes for nothing if you're photographed in them. I'll put you on to the people. You must do the rest."

"And if I refuse?"

Duhardt leaned back in his chair and, folding his arms, looked steadily at Myra. "Hadn't you better make

up your mind to the fact, once and for all, that you ain't going to refuse?"

There was a short silence. "It depends on what you ask me to do. You may go just a step too far, Mr. Duhardt. I wasn't bluffing when I told you last night that I tried to take my own life. I dare say that won't happen again. But if you go too far I may be tempted one day to walk into Scotland Yard, confess everything, and give myself up."

Duhardt shook his head. "Rough on Ralph, wouldn't it? Besides, what would you gain? Hang it all, our interests are identical. I'm working for you."

"You have made use of me; you have cheated me. I loathe myself almost as much as I loathe you."

Duhardt smiled. "You'll get over that." He pushed a sheet of foolscap toward her. "Here's your contract; sign it."

She read it through. It was the usual thing—seven performances a week, half salaries for extra matinées; as if the public were admitted free on the first matinée and only paid half price for their seats on the second.

A long list of absurd rules stipulating that she should not use bad language or get drunk on the stage. Her salary was twenty pounds a week during the run of the play; and she was bound to Paul Duhardt for three years.

Duhardt handed her a pen. After a moment's hesitation she took it and signed her name.

"That's right," he smiled. "You're getting wise quickly. Perhaps you realize how generous I have been. I might have got you for nothing."

Myra Berrington rose from her seat and, placing her arms on the top of the desk, leaned across it.

She shook her head. "A few weeks ago, Mr. Duhardt, I was very clever in my own estimation. I thought I knew everything a woman could know. You have opened my eyes."

"I haven't started yet," he replied laconically, pulling forward a bundle of telegraph forms and commencing to fill them in.

"Oh, yes, you have. But I can look ahead now. Perhaps one day my chance will come. One day our positions will be reversed, and I shall be top dog. If so I'll make you pay tenfold for all I've suffered and am going to suffer."

He looked up and laughed in her face. "Isn't it rather silly to put me on my guard?"

She smiled at him, and Duhardt put down his pen and kept his eyes on her face.

Not only beautiful, but confoundedly fascinating. She possessed what artistic people call temperament—that indescribably fascinating, alluring something which often succeeds where beauty fails, where wealth fails, where chicanery fails.

Duhardt stroked his chin. It was a foolish threat she made—but it struck him then that it would be well not to treat her too lightly.

"I've never seen you off your guard," Myra whispered, answering his question. "That contract I've just signed isn't worth the paper it's written on."

"No contracts are."

"I shall do as you tell me up to a certain point, because I can't help myself. I shall act for you, advertise for you—and so on. You can do as you like with me more or less. But keep your hands off the man I love. Don't touch Ralph Humphry."

Duhardt took up his pen again and continued to write out his telegrams. "Thanks for the warning."

"It's not a warning," she whispered —"it's a threat! If you value your life you'd better heed it."

Paul Duhardt went on writing until he heard the door close. Then, looking up, he took a handkerchief from his pocket and passed it across his face. For a few moments he remained deep in thought.

Picking up the speaking-tube on his

desk, he told the clerk in the adjoining room to admit Mr. Ralph Humphry. He showed him the lists Myra had made out, and told him the names of the people to whom he had already telegraphed.

"I hope to see 'em this afternoon. You had better be here. We can engage them right away and start rehearsing to-morrow."

"By Jove! you're a man after my own heart; you can hustle," Ralph laughed. "What about a producer?"

"We'll produce the play ourselves," Duhardt replied. "I've got a proper contract made out for you; look through and sign it. I'm reserving all rights to myself, but you get a commission right through."

"It seems fair enough," Ralph said, and he signed.

Duhardt offered him a cigar. "By the way, to drop business for a moment, I believe you're engaged to be married to Miss Berrington, aren't you?"

Ralph colored. "How do you know?"

"Oh, I guessed it. When we were talking about your play she let drop a hint. She was so awfully keen on its production I guessed there was something up."

"Bless her heart," Ralph said under his breath. "Do you know, she cares more about getting my play produced than playing in it herself? She would have given up the part if she could have found some one else to produce it—another actress with capital, I mean."

"Then, it's true?"

"That we're engaged? Yes." Ralph rose from his seat and commenced to walk about the office. "I'd better make a clean breast of it; though, don't let it go any further for the present. I've got a license; we're to be married in a couple of weeks."

Duhardt gave a twirl to his mustache. "That will be about three weeks before the first night. Have you thought of the wedding tour?"

"Oh, we sha'n't bother about that—I hadn't thought of it. But that's only a silly convention. When one loves one doesn't want a wedding tour. A man goes to Cairo, Paris—and paradise—when he takes the woman he loves in his arms."

Duhardt pursed up his lips.

"Well, I'd better be getting along," Ralph continued. "What time did you tell those people to call? If I'm back at four o'clock it'll do, won't it?"

Paul Duhardt rose and planted himself in front of Humphry: "Do you love Miss Berrington enough to make a small sacrifice for her?"

"I think so," Ralph replied very quietly.

"Then, for her sake, more than the sake of the play, you must not marry her—yet."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"Gently, gently," Duhardt replied. "Let us look at this as two men of the world. Marriage doesn't mean much to a man. It's the beginning and the end of a woman's life. It would be fatal if Miss Berrington married right in the middle of rehearsals. You know what rehearsals of a new play are like? Ceaseless work day and night; nerve-racking."

"I didn't think of that."

"There's something else. Something more important. Miss Berrington will be standing in the full glare of publicity—just as if one stuck her up on a pedestal in the middle of Piccadilly Circus and turned a score of search-lights on her. The news of her marriage is bound to leak out. It won't be good for business. The public likes to surround its footlight favorite with a certain amount of romance. There isn't any romance in a married woman—or there shouldn't be! Not in England at any rate."

"What difference can it make to her work? It's her work that will count."

Duhardt shook his head sympathetically. "Not in London, my boy. It's all the little paragraphs in the daily papers. The picture post-cards, the fas-

cinating portraits in the weekly journals and the monthly magazines. The public likes to have a heroine off the stage as well as on. If she marries the *Duke of Montguise* in the play it likes to go home and over the tea cups marry her to the Duke of Somebody-Else. If it knows she's plain Mrs. Humphry, the author's wife—well, it lets her down."

"Oh, that's all rot," Ralph said fiercely.

Duhardt turned away, and picking up the contract which Humphry had signed, he slipped it into a drawer in his desk.

"Very well, I'm only asking you to wait until her position is absolutely secure in London. When Miss Berrington is *it* she can do as she likes, marry her chauffeur or a pork-butcher. Marry her in three weeks if you wish, my dear fellow, but we must find another leading lady for the play."

Ringing the bell he gave a clerk the bundle of telegrams he had written out and told him to despatch them at once.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to go now; I've a score of people waiting to see me. Think it over. I must have your decision at four o'clock. I haven't mentioned it to Miss Berrington; women are funny creatures; but probably she would feel as I do—wouldn't like to tell you for fear of hurting you."

Ralph walked to the door. He stood there some seconds with his back to Duhardt. At last he spoke.

"Very well, I'll wait," he said unsteadily. "But you mustn't expect me to wait too long. If the play's a success, and Myra makes the hit she's bound to make, then she becomes my wife, and I'll see the public—"

"Exactly," Duhardt smiled pleasantly. "And you'll probably be grateful to me for my suggestion. A good thing's always worth waiting for, eh?"

Ralph Humphry left the room without replying. Duhardt touched the electric bell button by his side.

"I'll see Mr. Smith now," he said to the clerk.

He picked up a portrait Myra had given him of herself, from which lithographs were to be made for the posters. He looked at it critically.

"Hanged if I'd have waited for you if I'd been in his position," he said to himself. The ferrety eyes grew bright and a cunning smile parted his lips.

"If the wedding bells have got to ring it is I who will set them jangling, Myra. *'When the man takes the woman he loves in his arms he goes to paradise.'*"

He laughed under his breath as he laid the portrait down. "*You* may think it's quite a different place, Myra, but I guess I'll take you there, my dear, and we'll stop at Paris *en route.*"

CHAPTER XVI.

The Spider Meets the Fly.

REHEARSAL was just over for the day. It commenced at eleven o'clock, and had proceeded with a short interval for refreshments until late in the evening. Ralph called a cab and drove Myra to Alma Mansions. This had been the fourth rehearsal, and to Ralph's surprise and to Myra Berrington's relief, Duhardt had not once put in an appearance on the stage.

Now that things had more or less settled down, and the first flush of excitement gone, Ralph felt inclined to criticise Mr. Duhardt and his methods—and there were a score of questions he would like to put to him.

Who was Mr. Paul Duhardt, anyway? Where had he suddenly sprung from? What was his capital?

Ralph asked these questions of Myra as they drove along. After all, she was in a sense responsible for him. He was her discovery.

"I don't know anything more about Mr. Duhardt than you do," she told him now. "I only know that he's got

plenty of capital, and after all nothing else matters to us, does it? Especially as he's letting you produce the play your own way."

Ralph was tempted to tell Myra of Duhardt's stipulation, that they should not marry until the play had been produced and she had made her position secure. He was waiting for her to say something about their marriage; it hurt him that she had never referred to it since that evening at the Savoy Restaurant.

"No one seems to know anything about Duhardt," he continued. "I suppose he's all right?"

"It's too late to think about that now," Myra replied uneasily. "I don't suppose Mr. Chagford would have leased him the theater if he hadn't been." She laid her hand on her lover's arm. "You mustn't worry about anything except the production." She gave a curious little laugh. "If only your play's a success you'll have every manager in London imploring you to write him one. Then there'll be the provincial, colonial, and American rights. You haven't parted with those to Mr. Duhardt?"

Ralph was forced to admit that he had done so. "I couldn't fight or argue about it. Everything was done in such a rush. I get my royalty, though."

Ralph left her at Alma Mansions. "You'd better rest," he said, "and I must go home. I've several alterations to make in the second act."

Myra was glad that he had not suggested coming in. Already she had a dreadful feeling in her heart that unless she was careful they would drift away from one another. She was afraid of being left alone with him. She had not known how difficult it would be to act a part—off the stage.

It is easy enough to deceive acquaintances, friends. A woman can deceive the man who loves her, but try as she will she cannot deceive the man to whom she has given her own heart.

She entered her flat wearily, glad to be alone, yet always haunted by the knowledge that at any moment Duhardt might send for her or come to her. She told her servant to get her some tea.

"There's a gentleman waiting to see you in the drawing-room," the maid replied. "I think he said his name was Mr. Vessie."

"Vessie!" Myra stopped with her hand on the door handle. What could Sir John want with her? She thanked Heaven, as she pushed the door open, that Ralph had not come up.

Reggie Vessie rose from his seat and flung his cigarette away. He held out his hand rather awkwardly.

"Hope you don't mind my coming. I just missed you at the Ingénue, so I thought I'd come on here. They told me you had finished rehearsal and gone. I suppose that is the sort of thing doorkeepers always say to strangers."

Myra Berrington stared at him amazed: "I don't understand."

Reggie plucked at his fair mustache. "I say, you don't mean to say you've forgotten me. That's awfully rough luck. I suppose it's a year or more since we last met. My name's Vessie—Reginald Vessie. I came round to see you last when you were playing at the Old Empress. Awfully rotten play—but you were ripping."

Myra gave him her hand and then dropped into a chair. "So you're Mr. Reginald Vessie, Sir John Vessie's son! Oh, yes, I remember you now—quite well. But somehow or other I never connected you. But that's why the name seemed so familiar!"

"That's all right then." Reggie did not seem quite at his ease. He helped himself to another cigarette and sat on the arm of the chair he had been occupying. "You don't mind my smoking?"

Myra shook her head. "To what do I owe the honor of this visit?" she asked, trying to speak lightly.

"Oh, I don't know. Only got back to town this afternoon. Saw your

name on the hoardings. And—well, I've never forgotten you, you know. I was an awful young ass when we had that rag at Aldershot. And, by gad, you were a recent sort."

Myra smiled. She remembered now. A lot of overgrown, high-spirited boys conducted her back to her hotel. They had showered flowers on her at the theater. That had been nothing unusual. The same sort of thing occurred when she went to Oxford or Cambridge.

"You've grown up now," she said. "You mustn't be surprised I didn't recognize you."

"But I haven't changed," Reggie cried eagerly. "I mean—"

Myra's thoughts were running ahead. "Why did you call?"

He got off the arm of his chair and sat closer to her. "Because I wanted to see you, of course. I suppose you think I've forgotten? Hang it all, a fellow doesn't change in eighteen months."

Myra sighed. "Are you trying to remind me that you made love to me? You were a boy then, Mr. Vessie. And there were a lot of other boys. And they all made love to me." She tried to laugh.

"I know," Reggie said quickly, "they always did to every pretty women they came across. But I was different. I mean, I really liked you just for yourself."

Myra really laughed now. "You're awfully kind."

From the way he spoke and behaved Reggie Vessie was reminiscent of his father. He was a young man of the world, and just as innocent as the old man. She found herself wondering cynically what woman would open his eyes and pick his pockets.

"I don't think you've told me yet why you really came to see me," she said.

"Yes, I have," Reggie replied, looking at her eagerly.

He wondered why he had ever lost sight of her. Her beauty made him feel tongue-tied. It was rather wonderful to find himself alone with this beautiful actress in her own flat. There was an atmosphere about the room quite different from the atmosphere at home, or to that which he found in other houses when he paid duty calls or went to dull, respectable dances.

"I get beastly fed-up in London sometimes. It's awfully rotten living alone and only meeting the usual conventional people one's got to meet, you know!"

"So you'd like to come and see me sometimes as an antidote?" There was a pause. "Is your father aware that you know me? You say you only came up to town to-day. Did you tell him you were coming to call?"

Reggie Vessie flushed. "Rather not. He's awfully old-fashioned; he wouldn't understand. But all the same I wanted to ask you something about him. We were talking of you yesterday."

"Really?" She tried to speak lightly, but her heart commenced to beat at an absurd rate.

"You met the guv'nor, didn't you, coming over from Homburg?"

"He told you that?"

Myra was on her guard. Reggie Vessie made her think of her lover. Her soul revolted against the idea of seeing this boy's ideals dragged into the mire, his faith in his father shattered, and perhaps his home life destroyed.

"Oh, yes! I met your father in Homburg," she replied quickly. "We were both there for the cure. He told you— What did he tell you?"

Reggie rose from his seat and commenced to walk up and down the little room. He did not find it easy to explain, but Myra waited, wondering what was coming.

"Look here, Miss Berrington, I want to be straight with you. Father did not tell me everything. You rang him up on the telephone the very night he got home. Of course when I heard your name I was rather surprised.

Then a few days later I got a letter—a beastly, anonymous letter—in which your name and the guv'nor's were mentioned."

"A letter? An anonymous letter?" She made no attempt to disguise the anxiety in her voice.

"Yes. It was addressed to Mr. John Vessie, so naturally I opened it. I can't quite remember how it was worded. But it sort of suggested—well, you know, blackmail."

Myra covered her face with her hands, and a low cry escaped her lips. Blackmail! Was she to be haunted by that loathsome crime for the rest of her life?

"Do you think I wrote that letter?" she asked when Reggie had roughly outlined the contents.

"Good Heavens, no!" he cried vehemently, turning on her. "Such a thought never entered my head. I know you didn't. Do you think I should have come to see you if I had?"

"Then who—" Was this Paul Duhardt's work? It seemed impossible. He would not risk it; he had got all the money he wanted. He had made himself safe by getting it through her. And yet who else could have known, who else could have done it?

"Of course the guv'nor was rather upset," Reggie continued. "If I'd been he I'd have chucked it into the waste-paper basket. But I suppose for your sake he thought the matter ought to be sifted to the bottom. Anyway, he sent for some beastly detective chap."

"A detective?" Myra rose to her feet.

"Yes. Arthur Brown. Do you know him?"

Myra shook her head.

"Well, he knows you. He remembered that night at Aldershot, spotted me when I came into the hotel. Of course, that doesn't matter. Had to tell the guv'nor all I knew—which was nothing."

Reggie looked at her, then crossing to her side, took her hand. It was quite cold and lifeless. "I say, I almost wish I hadn't told you anything. You mustn't let it upset you, Miss Berrington. Surely you know the guv'nor's the straightest of men. He'll see that you're protected."

Myra began to laugh. With a great effort she stopped herself. "And so you came to warn me? Your father doesn't know that?"

"Of course not."

Myra withdrew her hand, and told Reggie to sit down again. Neither of them heard a ring at the front-door bell.

"I suppose you haven't the faintest idea who is the author of that letter?" Reggie asked. "It's simply vile just because you're a woman with no one to protect you, that some foul brute should try. By gad, if I get hold of him I'll wring his neck."

Myra looked at him, and forced a smile to her lips. Her face was white, her eyes lusterless. "You mustn't give it another thought, Mr. Vessie. It doesn't matter a bit to me. Women who live alone and work for their living have to take risks. It's splendid of you to have come to me and been so frank. But you mustn't come again."

He leaned forward and seized both her hands. She tried to draw them away, but he would not let them go. "I certainly shall come again," he whispered. "Now, more than ever."

She shook her head, and looked at him imploringly. The pallor on her face, the expression in her eyes only increased his determination to serve her and his desire to see her.

"Hang it all, it's my duty, now. I'll tell the guv'nor, if you like. We'll let this blackmailing brute see we're not afraid of him. I tell you what, when I get leave for a week-end, I'll motor you down to Napperly Hall. Lady Vessie would just love you, I know she would."

Myra commenced to laugh hysterically. "You don't know what you're

saying. And you're hurting me. Please let go my hands."

Reggie Vessie shook his head. He possessed all the quixotic chivalry of a former century. Two years ago he had been head over ears in love with Myra Berrington. He felt the boyish passion return with renewed force. He was a man now—and she needed his protection.

"Not until you've told me when I can come again," he cried. "Not until you've promised to let me see this thing through for you. To—protect you."

He bent closer. She wrenched her hands free. She felt tempted to strike him: "For your own sake, for your father's sake—"

The remaining words rattled unsaid in her throat. For the door opened and Paul Duhardt walked into the room. Reggie pushed his chair back and rose to his feet with a smothered oath. Myra Berrington got up, too, and, walking to the windows, flung them open.

"Want to have a little talk about the play, to hear how it's going," Duhardt said quietly. "Haven't had a look at rehearsals yet." He turned toward Reggie, then walked to Myra's side: "Won't you introduce me?"

Myra Berrington was staring at Reggie, trying to tell him to go. He saw fear in her eyes. She said nothing, only looked at him.

"My name's Vessie. Reginald Vessie. Perhaps you'll tell me yours?"

"Paul Duhardt. Manager of the Ingénue Theater. I'm presenting Miss Berrington in a new play in five weeks' time. Glad to meet you, Mr. Vessie." He held out his hand. "Sir John Vessie's eldest son, I presume?"

Reggie nodded. Duhardt looked at Myra, then opened the door again. "I'm afraid you're tired, Miss Berrington. Long rehearsal, I suppose? Hadn't you better take off your hat and have a little rest before we talk business? I'll entertain Mr. Vessie and give him a cup of tea. I noticed the servant was bringing it in."

Myra slowly crossed the room. She had to do what she was told. Duhardt watched her into the passage, then closed the door.

"Sit down, Mr. Vessie, and have a cigarette," he said condescendingly. "I suppose you're an old friend of Miss Berrington, eh?—interested in her career as an actress?"

Reggie nodded. He was trying to sum up Paul Duhardt. Instinctively, with the egotism of youth, he resented him.

"Well, I'm very glad we've met," Duhardt continued. "If you're one of the select few who have realized Miss Berrington's genius, then this is just the moment when you can make yourself useful and help her! Would you like to?"

CHAPTER XVII.

In the Web.

REGINALD VESSIE stroked his fair mustache thoughtfully. He could not help feeling slightly flattered at what Paul Duhardt had just said.

"One of the select few to help the well-known actress, Myra Berrington!" It was quite the fashion, too, to be mixed up in theatrical enterprise.

Reginald Vessie had on the whole been very well brought up, but it was only natural that his father's position in the county, his wealth, and the regiment to which Reggie belonged should have given him an undue sense of his own importance.

And now at Duhardt's words he became more keenly alive than ever to his own importance.

He commenced to walk about the room, his hands in his trouser-pockets. "In what way do you imagine I can serve Miss Berrington? And—er—by the way, what makes you think I wish to serve her?"

Duhardt raised his eyebrows in mild surprise. "I beg your pardon if I've made a mistake. I had an idea, I don't

know why, that you were an old friend of Miss Berrington's, and naturally interested in her career. She has had so few real chances. Every one admits her genius, but she has never been connected with a really popular success."

Reggie Vessie cleared his throat and nodded. "That's true."

"In this country unless an actress keeps right in the public eye, and plays in two or three successes, managers won't look at her, and she can never get a decent salary."

"I think I know what you mean," Vessie said, standing beside Duhardt and looking at him critically. "But where do I come in? I can't write Myra—Miss Berrington—a play. I wish I could."

Duhardt glanced uneasily toward the door as it opened. But only the maid entered, bringing in the tea. "She's got a play all right," he continued. "I've got the theater, the prettiest in London. I'm backing her for all I'm worth. What she wants, Captain Vessie—"

Reggie corrected him, and explained that he had not yet obtained his captaincy.

"All she wants, my dear sir, is booming, advertising!"

"That's rather cheap, isn't it?"

Duhardt wagged his finger knowingly. "If I were to do it—I, as a business man with my business instincts—yes! But supposing a man in your position were interested—"

Duhardt waited to see the effect of his words. Reggie once more took a turn up and down the room. He was certainly feeling interested and, without knowing it, was also feeling flattered.

Duhardt sat down before the tea-table and poured out two cups of tea. Presently Reggie drew his chair close up to Duhardt's.

"I'd like you to explain a little more fully. I don't see what I can do—to advertise Miss Berrington. Anyway, I hate advertisement. Beastly bad form."

"Have a cup of tea. That looks rather a nice cake on your left."

Reggie Vessie suggested they should wait for Miss Berrington. Duhardt explained that her flat was Liberty Hall.

"And you're a Bohemian at heart, Mr. Vessie; you are one of us. I can see that at a glance."

"I believe I am," Reggie acknowledged smilingly. "I get awfully fed-up in London with the usual round. The army's all right as an amusement or a side show, but I'm hanged if I can see it's any good as a profession. But about Miss Berrington?"

"You admit that she's a beautiful woman?"

"By Gad, yes. I'm only just beginning to realize how beautiful."

"She would make a sensation in society. But nowadays people have to have things thrust under their noses, hence the necessity for advertising. One can't advertise actresses as one does patent medicines—certain managers do, but I don't believe in it. Anyway, Myra Berrington isn't that sort."

"Of course not," Reggie agreed. "It wouldn't do at all in her case."

Duhardt emptied his cup of tea and lit a cigarette.

"Now, what Miss Berrington wants," he continued, thoughtfully blowing a cloud of smoke between his lips, "is a man of the world, a gentleman moving in decent society who will introduce her to the right sort of people. Take her about to the right places. To put it coarsely, some one who will show her off! A beautiful actress, Mr. Vessie, is like a great picture: she has got to be exhibited before she can be appreciated."

Reginald Vessie was silent. He did not quite know what to say. The suggestion was sudden and unexpected.

"You see," Duhardt continued, "directly the play is produced at the Ingénue Theater, Miss Berrington will be pestered with attentions from the wrong sort of men, both young and old.

You know the type as well as I do, Mr. Vessie."

Reggie nodded. Duhardt handed him a cigarette and lit a match for him. "It's very sad for Miss Berrington that she's alone in the world," he said sententiously. "She's never made friends—a shy, retiring nature. By the way, has she ever met Lady Vessie or Sir John?"

Reggie started, and the color mounted to his face. Duhardt pretended to be busy pouring out another cup of tea.

"No — that is to say — I think my father ran across her—when he was at Homburg." He had half a mind to confide in Duhardt.

"I know you won't misunderstand the interest I take in Miss Berrington," Duhardt said as he stirred his tea. "While she's under my management I feel I have a duty to perform. No breath of scandal must attach itself to her name."

"Rather not!"

"So I hope you won't mind my suggesting that if you're interested in her future and wish to remain her friend, you'll introduce her to Lady Vessie."

"I never thought of that." Reggie spoke under his breath.

Duhardt laughed pleasantly. "Mothers are very jealous of their sons, and they seldom look with favor upon any friendships they form away from home." He waited for few moments: "The simplest and most tactful thing to do would be to motor Miss Berrington down to Napperley Hall one Sunday. During these strenuous rehearsals a day in the country would do her a world of good. Probably Lady Vessie would fall in love with her at first sight. Whereas, if you wrote and said you wanted to introduce her to a friend of yours who was an actress, well"—again he laughed—"you're a man of the world, you know!"

"Yes, women are funny about those things," Reggie agreed.

"And if people knew that Miss Berrington was received at Napperley Hall they couldn't say anything—anything unpleasant concerning your friendship for her. In this world it's still the woman, the innocent woman, who suffers; especially if she's alone and earns her own living."

Reggie sat back in his chair and threw his cigarette away. "I'll do it! I've got a little car, two-seater. If I can get leave I'll run her down next Sunday. There's only one thing—"

Duhardt knew what that one thing was, but he held his peace.

"I'm very glad I met you, Mr. Duhardt," Reggie Vessie said. "I'll think over what you've told me. I don't see how I can be of much real service to Miss Berrington, but, by Jove, I'll do my best."

"Probably you can do a great deal more than you think. You see, you're what we call a white man in America, and that's what Miss Berrington wants to protect her against the other sort. Your name, Mr. Vessie, stands for all that's clean and straight in English society."

Before Reggie could reply the door opened and Myra came into the room. She had changed her dress for a pale mauve wrap. She looked very pale and tired.

Reggie placed an armchair for her and put a cushion at her back. Duhardt poured out a cup of tea and Reggie handed it. After a while Duhardt hinted at the conversation he had had with Reggie.

"I'm afraid all my time will be taken up with rehearsals for some weeks," Myra said, and she threw a frightened glance at Duhardt.

"You must let me fetch you from the theater sometimes," Reggie said, "give you a bit of lunch or dinner at the Savoy grill, and a run round the park in my car."

"Excellent," Duhardt agreed. Rising, he glanced at his watch. "Well, I must be off now. I'm sure you're too tired to talk business, Miss Berrington. To-morrow at rehearsals will do. I've two or three appointments to keep this

evening." He held out his hand to Reggie. "If you want me I'm always at your service, Mr. Vessie. You'll find me at the Ingénue every day; just send up your name, that'll be enough."

As soon as he had gone Reggie Vessie sat down by Myra's side. He felt about ten years older than he had done when he first entered the room. He was thrilled by a sudden desire to protect this woman. She was so young, so lonely, and so beautiful. He told himself he had been a young fool to lose sight of her during the past few months.

"You look awfully tired and quite worn out," he said gently. "You must rest all you can, you know."

"I am rather tired," she admitted. "I shall be all right when I've had a little sleep."

Reggie refused to take the hint. "Mr. Duhardt has been explaining things to me. I want you to know I'm absolutely at your service in future. No, don't say a word," as Myra tried to interrupt him. "It's no use refusing. I—I promise not to make love to you," he laughed boyishly, "but I'm jolly well going to take care of you and see you're not pestered by a lot of rotten outsiders. You're going to make the biggest success ever known in this new play at the Ingénue, and I'm going to help you."

The fear that was never absent from Myra's eyes now increased. What, she wondered, had Duhardt been saying to this boy? She leaned forward and laid her hand on his shoulder. He looked up into her eyes—and she shivered. He had just said he was not going to make love to her. But already she read love in his eyes.

"Mr. Vessie, listen to me. It's impossible that we can be friends. Don't think I don't appreciate your kindness, that I don't trust you. But—"

"You're thinking about that rotten letter I received, I suppose," he said angrily. "But it's all right. I'm going to motor you down to Napperley Hall next Sunday if you're free, and introduce you to my mother. I know the guv'nor would be delighted, too."

Myra Berrington heard herself laugh in a strange, unnatural way. Before she could reply the servant opened the door and handed her a half-sheet of note-paper. Myra took it and unfolded it. It contained just half a dozen penciled words.

"Excuse me for a few minutes," she said unsteadily to Reggie. "I'm—I'm wanted."

She closed the drawing-room door behind her and waited until the servant had gone back to the kitchen. The front door stood slightly ajar. She opened it and found Duhardt waiting outside.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"I came back to tell you that you've got to let young Vessie run you," Duhardt replied. "He'll advertise you better than I can. And he'll take you down to Napperley Hall. That'll give the old man a nasty jar, but if we want any more money it'll make matters easy for you."

"I refuse!"

Duhardt smiled and shook his head. "For the third and last time—you can't! Directly you refuse to obey me I shall expose you. You must remember, my dear Myra, that you are the blackmailer, not I. You asked Sir John for the money. He brought it to your flat. You took it.

"You must go down to Napperley Hall, you must make yourself pleasant to the Vessies. Tell the old man he's quite safe—for the present. That's all. If young Vessie falls in love with you so much the better. You can keep him hanging on. Now go back and make yourself pleasant. If you don't—well, I shall have to find another leading lady during your temporary absence in Holloway jail."

Turning on his heel he walked down the staircase.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

ON June 25, in the year of grace 1914, in the shadow of Witch, or Gallows Hill—that ominous crest where nineteen souls were hanged for witchcraft in the year 1692—an explosion in a Blubber Hollow leather factory started a fire that in little more than twelve hours wiped out one-third of the historic old city of Salem, Massachusetts.

Almost before the ruins of a house on Gardner Street were cold a man might have been seen digging frantically with the aid of a pick, but mostly with his naked hands, for something which he evidently hoped and prayed had escaped the devouring fury of the flames.

A militiaman with a lantern stood by and watched.

Presently, buried beneath the broken red bricks of the fallen chimney, the man found it. The sound that escaped him was one of unrestrained triumph, and without hesitation he leaped to his feet, waved joyfully to the militiaman, and bearing a battered little iron box under his arm sped off with it, scarcely halting a moment until he reached a large colonial mansion on Federal Street where two elderly ladies and one young and very pretty one awaited him with all the patience they could muster.

The young lady's name was *Alice Bancroft,* and that which the little iron box contained proved to be the prologue to a story that began exactly two hundred years before she was born.

That is the introduction to one of the most powerful and stirring stories that we have ever offered you—

THE EXECUTIONER

BY ROBERT SIMPSON

It seems almost incredible that one could successfully weave the Old World and the New, the seventeenth century and the twentieth, black superstition and the white light of modern thought into a convincing, thoroughly up-to-date novel; yet Mr. Simpson has done this in a fashion that is more than masterly.

You know what else he has done: "Clavering the Incredible," "Midnight in Wimbledon Terrace," "Barstow's Wife," "Enter the Hero," "The Red Book of Mystery," and so on. Well, we believe that this newest creation of Mr. Simpson's pen is by far his best!

This fine story will begin next week in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and will run through six numbers.

Stalwart and good to look at, long of limb, clean cut and capable seeming, with breadth and depth of chest to match his great height; a hard man with regular

good features, and eyes that tell plainly of courage and determination: such is *Pirate Swallow*, the hero of

PIRATE SWALLOW'S SACRIFICE

BY G. S. SURREY

Pirate is a South Sea trader, skipper of the schooner Firefly. The Firefly, when the story opens, has but barely won out from the tail of a snorting hurricane. More than once during the forty hours preceding, while the Firefly was being driven helplessly over miles of sea, tossing and heaving in continuous paroxysms of blind, insensate fury, *Pirate* had wondered if his life were to end amid the wreckage of his smashed vessel. The gale had snapped off a mast like a pipe-stem, had swept away a boat and more than one of the negro crew, and driven the profanity clean out of the white mate and bo's'n.

The direction the goaded Firefly had taken was known, the rest was a matter of conjecture no one, *Pirate* included, had found time to discuss, when, the hurricane blown out, the schooner had fetched up at an island in appearance like that of other thousands and been guided through the cleavage in the surrounding reef into a smiling harbor.

Swallow breathed a sigh of relief, and forthwith sent his mate and a few of the crew ashore for some fresh water and cocoanuts. And in doing that he committed an egregious blunder, for he knew nothing of the nature of the strange island or her people; and he has cause to regret the act when, after waiting over an hour for the mate to come back, he goes in search of him.

You will like this intensely interesting tale, which is complete in our next number.

* * *

"YELLOW-JACKET!" by John Amid, is a delightful little tale about a rooster, with an eye bright as agate, and proud red comb which bears five great scarlet spikes, and a coat yellow as gold that scintillates in the sun. He is the private property of *Ethel Blaine*, the one chicken that is really hers out of all the yellow flock that crowds the yards of her father's ranch. Her father is *Blaine*, of the *Buff Minorcas*, proprietor of the *Blaine Minorcas*, the blue-ribbon breed, who has taken more prizes at the great Los Angeles show than any one else in all Southern California, except his neighbor, *Henry Bumiller*.

Ethel Blaine thinks the world and all of *Yellow-Jacket*, though among the great, insolent cocks of her father's flock he does look terribly small and undersized, and his legs and bill are badly off-color for a *Minorca*. But he can whip them all just the same, and the day comes when he makes *Ethel* very proud of him.

* * *

"FLATIRON, TROUPER," by Dale M. Brown, will take you back to the time when you sat on a board six inches wide 'way up under the hot roof of a circus tent and watched the clowns cavorting about in the ring below; the rough-riders and trapese performers doing their stunts, and the elephants, for beasts of their size and stupid appearance, performing marvelous feats of legerdemain.

Flatiron is a circus follower.

When the story opens he is sitting on a fence watching the flunkeys pull down the cook-shack. He is tired and hungry, and has several times been on the point of hitting up the cook-shack boss for a feed. His eyes ever and anon search the ground outside the entrance, hoping against hope that some careless kinker would drop his meal ticket, in which case *Flatiron* feels reasonably certain of something to allay his hunger. But his hopes do not materialize, and he is still sitting on the fence when the last stakes and poles are loaded onto the wagon for the trip to the cars.

It will amuse you to read what *Flatiron* does in this emergency.

* * *

"THE FINCHLEY PUZZLE," by Richard Marsh, is the second of the "Adventures of Judith Lee, Lip-Reader," the first of which, "The Clarke Case," was published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for July 10.

In this new story *Judith* is threatened by a combination of criminals who, alarmed at her activities, and fearing greatly her, to them, mysterious power, decide to put her out of the way.

A rather strenuous position, is it not? A young and pretty girl, whose only desire is to be allowed peacefully to pursue her profession, at war, single-handed, with a gang of the most desperate crooks in Europe. It ought to stir up some excitement, hadn't it? Well, it does, and the telling of it makes a story of absorbing interest.

HIS FIRST LETTER TO US

TO THE EDITOR:

On the 27th of April I was burned out of my house, and was also burned badly

myself, so that I could not attend to business. To-day is the first day I have been able to write a letter, and my first is to you, because I like the ALL-STORY WEEKLY so much. I beg you to send me all the back numbers from May 1. Enclosed find money order for $4.00 for renewal for one year.

Yours respectfully,
FRANK RINALDI.

Mabton, Washington.

ANENT "O'TOOLE'S WATERLOO," BY CARVEL-CAREWE

(After havin' perused the poetic press-notice concernin' me masterpiece.)

WHIST! DEAR EDITOR:

Faith, how can I keep sore at the way that you juggled me name, when your poetry's grand and must surely command both world-wide attention and fame! So, thanks for the elegant manner in which you have went and writ up that same funny switch.

And assurin' yer highness your blarney is shwell, 'tis meself be remainin',

Yours,
CAREWE-CARVEL.

THE GOOD OLD INCOMPARABLE

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed find post-office money order for $4.00 for which please send me that good old incomparable, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, for one year, beginning with the June 19 issue. My former subscription expired all too soon, and if I don't get to finish "The Promise," and read others like "The Quitter," "The In-Bad Man," and others as good, well — words cannot express what might happen.

Wishing you continued success with your grand magazine, I remain,

Sincerely,
B. H. BUCHANAN.

P. O. Box 326,
King's Mills, Warren County, Ohio.

BETTER EVERY ISSUE

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed you will find 10 cents in stamps for which send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for June 5.

Just a word in favor of the ALL-STORY. I have read it many years, along with other Munsey publications, and it is getting better every issue. Your authors are all good and I have no kick any source.

Wishing you all kinds of good luck in making up a still better magazine, I remain,

An ardent reader,
MERETT H. ROYER.

Hingham, Massachusetts.

AFTER THE DAY'S LABOR

TO THE EDITOR:

Nearly since the initial number have I been a reader of the ALL-STORY as my favorite diversion after a day of labor at the editorial desk. Its marriage to *The Cavalier* was very displeasing to me, as the union cut out many of the restful and entrancing stories of the old *All-Story*. The divorce of name came as good news, and I sincerely hope it will be followed by a return to the good stories of the old days. Edgar Rice Burroughs has ever been the peer of all, although I found few stories that were not well worth reading before the amalgamation; but since that time I have been forced to pass many a one by. I would like to see my old friend the ALL-STORY in reality instead of name only.

Yours truly,
B. L. BIERCE.

Editor, *Herald*,
Iola, Wisconsin.

PARDONS GIESY FOR HIS NERVE

TO THE EDITOR:

Believe me, your magazine is a corker, top hole from start to finish. I began to read the ALL-STORY two years ago, and since then I have not missed a number. What has happened to Zane Grey when he is not sending in another story as good as "The Lone Star Rangers"?

Edgar Rice Burroughs had better begin writing that sequel to "The Mucker" or he will find himself forestalled; some of the *Mucker's* fans will take up the story where Burroughs left off, and bring it to a better ending. I think that "The Curious Quest of Mr. Ernest Bliss" was one of the best stories ever published in your magazine, and it certainly is the best story Oppenheim ever wrote.

I have just begun to read "House of the Hawk," by J. U. Giesy, and it certainly promises to be a good yarn, although the introduction of *White Kate* was rather a novelty in fiction writing. It is seldom we get such a close view of a heroine.

However, the story promises to be O. K.,

so we will pardon Mr. Giesy for his nerve. "The Promise," by J. B. Hendryx, is tip-top. If you continue to publish such good stories in the future as you have done in the past, your magazine will never go bust for want of readers.

From your friend and booster,

J. A. JOHNSON.

P. S.—By the way, when is Jacob Fisher going to write that sequel to "The Quitter"?

J. A. J.

A DETECTIVE STORY DE LUXE

TO THE EDITOR:

Quite recently I was fortunate to secure four back numbers of *The All-Story* (monthly) containing the complete novels: "Under the Andes," "A Man Without a Soul," "The Outsider," and "The Invisible Empire."

Each of these stories was remarkable, and I only regret that I wasn't born sooner (I'm only twenty). I began reading the present magazine with the amalgamation, and I've noticed the kicks registered by THE ALL-STORY readers because of the consolidation. And no wonder! I opine that the discontinuation of that periodical was a terrible loss to the reading public as well as a financial loss to the publishers.

But I suppose you know your business.

Below you will find a listed report of the serials published in the second quarter of this year. It is gratifying to state that you have done exceedingly better than for the first three months. The average is 87 per cent, a gain of 12 per cent on the first quarter. I mark them according to how I liked them.

"The Mysterious Goddess" is a detective story *de luxe*. Footner, Gregory, and Titus are three comers, the latter's "Doc!" is an exceptionally dramatic story. "The Bondboy" is big, vital, and wonderful. "Cinder-Eve," by Jackson, was rather good, and the situations were clever and amusing.

Although "Pellucidar" is a sequel (a good one) to "At the Earth's Core," that does not, and must not, be the last story about this wonderful land. *Innes's* inner world is too wonderful to be forgotten so soon.

It is little over a year since the amalgamation, and in that time you have published six big stories: Grey's "Lone Star Rangers," Oppenheim's "Curious Quest," Simpson's "Clavering the Incredible," Ogden's "The Bondboy," and Warner's "The Man-Eater." Of course there are scores of other good and extra good novels, but the aforementioned are top-notchers.

I haven't listed the novelettes because only several were worth while.

Ayres, Ruby M., "Barriers Strong"	.85
Burroughs, Edgar Rice, "Pellucidar"	.95
Buchanan, John, "The Thirty-Nine Steps"	.90
Crewe-Jones, Florence, "The Laughing Death"	.85
Footner, Hulbert, "The Fur Bringers"	.92
Fredericks, Arnold, "The Mysterious Goddess"	.95
Hendryx, James B., "The Promise"	.90
Ogden, George Washington, "The Bondboy"	.99
Sheehan, Perley Poore, "Abu, the Dawn-Maker"	.40
Titus, Harold, "Doc!"	.96
Warner, Anne, "The Man-Eater"	.98

Very truly yours,

J. R. CHROMEY.

720 Donnelly Street,
Duryea, Pennsylvania.

ADMIRES FERTILE IMAGINATIONS

TO THE EDITOR:

As per your suggestion (and well you know same will be followed by many), I am enclosing herewith forty cents in stamps, for which you will please send me the four copies of *The All-Story Cavalier* containing the story entitled "At the Earth's Core," by Edgar Rice Burroughs, of which "Pellucidar," now running, is a sequel.

We certainly do enjoy the magazine, and particularly those dandy impossible stories. We admire the imaginations which can conceive of such plots and carry them to a successful finsh.

I wish your magazine every success in the world.

MRS. MARGARETT E. DRANBAUER.

1415 Webster Street,
Baltimore, Maryland.

PREFERS COMPLETE NOVELS TO SHORTS

TO THE EDITOR:

I quite agree with Claude A. Beardsley concerning the short stories. I would rather have a complete novel instead.

Give us more stories like "Sand," "The Mucker," the Semi Dual tales, and countless others that are very good.

Please continue these interesting stories. Also do not forget the Heart to Heart Talks.

MINERVA V. SMITH.

277 Christian Street,
Steelton, Pennsylvania.

Crazy With the Heat

by Suzanne Buck

THE display-room at Heinsheim's, "Fine Millinery, Wholesale," was in the perfection of order for the season's opening. As Heinsheim said it, "While it ain't not the opening, official, yet better we should be ready sooner as later."

Heinsheim's knowledge of the business and of the customers was comprehensive, indeed. Next to him in the matter of acquaintance with the trade came Abie.

Abie had never heard of that rolling stone, whose desuetude of moss has for so many years been the subject of comment, but he was conscious that perseverance in any one line was the course of action which insured ultimate success. For that reason he stuck doggedly at his post, even though his blue coat and his brass buttons had lost for him their fascination.

Abie wanted to be a bookkeeper, and even though this desire for a long time nourished on nothing other than that which was visionary, it finally attained a degree of strength which completely overshadowed whatever of timidity he entertained about broaching the subject, and one morning he approached Heinsheim with a distinct view to improving his situation.

But the poor boy chose an unfortunate time. Heinsheim was opening his mail, and the first letter had brought to him the news of a ribbon mill's insolvency, with the receiver's notice, "Please remit," scrawled at the bottom of his statement.

"Mr. Heinsheim," Abie began, timidly, "I want a raise."

"Raise," echoed Heinsheim, absently. He was thinking of the businesslike receiver at the mill. "The dirty, low-life! So quick he wants already his money?"

Then he looked up and saw the boy.

"Good-morning, Abie Rosenshein. For what reason you ain't now by the elevator, hah?"

"Because I want a raise," answered Abie, quickly, bent on making known his mission before his courage should have oozed away. "I been at the elevators four years already."

The smoldering rebellion in his voice startled Heinsheim out of his abstraction.

"What?" he shouted, in a manner calculated to freeze all the presumption in the youth before him, while the fire in his eyes belied the chill in his voice. "All the slack season I keep you, and now, when the season is just commencing, you want from me a raise?"

"I don't want to leave this place,"

Abie explained hastily. "I only want a higher job, that's all."

"That's all! That's all!"

The head of the firm eyed the boy, first in anger, then in wonder, and finally in pity. He nodded his head in a manner distinctly in the affirmative, but marred that complaisant quality wholly by his words.

"What you can do, anyhow?" with asperity. "What you can *do?* All the time for eight seasons you bring me the customers' cards, and even this you can't do straight. Last season you bring me a card from Miss Katzenstein, from Kankakee; the while it was Mrs. Petersburg, from Red Springs. *You* want a higher job, you—you—you—"

"But she gave the wrong card to me herself," pleaded Abie. "She herself gave the wrong card to me. If Mrs. Petersburg herself don't know her right name, how should *I* know it?"

"Silence from you!" thundered Heinsheim. Then he added in kindlier tones: "Abie, go now back by the elevator. Might to-day some customers will come. If you didn't was by the elevators, might they will think if this ain't the right place."

Heinsheim had no desire for trouble with the help on the very eve of the season, and his attitude of near-tolerance prodded Abie's ambition to one more futile display.

"Mr. Heinsheim, you ask what I can do? Every day regular, I practise my handwriting. I write now fine. And at figures, I'm extra fine."

Increasing confidence became apparent in him.

"Lemme show you," he volunteered eagerly. "If you had two hundred chickens running around here, and somebody offered you sixty-two cents apiece for 'em, and then somebody else came and said, 'I'll give you sixty-two and a half cents for 'em,' apiece, I mean, how much would you make more on the second man than if you sold out to the first man?"

Pausing for a second he flashed a look at the open-mouthed Heinsheim, and then continued, triumphant, secure that his was a superdemonstration of mathematical ability.

"You'd make just a dollar more, because he'd give you one hundred and twenty-five dollars, and the first man could only give you one hundred and twenty-four dollars, see?"

But Heinsheim only snapped viciously in answer:

"By me in the showroom, Abie, ain't no chickens running around. There is only there muddles," he said severely. "I should worry me my head about your figures." His disregard for simile was awful. "Muddles figures and chickens figures is something again altogether difference.

"Go now back, Abie, by the elevator," he said with decision, "and don't make for me no more bother. From you I'm tired already."

Then he turned back to his desk.

"But, Mr. Heinsheim, I can do any kind figures," Abie persisted. "*Any* kind! Just like I done that, in my head. Any kind at all. Ask me something!" His request was almost imperative. "Go on, ask me something!"

"*I'll* ask you something," yelled Heinsheim, whirling about furiously, while every vestige of patience fled from him and he shook his fist in dangerous proximity to Abie's nose. "I'll ask you something! For why it is you didn't close all the windows last night before you went away home? Answer me that, hah! For what reason you didn't was closing all the windows? You want that the burglars should cancel for us our insurance?"

His exasperated voice shrilled until it ended in a squeak.

"You want I should ask you something? Well, now, I ask you something. For why it is you don't make me no quick answer? Now, Abie," —again he was the conciliating "head," but this time his tones carried, somehow, a note of positive final-

ity—" go you back by the elevator. Maybe next season I give the raise. —when you're worth it. By me is a man what he shows."

And with this vague promise Abie had to be content. He went back to his place in the hall, there to meditate on the ill-luck that was his. He grieved, too; grieved because he, who was in every way fitted to be a book-keeper, was only a hall-boy.

Abie, just then was in that frame of mind which inevitably invites disaster, and disaster accepted his invitation and approached, as it so often does, in the form of a woman.

In short, Ethel O'Neill emerged from the elevator.

" Card," said Abie, automatically, his mind still concerned with the scurviness of fate.

" No card," said the lady. " I want t'see Heinsheim. M'name's O'Neill."

Abie studied the scrolls in the wrought-iron of the elevator gate.

" Godda have a card," he said apathetically. " Godda have a card."

" Oh, yeh, now. *Have* yuh godda?"

It was a plaintive little speech. It brought the boy's eyes down. Mainly he became aware that she reached about to his shoulder; that yellow ringlets cascaded over her forehead and curled behind her ears and over her ears and around her ears, and then lovingly hugged her cheeks.

He liked her hat, too. It set so jauntily on her blond head. He liked the brace of wings that it flew from its starboard side and the tiny bow it blew to helm.

Why, even the wings quivered with disappointment when Abie made that short answer!

" Well, I ain't got no card," she murmured, stressing the " got " with a vocal kind of violence. " I wanted t' brace old Heinsheim f'r a job, but I ain't got no card."

Then, after a pause. " I guess I better be goin'."

She made the announcement in the manner of a question and the cadence of that Third Avenue voice stirred Abie unaccountably.

" Wait a minute," he said, quickly. " Just you wait a minute, and I'll see."

He disappeared into the office.

" Mr. Heinsheim," he whispered hurriedly, as in the man's placid exterior he remarked no trace of the previous upheaval. " There's outside a girl wants work."

" Tell her she should go in the factory and see the forelady. And make she should use the back elevator." answered Heinsheim, peremptorily. " Ain't you know it yet, Abie, that the front one is for the customers alone?"

" But she ain't a factory girl, she ain't a factory girl," Abie assured him in a kind of breathless stage whisper. " A card she ain't got, but blondie hair she's got, and she's pretty like a model. A swell little model. She's a Irish gentile, Mr. Heinsheim," he insisted; " a Irish gentile with blondie hair and a fine hat, and pretty, yet even better than a model."

Heinsheim sought to hide his interest in a great crackle of paper.

" Send her in by me here," he commanded briefly, and Abie moved quickly at the behest.

" Go in," he said, propelling the damsel officeward. " Tell him you can do anything."

And with this modestly circumscribed injunction, he subsided for the time. But he waited not too long before Heinsheim, with his hand fastened securely on the young arm of Miss O'Neill, burst on his view.

" Abie," offered Heinsheim, " Miss O'Neill is going to work by me. You show her where she should put her hat, and then you make her with the whole place familiar.

" Go mit, go mit," he counseled the girl pompously. " This is Abie. Abie will tell you everything you will want to know. Abie is the smartest boy in the place, the smartest boy. On figures Abie can't be beat. Any kind figures is for Abie easy, only not figures from musical shows."

A little cackle of merriment issued from his lips, then swelled until it became a full-fledged laugh. When Heinsheim laughed his gold chain shook. You could tell by that chain just where the chest of him ended and the stomach of him began.

"Take on her good care, Abie."

Still chuckling at his own wit, he relinquished his hold on the girl's arm and went back to the office.

Alone, they stared at each other. There was renewed interest in the brown eyes and the dawn of a great relief shining in the blue.

"Gee," giggled Miss O'Neill, "ain't that old duffer the limit?"

Abie agreed in the libel, and then Ethel O'Neill drew closer to the boy, serenely conscious that her manifold charms had taken him by storm. She shifted the chewing-gum resting behind her white teeth.

"What's y'r whole name?" she questioned, imperiously.

"Abie Rosenshein."

"Holy mackerel!" she ejaculated. "That's some mouthful, ain't it?"

"Don't you like it?"

"It's punk," she observed succinctly. "Say, why did that old guy freeze onto me like that?" She rubbed her arm and squirmed one shoulder. "What's the big idea?"

Then Abie stated a perfectly obvious fact.

"I guess he wants you to work here. Don't you want to work here?"

"Who, me? Sure, that's what I came f'r. Say"—her questions were irrelevant and her tones a trifle uneasy—"can you write nice?" She jerked her thumb backward, indicating the closed door behind which sat Heinsheim. "An' c'n yuh figger real good, like he says yuh c'n?"

"Well, I guess I can!"

Abie was boastfully radiant. Even that slur on his name was fully counterbalanced by the awe in the girl's voice.

"If you walk twenty-one blocks every day for one hundred and thirty-two days," he volleyed at her, "how many miles will you walk, counting nineteen blocks to a mile?"

Ethel backed away and regarded him helplessly. "I dunno," she said, "do you?"

"Sure," he assented, joyously. "You'll walk a hundred and forty-five miles and two blocks less than another mile. It's easy when you know how. Just as easy! *Ain't* it easy?"

"Search me. I suppose so, if yuh say it is."

She remained silent for a moment, eying him contemplatively. Then—

"If I tell yuh something, will yuh promise never t' tell a soul?"

He nodded, and she spoke candidly indeed.

"I'm a bum at figgers. Heinsheim's goin' a give me some bills t' copy in a big book. I godda foot 'em up." She giggled hysterically. "Whatever that means! You know"—there was the flavor of honey in her voice—"you tol' me to say I could do anything, an' I did, an' now I'm *so* scared! Feel my hands! Ain't they cold?"

She slid the small members into his. Her chin quivered. Her breath fanned his cheek. She had to stand on her toes for this coup, but wasn't the game worth the candle? And don't they breed 'em wise enough to know it on Third Avenue?

"Oh, you needn't to worry about that," her father-confessor advised her loftily, smiling a slow, superior smile. "I can do that little work for you."

"C'n yuh? When?"

"Dinnertimes."

"Aw!"—she shifted her gum coaxingly—"take it home! The old man can't get wise t'us, see?"

And thrilling at the nearness of the Irish gentile, the guileless youth acquiesced.

But may we waste sympathy on him? Was he the first man to burden himself with work so that a woman might riot in ease? And was he due for any more sympathy than the usual man gets in a like situation?

For a long time Abie was blissfully unconscious that he was in need of any sympathy. Though, after his day's work, he performed another day's work, doing what had been assigned to her, Abie was honestly glad that it was through him Ethel retained her position.

If Ethel talked with buyers and walked with buyers; if Ethel dined with buyers and danced with buyers, while Abie, at home, copied bills and then added whole columns of figures, he was only hazily aware of it. He was faithfully serving a lady with whom, in vague dreams, he associated himself in a roseate future; and for him that was enough. When the week drew to its close, for *his* good work Ethel O'Neill drew *her* salary.

That wily lady gained in self-possession with the passing of each day. She feared no exposé. The unmitigated wrath which Abie would bring down on his own head precluded any such possibility, and was for her sufficient guarantee of immunity.

Besides, Abie's mother depended on her son for support. He had told her that himself, and a midsummer search for work was certainly a very hazardous undertaking.

Ethel weighed not the right nor the wrong of the matter. For her, Abie was just a good thing to be worked to the limit. She even exceeded the limit.

Heinsheim found a paper which reported millinery arrivals, and commissioned her to mail out to them the firm's invitation cards. The grace with which she accepted the task charmed him inexpressibly. He admired her tremendously, and he invited admiration for her.

"Look it, Abie," he said, once, when shortly before closing time Abie licked stamps onto the outgoing mail. "Look it Ethel's work! I tell you what, that girl's a wonder. That's what she is, a wonder. All the time she's dancing. All the time she's eating mit buyers. All the time she's seeing the latest shows, and in the mornings she's fresh like daisies, and besides yet she's doing such clear-headed work! Ain't it beautiful, now?" He held up a card and a page from a loose-leaf book for Abie's inspection.

"She's a wonder," he reiterated, failing to catch the peculiar expression which flitted across the boy's face. "She's a wonder!"

Abie was beginning to glimpse how neatly he fitted the rôle of "paw," when played to Ethel's "cat," and his understanding of the situation was rendered complete when Ethel sped through the office, powdering her bit of a nose and making other hurried preparations to keep a luncheon date.

Heinsheim was constrained to call after her:

"Ethel, just now I'm showing Abie your fine work. And I'm telling it to him how for dancing you yet find time, too!" He looked after her as roguishly as he was capable of looking after anybody. "It makes me young to look on you, Ethel," he declared. "Makes me feel younger all the time!"

"If yuh keep on yuh'll need a nurse," she flung back saucily, and at this quip Heinsheim laughed indulgently.

In her scheme of things Abie existed not at all. She flew right by him.

His home-life, tinctured as it was by her Machiavellian influence, was no happier. Still it never occurred to him to balk. With all his heart, with all his strength, with every nerve in him, he labored to keep up-to-date the work which, with increasing wonder at her capacity, Heinsheim found for the girl to do.

Secure that in Abie she had a minion who would not in honor, besides the more substantial reason that he needed his job, betray her, Ethel began to flout him openly. Only when it served her purpose was she kind to him, and after each of these little séances, when skilfully she cajoled him into taking home more of her work, only after, I say, did Abie

realize how completely he was enmeshed in a web of his own making.

He grew to hate that girl, to hate every curl on her head, every flash from her blue eyes. He grew to hate her with a hate so deadly that only in the ashes of a perfect love could such a loathing have had its being.

And then he fell ill. No physical illness his, but a complete suspension of energy, which had its beginning in a feeling that, if he failed to report at Heinsheim's for a few days, the bills unposted and the unwritten cards would bring Ethel's hellish machinations to light and so obtain for him salvation.

So great was his anguish, so great the stress of mind which prompted him to this course, that the fact that absence now, at the height of the season, meant surely deduction from his wages, or worse still, absolute discharge, he waved aside as negligible.

And looking at the pallor of him, his mother wiped a tear from her eye with the corner of her apron, shook her head commiseratingly, and then clasped her hands with a gesture of supplication.

"Oh, Abie," she murmured brokenly. "I'm afraid for you! So weak you got to be, so white! I tell you all the time, 'Abie, Abie, put avay d' books,' but on me you don't listen. I know you want you should be a fine bookkeeper, but ain't better in my family I should have a live office boy like a dead bookkeeper? You need a wife she shall look out for you. That's what you need, a wife—"

Then Abie sat up and smote the air with a clenched fist. Mrs. Rosenshein was unacquainted with the situation and so failed to catch the significance of his words.

"Ain't enough I'm sick in bed already? I need yet a wife. I need yet a wife—"

He clawed the air in impotent fury, and his mother fled from him in fright.

Evening brought with it the set of the sun, and Ethel O'Neill.

"Abie," she cooed, "I'm so sorry that y'r sick."

Abie stared unsmilingly into a space which took his gaze out of the one window in the bedroom straight into the airshaft; but the view there, the blank, gray wall of the tenement opposite, was hardly enticing. The blond head bent over him was distinctly more so. Abie's esthetic sense, however, was dead.

"Are you?" he said, listlessly.

"Yeh, I am," she breathed, bending closer. Ethel had a way of bending close to any one of the masculine persuasion. Then she giggled rather nervously.

"Is it the heat what's got yuh? Yuh ain't crazy yet, are yuh?"

"I am," he returned, bitterly. "I am crazy. Just like you say"—his hand sought his head with a motion which bore out the statement—"crazy with the heat."

And no physician could have more truly diagnosed his case. Abie *was* crazy, not only with the heat that assailed him from without, the unbearable heat of the sweltering summer, but with the heat that assailed him from within. A heat generated from a galling sense of defeat, a mounting irritation which gathered itself to a fury, blind and insensate, and then fled and left him strangely languid.

"Abie," cooed Ethel again. "Abie, look at me!"

Very reluctantly Abie stopped trying to count the bricks in the opposite wall, and looked to the compelling Ethel. Her face was wreathed in smiles.

"The first day that you come back, Abie," she mouthed sweetly, "we c'n go t'the movies."

And then she smiled again.

So, indeed, must Delilah have smiled when she enticed the man who had many times Abie's strength and greater, proportionately, his power for resistance. Who, then, can blame Abie, if, without any volition of his own, his hand closed over the folded com-

mercial paper and the cards she slipped to him and he shoved them hastily under his pillow? Who can blame him if he groaned silently and turned his face to the wall?

Next day he was back to work.

"I wish that you wouldn't stay away in the season time, Abie," said Heinsheim, querulously. "Can't you get sick when the business ain't? You think you work hard, maybe. Look it that little Irisher. *She* can work! Look it, look it, look it! She is a smart girl, ask her something!"

Irritably he held up to Abie's view cards done in the boy's own handwriting; figures ranged in regular rows like soldiers on parade.

"You are thinking you work hard with nothing to do only bringing in cards from customers by the elevator. And then even you ain't got sense, but you go and get sick right in the busy season. Figures from your head you can make? Better from your head you should make a rocking-chair, and even then you'll got wood left over."

When Heinsheim became sarcastic the shadows about Abie's eyes, and the line of gray that bordered his lips, deepened.

"Look it Ethel. I say again, look it her!" He pounded his desk. "All the day she can work in the showroom and jolly with the buyers they should leave here big orders, and go out with them every night, and bring me from home yet best-class work besides!"

He regarded Abie contemptuously.

"You wanted I should give you a higher job. Not this season, Abie," he grated, "and yet not yet next season, I'm thinking."

Heinsheim clicked his tongue in conclusion, and Abie held his peace. When that most perfidious of her sex completely forgot the tryst she made in the sickroom and flew out to dine with a buyer from Kansas, his humiliation was complete; and when, three days later, he was summoned to the office peremptorily, some mysterious prescience warned him that an hour of reckoning was at hand. The thought that at last he would be discharged filled him with none of the joy he anticipated from the circumstance. On the contrary, even with the mercury at 91 degrees, he became quite cold Nor had his intuition erred.

"Look it, look it, look it!" shrieked Heinsheim, waving a yellow sheet of paper high above his head. "Only this once!"

He permitted the paper to flutter to the floor and the dazed Abie made no attempt to rescue it from its ignominious position.

"Is it right, I ask you," yelled Heinsheim. "Is it right from you, hah? You who by me should be such a faithful employer!"

Heinsheim meant "employee," but he caviled not at trifles.

"I paid that girl her salary, and all the time for nothing I was paying her! Only she sat around and laughed and put powder on the nose, more and more and more!"

His voice rose with each repetition. He shook an accusing forefinger at the boy.

"For what reason you make me pay out good money, *kosher* money? For what reason, I ask you, hah? So Ethel she run by all cabarets mit buyers and wear for my money shoes mit fancy fronts? For why you do this, Abie? For why? for why?"

He paused, not because his arraignment was complete, but because his breath gave out, and the quiet Abie thrust out a belligerent chin as all the accumulated ire against everybody who had ever wronged him flamed to the surface.

"Did *I* tell you this," he demanded, utterly forgetting the respectful "Mr." with which conversation with Heinsheim must always begin. "Did *I* tell you this? Did I? Did I?"

He waited not for answer. His voice rose in a shrill crescendo, and then slid right back again to normal. "Did *I* squeal on that Irish gentile?

'Ain't I kept still all the time I knew she wasn't worth no three dollars a week? Ain't I? She told me the first day she came how she didn't know nothing, and I promised not to tell on her. And ain't I kept my word? Ain't I always been honest? Fire me, that's right, fire me," he babbled, incoherently. "*I* did all the work and she got all the money; and now," his voice broke, "even my job I won't have. But I should worry! I should worry!"

Obviously Abie. *should* worry, and he *would* worry nevertheless.

"Who told you this?" he demanded, bringing his face close to Heinsheim's with splendid disregard for consequences. "Who told you this?"

"Abie," said Heinsheim solemnly, "read you this."

He stooped for the fallen paper and, from the Western Union sheet, Abie read:

I married Sidney Vailski of the Peoples' Emporium, this morning. Who's your best office-boy? Who's your best bookkeeper? Who did my work while I was out to rackets? Ask Abie—then raise his salary.

(Signed) ETHEL.

"Abie," said Heinsheim, as Abie lifted his eyes. "Them bills is already three days back. Go you by the books, Abie. A good elevator-boy is for me easy to find. A good bookkeeper, not!"

THE SECRET GARDEN

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

I HAVE a secret garden
Deep down within my heart,
Abloom with the mem'ries of the time
Ere Fate us twain did part.
There violets and forget-me-nots,
Soft bluets like the skies,
Recall the glances once you gave
From your loved azure eyes.
Carnations and pink peonies,
Your blushing cheeks aglow;
Your slender hands, so graceful, white,
Sweet lilies, sway and grow.
While all around, about, supreme,
Within my garden's close
Rich, rapturous roses—deep and red
Queen of all flowers—the rose,
Each one a radiant bliss is,
They are the wond'rous kisses,
Once, as a bee, sweet nectar sips,
I gathered from your warm, red lips.
When life seems dark and dreary
I steal an hour apart
To revel in this secret
Loved garden of my heart.

Through Flames of Fear

by Kendrick Scofield

Author of "Harbor-Sick," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

DOUGLAS STEELE, arriving in New York from India, finds that his aunt, Minerva Steele, with a lot of other women, is studying occultism under Swami Dewan and his disciple, Nathoo. Steele suspects crooked work, especially since Jhanavi Faron, a pretty girl of Indian descent, is mixed up in it; and his suspicions are justified when in a raid on the Swami's house he finds the rag, bone, and tooth, symbols of the Thugs. Chota Lal, Steele's Indian servant, turns up suddenly and recognizes the Swami as Nana Sahib, a Thug leader. Minerva disappears overnight, and when Steele calls at Jhanavi's home, her companion, Mrs. Montague, is terribly upset.

Jhanavi has vanished. Steele cables Captain Fitzallen Austin of the Delhi police, his old chief, and sets other wheels moving to trace the Thug and his dupes. A fresh search of the man's house gives two clues; the names of a town on the Oregon coast and of others in Indo-China. They go to the coast town, where Chota Lal finds an encampment of Thugs and kills one of them; then Steele goes on to San Francisco and learns that Nana Sahib had chartered the Matsu Maru, and that the ship will sail from a point in Magdalena Bay. Then he is attacked by a mob.

Steele comes to himself, shanghaied. In a collision in the bay he gets aboard another ship and so back, losing three days. Disguised as a Brahman he locates the horde of Thugs as they are about to embark on the Matsu Maru, and Chota Lal, posing as one of them, introduces Steele as Bhagwan, his brother. Thanks to a sacred tooth, Steele is made priest of Kali Devi. In a religious ceremony Chota Lal, really a Thug, becomes so excited that later Steele fears for his life.

CHAPTER XX.

Austin Begins to Move.

FOUR hours after Steele's cable message reached Fitzallen Austin the schedules of the luckless railway lines that lay between Delhi and the Indian summer capital all were hopelessly shattered. For Austin required immediate special trains, with special running orders, and the fat *babus* in the railway offices sweated and wondered, yet finally arranged for his speedy departure, although they knew not who was to be whisked thus across the country contrary to all their preconceived notions as to how "te-rains" should travel.

The head of the intelligence agents had the bit in his teeth. Returning to his office for a final consultation with Meddoes before his departure, he had taken it upon himself to sign and send code messages in the name of the highest official of the empire, urgently summoning to Simla the lieutenant-governors of the states of Bengal and the united provinces of Agra and Oudh.

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It was all fantastically irregular, and not a man in the whole land would have undertaken such an arrogant piece of official forgery except Austin. When finally he began his racketing journey with the summer capital as its objective, he went heralded by other code messages addressed to government officials who well knew his "unofficial" connections, and who could insure him an immediate audience with the viceroy. And twenty minutes after he had entered the town which thrives under the snow-freshened wind from the Himalaya foot-hills he was closeted with Lord Belden.

After the florid English peer had cast wondering eyes over the small bunch of cablegrams which comprised Steele's correspondence in the case he laid them down uncertainly on the desk before him, gazed at his importunate visitor with puzzled mien, and declared:

"But I don't understand this at all, my dear Austin. There hasn't been a Thug murder in India for all of God knows how many years."

"I know there hasn't—openly," the intelligence man snapped back. "But this tale is jolly well straight, your excellency. If your lately departed predecessor were here now he could vouch for what I'm going to tell you." And he related the appearance of the Thug signs upon the dead-walls of Delhi and in other cities as far south as Calcutta.

"This is no hoax," he urged earnestly. "I'm willing to stake my word on its truth, sir; and so would you if you'd known young Steele. But there isn't any time to lose. What's to be done must be done now. And, your excellency, knowing that the delay of a day or so might throw the whole thing against us, I have taken the liberty of summoning over your name the lieutenant-governors of Bengal and Agra and Oudh."

"What?" Lord Belden exploded. "Signed my name? Austin, I'll see you broken for this impertinence; I'll see—" he spluttered feebly.

"After this has been settled, as you please, your excellency," the intelligence man interposed. "I apologize now for having done it, but before this is over you will see that the only thing to do was to get them here as quickly as possible."

And then for a moment overstepping the bounds of strict official courtesy, he expostulated: "Great Heaven, man, won't you understand this is the worst crisis India has had to face since the Sepoy rebellion? Am I taking my official life in my hands this way for nothing?"

So the upshot of it was that Austin chafed and fumed in Simla until the lieutenant-governors arrived post-haste, for such command as they received had been extremely irregular and disquieting.

But during the period of his enforced inaction Austin had not been entirely idle, and had finally won grudging support from the viceroy himself, with the result that a call was sent out for the gathering of the executive council to meet unofficially with the Indian state governors and Austin.

They gathered in the viceroy's office late on the third night. There were the three Indian civilian members of the council, representing the departments of land revenues, agriculture, and education, besides those at the heads of the bureaus of law, finance, commerce, and industry; for, although a native religious uprising could not possibly be brought under the head of any of these governmental divisions, Lord Belden refused to move an inch without the sanction of his official family.

The heads of the Indian states were present, and also, at Austin's suggestion, the commander-in-chief of the British forces in the empire.

Low-toned they discussed the cablegrams, trusted secretaries guarding the doors, for none knew better than

these men how secrets leak in India. One by one they admitted themselves nonplused; it was a situation which was unbelievable.

Many times before had iconoclastic doubters asked how many years England expected to rule the empire, and the answer had been given: fifty, one hundred, five hundred years; who knows? And yet to each man there the idea that Great Britain would not always be paramount in Hind came as a distinct shock.

Midnight fell at last upon the little gathering of uneasy officials. They had learned with increased alarm that the Thugs were probably to mobilize in territory adjacent to that controlled almost exclusively by the French. Visions of the articles of the Triple Entente smashed beyond all hope of repair, should they send an armed British force to enter Cambodia, flashed consternation upon their disquieted minds.

The lieutenant-governor from Bengal made futile suggestions and was plainly beyond his depth, groping in the maze of treachery which had been bared before him. The lieutenant-governor from Agra and Oudh, palsied with the fear that there was to be repeated in his provinces outrages similar to those which had made that part of India an anteroom of hell during the early days of Thuggee, stammeringly urged:

"Cable the home office, your excellency. Ask them to request France to aid us. Great Heaven! They tell me fifty years ago every well in the whole of Oudh concealed the body of a *phansigar's* victim!"

But the beleaguered viceroy waved him aside impatiently.

"If the Thugs are about to rise," he snapped, "there must be no advertisement of the fact in France. Russian spies are thick as flies in Paris; and you should know that the Czar's men are forever lurking just over there"—he waved out through the windows in the direction of the saw-toothed ranges — "waiting for just such an opportunity to strike and gain a foothold here."

The commander-in-chief of the army in India urged a course of prepared vigilance.

"Let them come," he offered, "now that we are warned. And as soon as they set foot on Indian soil we can nab them and whisk them off to the gallows."

But that, too, was waved aside; for the viceroy, although new in his post, realized that a single seed germinating in the hot, plot-ridden climate of the empire, can sprout a million-rooted holocaust overnight.

The members of the executive council—they who looked after the thoroughly civilized matters of finance, education, agriculture, and commerce —hemmed and hawed and finally admitted that they had nothing of importance to suggest; and so, without having arrived at any definite conclusion, the meeting was adjourned overnight.

Yet, Fitzallen Austin did not go when the rest took leave. Instead, he waited until the last of them had left the room; and the viceroy, turning, discovered him.

"I have taken the liberty of waiting, your excellency, for I have a plan," he extenuated.

"Why didn't you say so while the rest were here?" the peer demanded.

Austin, standing in the middle of a huge tiger-skin rug, hands behind him, hesitated a moment. He walked to the door to make sure the secretarial guard was still at his post, and closed it carefully before replying:

"I thought it best to keep my suggestions for the present for your excellency's ears alone. The plan is one which must be secretly, though on no account openly, sanctioned by the government."

"Sit down," the queen's representative in India invited gruffly.

Austin drew forward a chair and began:

"Your excellency, there is just one way to avoid the international side of this business. We must overtake the Matsu Maru on the high seas. And if we fail in that, then we must risk embroiling ourselves with France, if the need drives. There are men in my department who will undertake that risk. If they go, they will set out with the understanding that England cannot stand behind them, and that if we miss the Thugs at sea and follow them into Cambodia, we take the chance, if discovered, of placing ourselves on the footing of an invading army."

The old viceroy was listening intently, tugging at his close-cropped white mustache.

"But," Austin continued, "the government at home must know of this, and you must authorize certain expenditures from the secret emergency fund.

"And as I see it—if the worst comes — perhaps those of us who go can stand upon the ground that Steele's servant is a British subject; yet that's a pretty slim guarantee between our freedom and penal servitude or worse.

"We may not even have to set foot on French soil," he argued hopefully. "If the Thugs keep within the Cambodian limits, there won't be much trouble. The infernal country's only a sort of protectorate, anyway.

"However, your excellency, that's my plan."

"But hang it all, Austin," the old man growled humanly, "isn't there some other way? If you and your men get tangled up in these Cambodian jungles, with French Indo-China on one side and Siam on the other, and unintentionally get across either line and are caught — why, France sends offenders such as you and your force would be to Devil's Island!"

The intelligence man laughed a little grimly, and commented:

"No, your excellency. Any way you take it, I guess it's going to be a jolly tough nut to crack. And this is the only hammer I know of that will do it—unless"—and he eyed the older man shrewdly—"you have some other notion about it."

"But I haven't," answered Lord Belden shortly. At last, fully alive to the necessities of the situation, he added more kindly: "And thank God you found it out in time!"

So the result was that, following another hurried interchange of code messages, Lord Belden lifted the responsibility off the shoulders of his councilors to his own, approved Fitzallen Austin's plan, and sent the intelligence man scurrying to Calcutta, armed with authority to proceed.

Days later what appeared to be two dingy coast traders under loafing engines pulled out from Calcutta and entered the reaches of the Indian Ocean.

Every man aboard the Irma and the Orient Star had at some time or other been in the fighting rank and file of lost hopes. Every soul of them had seen his cartridges finish in the teeth of almost certain death. Each one would take any risk however wild, and could be depended on to keep silent ever after.

The two steamers sailed within half a day of one another; within thirty-six hours hails passed between them, and Meddoes from the Irma was pulled across a quarter of a mile of midnight sea to the conference with Austin.

They sat in the cabin of the Orient Star, sea-charts between them and a handy bottle and glasses.

"You've had a chance to overhaul the packing-cases sent aboard you?" Austin inquired.

"Yes; the machine-guns are in perfect working order. Also, there's a little one-pounder and plenty of rifles."

Austin heaved a sigh of relief. "They reached you in time then?"

"Yes; and plenty of food for their dainty gullets, too."

Austin drew the chart toward them. It showed the shore-line of Cambodia, and Austin had marked upon it ever-widening circles to cover all that part of the sea off the thickly wooded shores from the Gulf of Tongking to the Gulf of Siam.

"Here's how the land lies, Meddoes: The Nana is evidently seeking a back door to India, through which his leaders can come and organize their bands, and back through which they can slip when their murder expeditions are accomplished. The empire will be the hunting-ground of his wolves, but their lair will be far away.

"You remember what Sleeman found out in the early days; that native officials always, through fear and corruption both, turned their blind sides when Thugs entered their districts? Well, as nearly as I can reason it out, it looks like a repetition of their old game. There are plenty of spots in Cambodia where, with bribes paid to the proper authorities, they can establish headquarters. Perhaps they may never set foot on French soil!

"Now, our job will be to prevent the Matsu Maru, if possible, from ever discharging her passengers except in irons aboard either the Irma or the Orient Star.

"We've got to stretch our lines to block her getting into the Gulf of Siam, and that means we've got to cover the sea from Great Redang Island off the east coast of the Malay Peninsula—here it is on the map—to Cape Padarang in Cochin China."

"Shades of Henry Morgan!" Meddoes exploded and hummed to himself a snatch of an old buccaneering ballad as he scrutinized the chart.

"Yes; it's rank piracy, I know," Austin admitted.

"But this is a bit of all right!" his subordinate enthused. "Always have wanted to be a bloody rover."

"Well, here's your chance. You'll run from Cape Padarang south by southwest to the hundred-and-eighth degree of longitude. I'll take the other. Go as far as your sanguinary mind 'll let you if necessary, and blow 'em out of the water before you let 'em land!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A Man and a Maid.

LYING there in the hold, with the clutch of death in his vitals, Douglas Steele would sell his life dearly. A quick turn of his body; an upward, twisting thrust there between the ribs which showed against Chota Lal's lean barrel — then Steele might have a chance to gain the upper deck and the women.

His fingers crept along the edge of his couch. They wormed beneath the cloth, closing upon the sturdy haft. Suddenly he wrenched the blade free.

But as he whirled for the upstroke his wrist was pinned by a clutch of iron, and Chota Lal hissed: "Lie still, heaven-born!"

Incredulously Steele loosened his grip on the blade as the Hindu went on:

"I knew not that the weapon was so near or, Bahadur, I would have spoken when I saw the sweat beading thy skin. Turn thou and face me."

And when he spoke again his words were the words of a man ashamed.

"I saw what has been in thy thoughts since the Thugs worshiped here this day, even before thou thyself knew it. And I should have told thee to have no fear." Then his voice changed, and, holding a note of pride: "Yet I could not resist deceiving thee. I played, *sahib,* and I tricked the stranglers. For into my deception I put my heart, though I had not counted upon its stealing my strength from me."

Over Steele dawned a great white light. Self-hypnotism. His servant, living the verities of his part, had mesmerized himself.

A wave of relief came, and he

laughed nervously. "Thank God, you spoke when you did, Chota Lal!" he murmured; "for I have been a fool. Go on with the work." And Steele slipped into a fitful doze while his servant completed the task.

Sheared of his foolish suspicions of Chota Lal's fidelity, Steele underwent the monotonous though perilous routine of life aboard the murder ship for many days following.

Hours when the vivid light of tropic day bathed the ship he crouched in the noisome hold, going on deck only at night for brief spaces of airing and exercise. And then, later, the approach to the hold guarded by his servant, Steele would go through simple callisthenics to keep his muscles flexible and his limbs ready for instant action.

During the first hours following that time of awful suspense behind the sail-cloth curtain Steele was consumed with bitterness and self-abasement. That he had been guilty of misjudging his man was a fault which caused him to constantly reproach himself. But later Steele saw that even before he had acknowledged to himself that he mistrusted Chota Lal the little brown man had sensed the suspicions in his bearing.

He saw that the servant had accurately catalogued his master's misgivings and assigned to them their true causes. Afterward, Ghota Lal had watched their sprouting with that tolerance which an Oriental always displays toward one of whiter skin—even to one whom he loves. And that his servant harbored no bitterness or rankling resentment Steele soon became convinced.

The life aboard the Matsu Maru took on a superficial air of idleness, despite the ever-present, ever-menacing, and horrible purpose which underlay the cruise. Day crept into tropic night and emerged fresh-born into sparkling day again as the old ship took her course southwest by south and then circled more to the rising sun, keeping out of the lanes of steamer travel.

Neither Steele nor his servant did much to further their grasp upon the intricate details of plot and plan, except that each night Chota Lal crept to the top of the upper-deck house, ready to bring word or warning to Steele from the Sahiba Jhanavi.

And, in the enforced idleness of the dim old after-hold, Steele's thoughts gravitated night and day to the girl far above him, surrounded by peril and danger which momentarily might break and overwhelm her. To him the whole grim business seemed like a death-watch at the bedside of a friend—waiting, ever waiting, for the end to come.

To plan ahead at this stage of the game was impossible. And deeper and deeper he was sinking under the charm of this warm, radiant bit of womanhood. He had not gone to her, nor had he permitted Chota Lal to tell her the truth, because until this time he had been warned off by that peculiar masculine balance-wheel which keeps brave men from being reckless and makes prudent men of those who might otherwise be rash.

He had seen this slip of a girl with the Oriental strain in her nature looking her whole soul out through eyes that glowed with a zealot's fire. He had watched her as she sat at the feet of the lean, brown old man whom she still knew as the Swami. And he had not been certain whether she would listen to his words and play the game as he dictated it.

But now it occurred to him that the knowledge she already possessed of his interest in her, which she had kept closely and faithfully, had been test enough, even though his life and hers hung in the balance.

Douglas Steele had never been a man to take snap judgment, and perhaps he would even now have refrained from entrusting all of the secret to the girl had he not remembered

that the ship had now been long enough at sea to fetch any port in the neighborhood of the Cambodian Gulf.

This in itself, if the girl were at all observant, must be a cause for new anxiety. A word of reassurance, he concluded, would be all that the situation warranted. Yet, manlike, deep in his heart Steele resented the thought that he was known to the girl of his dreams only as a swart, hairy fakir who squatted day and night in the filth of a ship's hold.

And so on the evening of the twelfth day since the northwest coast had dropped away astern Steele, instead of relieving Chota Lal of his vigil when midnight approached, insisted upon going himself to the upper deck upon the dangerous nightly vigil.

Had there been sufficient light in the dim old hold, Steele could have seen the twinkle which shot through the beady eyes of the little Hindu. But the place was dark, and Chota Lal said no word; for there is a never-to-be-broken rule between Hindu and white men who understand that no mention must be made between them of their women except in the gravest of cases.

So it was that Steele went alone to the deck again, swarmed up the stanchion to the upper half-deck, and, previously instructed by Chota Lal, finally sprawled in the friendly lee of the long-boat, his ear to the gap between awning and roof. He could hear nothing at first, and then, emboldened by the absence of sound, he turned his body slightly, applying his eyes to the aperture.

Below him Jhanavi sat alone. She had chosen to fix the time of communication after midnight, as experience had told her that Minerva Steele retired to her small, stuffy cabin early in the evening even when she was not afflicted by her particular obsession—sea-sickness.

Ears tuned and alert, Steele lay motionless. The deep-yellow tints of his turban and *languti* cloth, as well as the darkness of his skin, blended well enough into the shadows of the boat to make detection hardly likely.

He had thought it all out down there below. He must first prepare the girl for the disclosure of his identity. Just how this might be accomplished he left to the unfolding of events. At any rate, for the moment he must preserve his rôle of Hindu mystic.

From the chart-house forward came, faintly mellowed by the distance and the heavy night-air, the voice of the skipper; and he could hear the whine and complaint of the decrepit steering-gear.

But there was nothing to alarm him. So he tapped gently upon a cross frame of the top awning to attract the girl. Finally she caught his insistent summons and stirred in her chair. A moment later she stretched her arms above her head in a gesture of well-simulated weariness. The loose sleeves of her white robe fell away with the movement from elbow to shoulder, and a ray of moonlight streaking through a break in the awning fell full upon her face and bathed the warm bronze tints of her arm.

At the sight of her there below him, her form indistinct, Steele's breath quickened. The charm of the girl was heady, like a sparkling wine. Then she rose and walked to the rail, casually peering over to inspect, so far as she might, the deck beyond her canvas screen.

Satisfied that there was no one about to overhear them, she came beneath the aperture, through which peered the man whose every fiber was singing praises to her beauty, and called softly:

"There is no word, Chota Lal."

"O Queen of the River, Chota Lal remains this night below, and it is Bhagwan, his master, who has come," Steele replied, speaking as do all Hindus, even when using the language of the whites, with that unusual, musical, half-alien construction of words which so well permits familiarity without giving offense.

The girl stifled a little gasp of sur-

prise, as without realizing she looked for the first time full into the eyes of the man who had followed her across thousands of miles of land and sea.

And the man in turn comprehended in that moment that whatever might have been in his anxiety for the fate of the British in India, still this slip of a girl and her fortunes were the most potent factors in his wild venture.

But Jhanavi Faron was suffering a shock. An utterly unreasoning impulse born in her, perhaps, by the influence of the wild sea reaches, had led her during the past few days in some absolutely illogical fashion to visualize shamelessly the mysterious sage of the Matsu's hold, as the young man of the Broadway traffic crush.

Now, even in the half light of the moon, she could see that the face pressed close to the aperture was a monstrous, hairy thing; the countenance of a swart man of Hind!

She was disappointed. All her youthful romanticism, not quite dead, demanded that her protector be of more aureate clay than this great, shaggy native.

She shuddered, controlled herself, and asked, after the manner of native speech:

"Why hast thou come to me, Bhagwan?" And then, half mockingly, as the full irony of her day-dreams burst upon her: "Do the omens speak well this night; or do they foretell such ill that no tongue but thine can bear the tidings?"

Steele sensed the change in her manner. It smote like a chill blast upon his fevered blood. But he did not dream its cause, replying gravely, feigning to have overlooked her ungracious manner.

"*Wah! Wah!*" he voiced the Hindu's exclamation of surprise. "Thou hast keen eyes, O Jhanavi, that they read so readily what has befallen. For I have looked into the past and have seen many things made plain, which, until I speak, must remain as mysteries to thee."

Unimpressed, the girl listened. What there could be in the coming of the Hindu sage, in place of his *chela,* to upset her, she was too disturbed to analyze even to herself.

And every fiber of her being to-night was in open revolt against all of the dark-skinned crew with which she found herself enmeshed. Not a thought did she give to her own native ancestry, for when the scales had at last begun to slip from her eyes, they had fallen fast, and each of her senses stood hostilely, watchfully on guard.

She felt that she had been tricked and made the dupe of a wily schemer; that all her better impulses had been played upon, and it was all the more maddening because she could isolate nothing definite from the seething mass of her unnamed suspicions.

Prudence had warned her still to preserve silence as far as Minerva Steele was concerned, and long bottled up, all her annoyance and uneasiness found in the swart mystic a ready object.

"Enough of this, Bhagwan!" she snapped imperiously, as a white woman might speak to her native butler. "I am weary of the purposeless intriguings and midnight visits!"

"Softly, Sahiba!" the voice above her warned. "Thy tones may plunge us into the bottomless pit. Surely thou knowest the danger and risk in my coming this night? Would my neck or thine look well then in a noose? Caution, for a time. The hour passes and I have much to say."

Then, taking refuge in a proverb of Bengal, he quoted: "'Fraud may achieve what force would never try; the jackal killed the elephant thereby!'"

Rebuked, the girl was silent while the man above her talked rapidly in clear-cut whispers.

"I saw in my crystal a city of white men. There was a street of bazaars, but not like those of Benares or Bombay. And it was night.

"There were strange *gharries*

which ran by themselves, without horses. There were men and women afoot. And the *gharries* swept by, to a corner, where they became crowded and stalled, and there was much talk and noise.

"From one of them, *sahiba,* there stepped a girl. From another a man. And together the two went through the throngs!"

The girl, interest again rampant, demanded: "You say that you saw him—a young man?"

"I said not that he was young; I said a man," Steele replied, and though he could not see it, Jhanavi bit her lips in annoyance, while the story went on.

"I saw as I have told, O Queen of the River," and Steele added rashly, "there was in his manner the way of a man with a maid; the—"

But, irritated at the personal note which the narrator had put into his words, she broke in again:

"Hasten with the telling, Bhagwan. If there be things of importance dally not with tales of idle visions.

"What is this man to me—he whom I have hardly seen? Why tell me of these things?"

Her disdainful tones stung Steele to reckless adoration. Full and strong his love for her flared out. She stood there below him a creature of superb attributes; a woman warm, pulsing and —because of her very denials that she cared aught about the young man of the crush—elusive.

Casting caution to the winds he cried low and tensely:

"You ask why I tell these things to you? And I answer of what use are a dreamer's dreams if he may not tell them?"

His words were still in keeping with his rôle, but the low, vibrant tones of his voice flecked the girl's intuitions on the raw. Blanched and trembling she gazed upward in the swart, hairy face, which gave the lie to what her heart told her she must have known all the time.

"You are he!" she exulted. "You are the man of the motor-car; the man of the traffic tie-up!"

What preposterous talk was this of motors and traffic! For the moment Steele had forgotten that such things existed. So thoroughly had he become imbued with his rôle of Thug that since he had first looked down upon this woman he had been heart and soul a Hindu lover wooing his brown-skinned mate.

So it came as a shock to hear talk of motor-cars and Broadway, there on the deck of a black, brooding craft, racketing her reckless way across a trackless tropic sea.

But there stood the girl, bosom rising and falling jerkily in the stress of her exultation. Gone was her disappointment. Something of the latent savage stirred within her, too, for here was a champion full worthy of her colors, and best of all, her feminine intuition had been vindicated!

She started to speak, but was forestalled.

"Softly, Miss Faron," the man above her called. "We are far from being clear of the woods. And yet I fancied that I ought to trust you. I'm Douglas Steele."

"Not—not the one—"

"The same," he interrupted. "And if my ears are good for anything, I can now hear the melodious slumber song of my sainted Aunt Minerva."

"I'll waken her," the girl suggested.

"No—not for worlds, if you value our chances. Not a word to her until I tell you. I know Aunt Minerva; and you and I, with Chota Lal, are about the only cooks needed to watch while this bit of devil's broth simmers."

He again became serious, and told her as rapidly as he could sketch it out the whole infernal business.

As he talked the girl's face became bloodless, and once or twice she choked, as though sickened by his revelations.

Still, relentlessly, Steele continued baring the plot to her, counseling, advising, until the morning watch waned. And it was not until he was about to

return to his lair in the hold that a personal note crept into their low-voiced, guarded talk.

"We've got to work together, Miss Faron," he declared. "Either my man or I will be here each night. But it were better, unless there is something that you or I should know, that no words pass between us. It will just be keeping the lines up and working."

Then he went silently and cautiously, leaving the girl a prey to her own confused thoughts.

Out of the nightmare of horror which had fallen from his lips came also recollections of things this man had said, less terrible, though scarcely less perplexing than his tale. She recalled his intimate words of address, patterned after the manner of a native. Had he merely been playing up to his part?

She remembered—and this time blushed at the recollection—his words as he described the young man of his vision.

"'The way of a man with a maid,'" he had said. And again his all too unmistakable complaint: "What use are a dreamer's dreams if he must forever keep silent?"

Surely here was food for what thoughts she might steal from the ever-present peril which hung above her!

CHAPTER XXII.

The Typhoon's Relative.

ON through tropic seas slathered the bows of the Matsu. Across southern equatorial currents she plowed, sometimes over a summer sea, blue and dancing with light winds; sometimes over the treakly breast of waters, oily and viscid in calm, reeking, steaming, undulating with a slow, tired motion; and again through wrack of squall and blow, but ever with her nose reaching out across miles of latitude and longitude, and never lying to.

To the young girl in the deck cabin peace had come strangely. Even when Steele had held up to her affrighted gaze the detail of nightmare plot and horrible reality which encompassed her, the sense of security she felt in his presence aboard could not be abated.

Somehow there came to her an abiding trust in the resource and fidelity of this man, whom she knowingly had seen but once in his proper person.

And, acting under his orders, she set herself about blinding the eyes of her companion to the true state of their plight, smoothing over, explaining, extenuating many of the puzzles of the long sea journey which had finally penetrated Minerva's mind to bring disquiet to her.

Although she never learned by word or sound of his presence, she knew each night that Steele or his servant for a moment crouched there, alert, above her, ready to step before her into any unexpected breach which might have opened beneath her feet.

And the midnight journey to the top of the deck-house was the only thing to break the monotony of Douglas Steele's days, except his care of the murder temple. Yet, much of a fatalist as are most white men who have lived on the outer rim, he was content to be vigilant and to borrow no trouble.

He wanted none—that is, until the old sealer had left behind her the stark wastes of the south Pacific. His duty it was to watch and wait, and be ready to strike!

There came no further clashes between Captain Bonin and his strange passengers, although Steele and Chota Lal knew that hostilities were but postponed.

So, down through nested islands, seldom sighting sails, the Matsu Maru worked as weeks piled on weeks, and at last she entered the shambling China Sea.

Sailormen of the long voyage declare that of all the waters of earth there is none so treacherous as this. It is a place of currents and tides, of shoal

water and islands of doubtful existence, off which smoky rollers plume and break.

Across its wide reaches, where furtive pirate bottoms skulk even to this late day, the monsoon winds blow steady, until the dreaded typhoon whirls out of nowhere, lashes and tears the waters, smashes ships to kindling, dances out its howling fury, spins into another quarter, and dies, swiftly, chokingly; for it is a wind of unknown listings.

None can tell the typhoon's signs. It is likely to appear during both monsoons. Yet, the skipper of the Matsu knew that the big wind seldom reaches as far south as the steamer's course bore, and so gave it little thought.

But there is a close relative to the typhoon which whips the China Sea below the fifteenth parallel of north latitude—the northeast gale. So the old sealer, in the track of a storm not yet manifest, plowed her way early in November across a sunlit sea, sky above blue and clear, and the monsoon sweeping the heat from her sun-baked decks.

Steele, as was his custom during daytime, lay below, resting on his sailcloth bed. Up above, Chota Lal squatted in the broiling sun, taking in, through half-closed eyes, all that transpired, ready to bring his master word of change or alarm.

Out from the east-northeast whipped the gale. It sang among the old schooner-rigged steamer's cordage and whined above her laboring decks. The seas piled in mad confusion.

In the midst of the coming fury, Captain Bonin relentlessly drove the Thugs into the steerage and locked them there. He needed his decks clear for the fight which was to come.

Under battened hatches, Steele and Chota Lal crouched in the hold. Fate had thrown down a scurvy trump, for if the wild gale triumphed they would be drowned like bugs in an entomologist's alcohol bottle. All about them they could hear the pounding of the waves and the shrieks of protest voiced by the sea-smitten timbers hulk.

Hour after hour, during that space of darkness and disaster, the white man lived in the torments of hell. Every crash above him could mean but one terrible thing — that the flimsy superstructure in which the woman he loved was penned up had gone by the board.

They could get no food and no water. The heat became insufferable. And the white man and his Hindu servant, battered and tossed, fought to keep from being slammed to their deaths against the inner skin with every pitch and buck of the ship, while through the dim gleams of their single lantern Kali the ferocious, Kali the hideous, Kali the goddess of all that was black and murderous, leered above them in her arclike sweeps with the roll of the steamer.

Gall and wormwood it was to Steele to know that above him men were fighting wind and wave for their very lives, while he, because a Hindu is supposed to know nothing of the sea, was forced to remain, uncomplaining, in his trap.

Once the huge butt of the mast, stepped in the after hold, quivered and groaned. With its chocks strained, it settled to quiet thumping with the Matsu's motion, and Steele knew that the mainmast had gone.

Then the seas ceased to break so heavily, and it was apparent to the watcher in the hold that Captain Bonin must have risked some of his already short-handed crew in getting oil-bags out to windward.

That night the gale spent its fury, and with the coming of gray, dismal dawn, the hatches were lifted.

Stifled by his long imprisonment, Steele risked the dangers of the light of day, leaping to the deck to fill his lungs with clear, sea air.

Around him was desolation. Even with the sun appearing in a hot, red ball to lighten the drab of breaking darkness, the scene was forbidding, oppressive.

Forward some of the Jap sailors, under the driving of the skipper, were hacking away the raffle of the broken foremast. And Steele could see that the mainmast had suffered a like fate. One of the quarter-boats hung in splinters at its davits, and, casting his eyes upward, he saw that the extra boat atop the deck cabin had been swept away.

The old sealer had discarded most of her small boats when she cleared as useless dunnage about the decks, and now the Matsu Maru's passengers, in case of wreck, must depend upon the one remaining quarter-boat.

The upper half-deck superstructure whereon the women's cabin stood had miraculously escaped annihilation. And though strained and wrenched in every seam and strake, the hull of the old sealer seemed to have come through without fatal damage.

All that morning three of the Japs worked at clearing away the raffle, Skipper Bonin driving them, with the mate, Fuji, at the wheel. Steele, although running some added risk in the glare of day, stood by, fairly itching to get into the game, but afraid of the consequences if he should betray any knowledge of seamanship.

Well along in the forenoon watch Captain Bonin, who had relieved Fuji after the raffle was cleared, sung out from the wheel-house for the mate. Together they talked a moment, and then the mate grabbed sea-glasses from their becket beside the binnacle and swept the tumbling sea ahead, off a little to port.

From where he stood on the after-deck, Steele could make out nothing, though, his curiosity aroused, he tried to pick up with his naked eye the object that the skipper had sighted.

Ten minutes later and he fancied he could descry a black hulk, now appearing, now disappearing with the pitch of the sea. It seemed to be about three points off the Matsu's bow and, glancing behind, the wake told him that the course of the old steamer was being altered to bring her nearer the skipper's find.

Then the Matsu was held to her new course until Steele, unaided by glasses, could see that their objective was a derelict. But whether a steamer or a wind-jammer he could not tell, for her upper decks seemed to be swept clean, with neither stump of mast nor broken funnel showing.

Skipper Bonin yelled into the engine-room tube, and the Matsu slowed down to half speed, finally losing all her way, and rocking with just enough power to hold her head to swell.

Hopes of salvaging a cargo, worth more to him than his present billet, ran rampant in the avaricious brain of the old seal-poacher. Despite the fact that he was leaving the Matsu fatally short-handed should anything unforeseen occur, he ordered the quarter-boat, spared by the storm, overside, and was pulling toward the wreck.

While the little boat bobbed and curtsied in her outward way, Steele leaned upon the rail, trying to make out the name of the derelict. He was alone on deck, none of the Thugs having as yet sufficiently recovered from the shaking they had received during the blow to appear.

He saw the quarter-boat near the wreck, veer in its course to board from leeward, and then the Jap sailors backed water furiously, pulling for their lives as the wreck settled by the head, lifted her stern high in the air, and took her last dive. For all his dreams of unearned gain, Skipper Bonin had been too late.

Steele waited until he came over the side, cursing in all his many tongues at his ill-fortune, and he heard him bawl a volley of Japanese to the mate, in which appeared but one word of English that Steele could recognize.

That word was "Irma," and Steele rightly took it to be the name of the derelict.

Undoubtedly the Irma had met her fate in the blow of yesterday, and although the steersman on the Matsu kept a sharp lookout, no trace of any survivors could be found. But it was not unlikely that if any had escaped from the sinking steamer, they had been blown far out of this particular zone long before.

So, unchallenged by young Meddoes and the Irma with her armament, the Matsu Maru stood on, her deck now clean, and her stack, which had been twisted by the force of the pounding waves, once more straightened and stayed.

But the Matsu Maru was not to escape entirely unscathed from her battle with the gale and the racking seas. Three days after the Irma had taken her last plunge Steele, squatting in the hold, where all the myriad noises of the groaning ship came to his ears, detected a new note in the symphony of sound.

First, he became impressed with the fact that the engines were pounding no longer with the staccato chorus of "full steam ahead," but were thumping monotonously as though cut down to half their power.

This puzzled him, for he was conscious that old Bonin had been driving the Matsu at her best, and nothing short of an accident could account for any diminution in her speed.

And Steele was right. Strained and tried to their utmost by the racing of the screw when the Matsu's stern was flung high out of the water during the gale, the engines—scrap-iron at best—had been weakened. To make matters worse, the constant driving under forced draft had greatly overtaxed the scale-corroded tubes of one of the starboard boilers.

Nor was that enough vengeance for the sea, upon whose restless face the Matsu Maru had ventured with her lading of murderers, for a crack had developed in the big propeller-shaft, and every mile she was driven added to the danger of the expedition meeting disaster there in the of the China Sea.

Before the gale robbed the Matsu Maru of her masts the skipper could have stood on under sail while a collar was worked upon the lame shaft and the leaky boiler-tubes were doctored; but now, without even an extra topmast aboard which could stand the strain rigged as a jury-mast, it became a question of drawing the Matsu's fires and lying-to in the open sea while the work was being done, taking chances of blows and squalls; or, as an alternative, standing on under easy speed, risking further damage to the boilers until some island was sighted, under the lee of which a safe anchorage might be found.

And that was what Skipper Bonin decided to do, as the crack in the propeller-shaft was as yet comparatively small and the risk therefore not too great.

Two more days of loafing over the placid reaches, and he fetched a point which on his charts showed land of a sort. It was marked "Existence doubtful," and was one of those points which abound upon maps even to-day to warn the mariner of dangers in the little-known sea-reaches off the regular lanes.

But the skipper knew that there might be an anchorage there and that there was no indication of any other harbor nearer to him than the nested islands in the neighborhood of Charlotte Bank, which lay farther to the northwest in latitude 7 degrees 8½ minutes north, and longitude 107 degrees 36 minutes east.

Although it was an even chance that there would be no haven on this "Existence doubtful" island, even if it were found, the Matsu held on. This time the skipper's luck was with him. The unnamed island rose fair before them one morning. Low it lay on the dancing, sapphire sea, ringed almost with a frothing, smoking barrier-reef. But old Bonin, cruising carefully about it, at last found an

opening through which he pushed the limping Matsu to an anchorage.

CHAPTER XXIII.

In the Shipboard Temple.

THE anchorage at which the Matsu heaved to was not ideal. The island at its highest point rose not many feet above the tumbling ocean, and even the thick growth of foliage that capped its gentle slopes could afford a ship lying offshore no great amount of protection from wind or storm. Yet it was the best to be had in many weary water leagues, and so the skipper was forced to drop his mud-hooks and be content.

Along the shore masses of the lush-verdure so common to the bits of land outcroppings in the China Sea ran almost to the water's edge—grim, inhospitable, repellent for all its leafy greenness. The Matsu lay perhaps fifty yards out, and hardly had her irons sank in four fathoms of clear, limpid water than her passengers were swarming her decks, filled with the yearning for land, their forebears for centuries having held nothing in common with the buffeting sea.

So, at the wish of the Nana, the single boat was gotten overside and the Hindus were freighted ashore.

Chota Lal had been the first to clamber gaily over the side; he, at least, held jointly with the other brown-skinned men a deep and abiding hatred of curling, trembling water. But Steele remained upon the ship, having to his great relief been charged to stay in attendance upon the evil goddess of Thuggee.

The women, too, remained in their cabin, which, with the Matsu lying as she did, faced seaward. All of which suited the wily Nana, in that they would have little opportunity to see anything of a suspicious nature that might happen ashore.

The lazy afternoon died at last. In the dusk the camp-fires of the Thugs gleamed and winked out of the open space which ran back into the trees from the scant beach; and the weird song-noises of the murdering men were chanted into the hum of insects and the cries of night-birds to become part of the sonorous symphony of the jungle.

Out on the Matsu, where until nightfall Bonin with the mate had driven forward the work of repair, a single Japanese sailor, constituting the anchor-watch, tenanted the decks, and for the first time since he had set foot on the murder craft many weary weeks ago, the white man who answered to the name of Bhagwan moved about the old ship freely without a sense of impending danger.

With the approach of night the tropic heat, despite the monsoon's gentle breathing high overhead, sagged down like a wet covering; and Steele dragged some of his sail-cloth from the hold to the forepeak, stretching himself there to rest. Yet sleep would not come to him.

Between his heavy eyes and the stars which had popped out brightly in the blue above him there persistently interposed the face of the girl for whose sake he had dared the dangers of the Thug ship.

Until now Douglas Steele had been content to steal to the deck-house when the midwatch began, satisfied with the knowledge that Jhanavi Faron was there below him, safer because of his presence.

But to-night he was hungry for the sight of her, careless of danger, reckless under the sway of his unspoken passion. The impatience of the lover saddled him, and he waited restlessly for the time when he could make his pilgrimage to the upper deck.

And when at last he crouched there silently, as he had waited so often before, the bonds of caution slipped from him, and boldly peering over the edge he called her name.

She answered softly, and then: "I wondered if you would come to-

night," she said. "Where are we? Is it an island? What has happened?"

He told her in short, hurried sentences, and watched the smile grow on her face as the features of a child might light up at the prospect of a holiday.

"And they are all gone?" she asked. "Then we can talk. There are many things—"

But Steele's sense of responsibility was returning, and he urged: "We must still be careful."

"Oh, bother!" she pouted. "If there is risk here, can't we steal away to some other part of the ship where we'll be safe?"

"Sh—not so loud!" he cautioned. "The crew is still aboard—"

"But there's nobody in the hold," she persisted. "The temple of the Thugs! Take me there! Think of our sitting *there* safe—of all places in the world!"

The man gasped at her audacity, and then chuckled to himself, for he knew that less danger would threaten them to-night in the dim confines of the temple of murder than anywhere else aboard the Matsu. Then, too, it would give him a chance to familiarize the girl with the general lay of the ship, a matter of moment should need come for them to escape.

"I have been very contrite, too," the girl hinted.

"Why?" Steele blurted.

"I was going to tell you why, but you say it's dangerous for us to talk here." She smiled, and Steele knew that he had been neatly trapped.

So, after the man had assured himself that the short companionway to the after-deck was clear, they stole like shadows to the yawning hatch, and Steele, leading the way, steadied the shaky ladder as she descended.

Under his guidance she explored the house of sinister worship, and at last, unawed by the Mighty Mother who scowled above her, seated herself cross-legged beneath the alabaster goddess, where the soft glow of the yellow-globed temple lamp streamed down upon her.

It brought back to the man standing, braced on bare, brown, sinewy legs to the gentle roll imparted by the ground swell, another night, which seemed ages in the past when he had first seen her sitting as Buddha sat.

More than ever she now appeared to possess the vivid beauty of a temple girl, the lissom grace of a half-wild, wonderful creature of the Orient. But the bushy beard which covered his face, and the turban folds which cast his eyes into the shadow, masked well the heart-hunger and the leashed desire of him.

He knew that the time had not arrived when she would come to him as a strong man's woman should come, flying gladly, tremulously to his arms; and until that time—

She was speaking:

"The night—the night you came to tell me of the danger—how I had been tricked—" she trailed off.

"But what of it?" Steele asked, his failure to understand her an honest one, for the subsequent trend of their talk that night when first he lay on the deck-house had wiped out his memory of her curt reception, which had at the time perplexed him.

He did not realize that his attitude, which now seemed a refusal on his part to respond, was making it very hard for Jhanavi to go on; but she, having made up her mind that some word was due this man to whom she owed so much, did not falter now.

"The 'what of it' is that I behaved abominably," she confessed. "I knew it all along, but I was in a wretched temper that night, Mr. Steele. Somehow I had begun to realize that everything wasn't as it should be, and yet my faith in the old Swami was dying mighty hard."

The girl's confession nonplused him. It did not seem, according to the eternal verities, that this glorious creature should take a tone of apology

with him. Besides, he hated explanations. And yet it was very pleasant that she should care even this much for his feelings.

So, taking a different tack, that he might avoid accepting an apology, which in itself would put her automatically in the wrong, he asked:

"Didn't you have any idea of the danger there is to a young, temperamental woman in these cults?"

She was silent a moment, grateful that he had possessed sufficient discrimination to make the expression she had thought necessary an easy one; and then she conceded frankly:

"Yes, I knew; I've heard of women who have gotten into all sorts of trouble over such things. But then almost everything can be made an evil through excess, can't it?"

He agreed. "Undoubtedly. What I mean is that there exist among the priests of Buddha many men who are every bit as earnest and conscientious in their own way as any of the good men of the world. But it has been my experience that the ones who are really worth while remain in their little hill villages, striving to lead the people of their own blood into better lives."

They talked for long, sometimes impersonally, sometimes not, on religion and other things. In the dim light Steele, watching her face, caught the play of her feelings.

He allowed himself for a moment to wonder upon the strangeness of their position—in dead of night arguing, almost academically at times, there in the ship's hold, while above them still leered the mighty Kali.

That he paid her the compliment of arguing with her and giving due deference to her as a reasoning woman, even in the face of the fact that she had allowed herself to be so shamefully duped, she appreciated more than she could have told.

"Perhaps if I had spoken sooner to my aunt," the man beside her said, "all this might have been avoided. But," in extenuation, "I had not the remotest idea that beneath the robes of the Swami was hidden the most dangerous criminal of the century. That was why I appeared to encourage her—so that I might have time to prove that he was a sham."

The girl rallied to his defense.

"I don't think she would blame you, Mr. Steele," she declared. "And it has been wonderful—just to think that you were there when the need came—that is all that counts anyway.

"I don't suppose you'll ever know how much you've helped me toward a readjustment — and — and — good night!"

She went swiftly, making her way surely through the dim light toward the ladder before Steele could disclaim her assertions; but he overtook her, and giving her the signal that all was clear, watching her as she gained the safety of the shut-in deck.

He returned to the forepeak, lost in a maze of retrospect and conjecture. He sat staring ahead into the deep sea night until he seemed to see the woman of his dreams floating ahead over the waves, beckoning him on.

He sat thus until the dim, false dawn, not knowing that he was cramped and chill.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Tupponi.

WHEN Steele awoke after a fitful nap the freshness of tropic morning had cast a benison upon sea and land, and from the beach came signs of stirring in the camp of the Thugs. It would never do for the brown men to know that for a whole night their deity had been without a servitor, and so he hurried below.

This morning the dim hold, with its leering patron of bloodless death, seemed purged and clean to him, for he fancied that something of the pure aura of the woman he loved had remained behind after she had left him there the night before.

Yet one thing there was which came to plague him; if the Thugs should remove their goddess to the land during the enforced anchorage of the Matsu, Steele would no longer have any excuse for remaining in the security of the dark hold.

And his apprehension materialized when, the sun having crept up above the eastern sea rim, the Nana himself with Nathoo and Chota Lal hailed the Matsu from the beach and came over her side from the boat which was sent for them.

Chota Lal brought a meal of rice and curry to his master, and the Nana attended the wants of the women, while more of the Thugs gathered on the shore and were ferried out to the sealer.

They poured into the after hold, loosening the fastenings which held the mighty Kali to the bulkhead.

"For a space this trust of thine is at an end, O Bhagwan," the Nana cried, his wrinkled visage lighting up with the fire of a zealot. "This day do we observe the rite of the *tupponi*, there in a glade where there may be vouchsafed to us the desires of the Mighty Mother!"

Then ropes were cast about the great alabaster statue and by hand she was hoisted from the hold, lowered into the boat, and taken ashore, this time Steele following, though he knew that in the light of day the danger was great.

Up the narrow beach went the Thugs, six of them laboring beneath the weight of Kali the Mighty, and the rest stalking impressively behind.

Into the woods they turned through the opening where the camp was set, and on through tangles and bits of jungle to a glade where the huge idol was enthroned upon an outcropping of rock.

The place was a natural temple, floored with soft, thick sward, and there the *phansigars* set about preparing for the rite which, with reverence and solemnity, should always precede the fateful taking of the Auspices, before an expedition may be inaugurated.

Steele, following with the band of Thugs into the glade, watched carefully each move of Chota Lal's Once there slipped from his servant's lips a word of caution and a glance, eloquently imperative.

He knew that the little brown man had something to communicate, but he could not dare disaster by word or act, and so he mingled brazenly with the stranglers.

At last, satisfied that the Thugs were too engrossed in the business at hand to pay much attention to him, the sham Bhagwan turned to find his servant; but this time an almost imperceptible negative shake of the head told him that he must wait, for already the *phansigars* were forming in a rude half-circle at the foot of Kali's shrine.

Steele fortunately was familiar with the ritual about to be enacted, and had little fear of blundering through ignorance; so he found himself a place among the worshipers and squatted, waiting as they waited the coming of the Nana.

Then out through the trees into the half light of the glade where his followers sat, the old man came, bearing those things he knew to be necessary for the proper propitiation of the great jealous Mother.

Amid the deathlike silence of the eager Thugs, the Nana spread a blanket upon the ground, laying thereon the consecrated pickax and a piece of money. This last was the *roop dursun* or silver offering to Kali.

Beside them he heaped coarse sugar, the *ghoor* of the *tupponi*, divided into two unequal parts; for a smaller and more consecrated portion must be at hand for the sacrament of Thugs who have already claimed a victim.

Turning, he clapped his hands, crying aloud. Allee Yar, Jeypaul, Bunyara, Hirolee, and Chota Lal answered him; for, as far as the Nana knew, each of them had crushed

out the life of a man, so qualifying as Honorable Stranglers. And they were even in numbers, including the leader, as is required by the laws of the Thugs.

With their leader, the four *phansigars* and Chota Lal, who, by virtue of his sometime boast concerning the lone traveler at his father's village, had been chosen, grouped themselves upon the blanket while those possessing less of strangler's honor hungrily crowded closer.

The lean old leader had prostrated himself, face to the west. Then he rose, and with a keen-edged knife, hacked through the center of the blanket, digging beneath the tear a shallow hole.

Slowly, impressively, he dropped into the little hollow a small quantity of the coarse sugar, and clasping his hands, lifted his eyes, crying:

"Great goddess! As you vouchsafed one lakh and sixty-two thousand rupees to Joora Naig and Kodukh Bunwari in their need; so, do we pray thee, fulfil our desires!"

And after him the Thugs repeated the words reverently and fervently; for be it known, Joora Naig and Kodukh Bunwari, who were mentioned in the prayer, are canonized Thugs.

Chota Lal explained later to Steele the history of these two. Joora, a leader of Multan stranglers and of the clan Hurtal, with his servant Koduckh, once fell upon a traveler and robbed him of rupees three hundred thousand. Yet they did not try to conceal their plunder, but instead brought it openly to their home, assembled all members of their fraternity and divided it equally. Wherefore the great honor of canonization came to them.

And as the supplication died away, the Nana, seizing a brazen ewer, sprinkled clear water over both pit and sacred ax; and placed a bit of *ghoor* from the more sacred pile upon the extended hands of the men with him upon the blanket.

As they received the murder sacrament the Thugs with one accord cried out the dread *j'hirni,* the signal to kill, ferociously and savagely, as if an actual murder were about to be committed. Then they ate their *ghoor* in silence.

When the last fleck of coarse sugar had disappeared from their horny palms the larger and less sacred portion was distributed to the other and less favored sons, grouped outside of the blanket.

The white man tasted the death sacrament with misgiving. Try as he might, he could not banish from his mind the boast of the *phansigars* that when once a man has partaken of the sacred sugar, heart and soul, he becomes a devotee of Kali.

Yet this was all in the game that he was playing, and so, careful to drop no crumb which might be devoured by bird or beast and bring upon him the wrath of the Thugs, he solemnly consumed his portion.

The *tupponi* rite was ended. Yet not one of the Thugs stirred from his place, and it soon became plain to Steele that there was more to follow. So, taking his cue from the immobile strangers, he made no move.

The Nana had risen and was speaking:

"*Ghoor* and silver have been offered to our Mighty Mother. She smiles upon her sons. Her face is not turned from us in anger.

"The land of our freedom, which shall see a new kingdom of the Thugs, lies near us, O my children! Yet before the expedition may set forth the sacred Auspices from her lips must be heard.

"Here in the tangles are birds and beasts, each ready to interpret her desires," and, turning to his fellows, who still sat around him upon the blanket, he pointed to one, the tall, powerful strangler who had conducted Steele and Chota Lal on the night of the embarkation.

"Thou art chosen, O Bunyara, to advise with me," he cried, "for, as

thou knowest, by the immutable laws of our kind, a wise *pundit* must select the day for the consultation of the Auspices."

The Nana stepped from the blanket, and, fetching a brazen plate filled with wheat and rice, with two copper coins upon it, offered his gift to Bunyara, who, in the rôle of *pundit,* occupied the center of the great cloth square. But there was in the old leader's manner an insolence and arrogance that told the gathered Thugs that Bunyara was but a figurehead.

"O greatest and mightiest of all our wise men," the Nana addressed his follower, a half-mocking note in his voice, "give to us the day upon which this our expedition shall start!"

As though detached from all earthly things, Bunyara sat in meditation. The echoes of the Nana's chant drifted off into nothingness, and only the buzzing of invisible insect wings with the soughing of the jungle broke the stillness. Motionless sat the Thugs, graven and eager, until the *pundit* spoke:

"Nana Sahib, Jemadar of Jemadars! Take thou the Auspices this day!"

And as Bunyara spoke Nathoo appeared, bearing in his arms a great brass ewer of water, which the Nana took from him. He clutched it in a mighty-muscled grip by the mouth, and in his right hand held it, arm extended at his side; for upon their leader's ability to retain this uncertain hold the Thug men set much store.

Meantime, Nathoo was tying within a square of clean, white cloth five bunches of tumeric-root, the copper coins from the plate of rice, one piece of silver money, and the sacred pick-ax. These the Nana received in his left hand, and held them close to his brown, glistening chest.

Bunyara raised his right arm. For a moment he held it straight aloft, then dropped it slowly until it pointed inland, and the lean old Nana stalked off solemnly in the direction indicated. One by one the Thugs slipped after him.

Steele with them, they went through the foliage, which was mottled by sun and shadow in great splotches like the skin of a green-and-golden serpent, pushing through bits of overgrown jungle until at last they came to another opening in the trees.

Here the leader halted. He still faced in the direction the *pundit* had given him.

Gradually a change was manifest in his manner. A mantle of concentration, the secret of which is known to most natives of India, fell upon him.

For a time he stood in rapt meditation. Then he chanted:

"Great goddess! Universal mother! If this, our meditated expedition, is fitting in thy sight, vouchsafe us aid and the sign of thy approbation!"

Every ear in the strange circle strained as his words floated off in the forest. Each of the gathered Thugs harked intently to catch that sound from out of all the jungle voices in which their fearsome goddess would speak to them. As rigid as old bronzes they stood.

Time trickled on. Steele in the background felt the tenseness of the moment, for he knew that the omen, to be good, must come within half an hour.

Came to them like the rasp of a file on bleeding nerves out of the jungle on the left, a hoarse, clucking sound. The breath of the Thug men rasped relief as they muttered: "It is the *bara mutti,* the call of the lizard! Kali has taken us by the left hand to lead us on."

But still they waited, for, if the omen be repeated on the right, then has their goddess truly looked with favor upon them.

And when the clucking had come from the opposite jungle the men of strangler creed cried as they turned and faced the Nana: "See! She hath taken both our hands to direct us!"

But, despite the omen of the lizard,

with its promise of plenty and success, the old Nana's face was drawn in agony. Steele, glancing at the hand which held the *lotah* ewer, could see that the gnarled fingers were tensed and white, and the knuckles stood out like horrible lumps with the strain of the heavy vessel.

While they watched the old eyes lost their gleam of craft and arrogance. Came slinking into them the dull of deadly fear. Like a film across his vision, it rooted there and bloomed.

As a man who stares into the face of a diabolical doom, he stood, and the chattering of the Thugs was wiped out when they looked upon him, as the chattering of monkeys ceases in the forests when a tiger slips through the *rukh*.

Palsied with the fearful struggle they were watching, their jaws sagged downward. Each was impotent to move hand or foot.

The moments shrieked their slowness. Now the Nana's face was ashen gray beneath its bronze. One of his great fingers jerked, and then convulsively, frantically, returned to its grasp. The battle was going against him. His uncertain clutch on the mouth of the heavy brazen pitcher was slipping, slipping—

Shrieks of horror were torn from the *phansigars* as the *lotah* dropped, and its clear contents sank into the greedy sward.

"Ardhul! The bad omen!" they wailed. "Remember the prophecy! Not to the expedition, but to him who drops the sacred *lotah* shall evil come, for it is written he shall die within the year!"

CHAPTER XXV.

The Omen.

SO upon the Nana Sahib fell the sentence of the omen.

The old man knew and held to the traditions of his people. That the hated English might scoff, and that even other sects of the Hindus might declare that in so innocent an accident as the dropping of a pitcher no occult meaning could be hidden, in no way shook his faith in the teachings of his forefathers.

He believed, as Thugs have always implicitly believed, that his destiny was controlled by immutable signs. It was the same rock-ribbed fatalism, except that it took a different form, as that which underlies the natures of all Orientals.

As far as the Nana Sahib was concerned, it was the implacable judgment of Kali!

How he had offended the old man knew not. But he had transgressed. Else why had the sacred pitcher fallen from his grasp?

Of course there would be offerings and sacrifices, made with much obeisance, to placate the goddess. Yet he knew it would avail him nothing. The course of the Nana was nearly run.

But now he must think of the glorious promises of the lizard, made before the hand of his fate had crashed upon him. There was yet to be accomplished the triumphant revival of the deity who had turned from him in her anger, and he found some comfort in the reflection that ill could come to none but him because of his unwitting violation. Nor would he passively await his doom.

So, like a man stricken with the plague, he seated himself upon the spot where the anger of his gods had overtaken him, there to remain for seven hours in meditation and prayer to the goddess of Thuggee. The Thugs drew away and silently slunk back in the bushes toward their camp. The omen which in their eyes marked the Nana Sahib for death within a year was a matter between their high priest and the Great Mother.

Whatever the old man had done to call upon himself the evil which awaited him was also none of their concern. At the proper time they would make the required sacrifices.

Fascinated with the potentialities for life and death which lay in the fall of the pitcher, Steele had with deep absorption watched the manifestation of the omen.

His daily routine, patterned faithfully after that of the Thugs, as well as the constant association of them with his every waking moment, was having a peculiar effect upon him, for he had caught to a small degree the psychological trick of not only assuming but actually living his deception, and had of late, superficially at least, become even to himself a Hindu.

It was a transient state of mind, engendered by the constant suggestions of his environment; yet because of it now the unquestioning resignation with which the old man received the sentence of death impressed Steele as not being something strange and unreal, but as a natural thread in the grim fabric in which he had become enmeshed.

Somehow it would have seemed indecent to Steele to remain and pry upon the Nana, devotee of ritual murder though he was. Steele knew he could, without compunction send a bullet crashing into the brain of him if it should become necessary. But to lurk behind, watching as he would have liked to do, was too much like vivisection.

He had witnessed what was a tragedy in its own way, and he stole back to the camp with the rest, edging as near as he could to Chota Lal when he recalled the evidence given by his servant that there were things to be told. But beyond casual mutterings the little brown man said nothing, for they were never out of ear-shot of the Thugs.

Through the long afternoon Steele lay about the camp where the brown men talked in awestruck whisperings concerning their leader, who still sat at his meditations. But when the dusk of evening came and soft blackness followed with that swiftness which leaves in those latitudes nothing of twilight, he slipped from his place near the spluttering fire, the smoke of which in some measure kept from his half-naked and unprotected hide the gathering swarms of great, blundering insects and tiny, worrisome gnats.

He made his way to the beach. The hot moon was up. As it rose it spilled a surfeit of silver upon waters that even before its rising had been overbright with the coruscating, refulgent streaking of phosphoric animalculæ.

Out on the sand he stopped.

For a moment Bhagwan, the Thug, was plagued by the thoughts of Steele, white adventurer. All that day, under the proximity of the jungle and the effect of the strangler's weird rites, he had been filled with atavistic yearnings. The tangles beckoned to him. The touch of sward on naked flesh, the scent of wood smoke, the murmurings and lashings of the sea out beyond the barrier-reef had stirred wild pulsings in his blood.

But from the back of his mind, uncalled, unbidden, there came a flash of memory—Broadway at night! Yet what was Broadway to him? A great street thousands of miles away—to all intents and purposes in another sphere. For the Douglas Steele who had trodden its brilliant length, he knew in his heart of hearts, had been a savage returned for a brief time to the haunts of men; to-night he was back again to his own, rightfully perhaps, and known to his fellows as Bhagwan, a strangler.

He thrilled with pleasure at his own nakedness and savagery.

But his thoughts whipped back as unaccountably as they had swerved. Now again he was heart and soul the traitor Thug, planning the downfall of his own band; and in furtherance of his plot he started out along a narrow sand spit which jutted out into the waters.

The strip was bare of verdure, and he felt that there was little chance of

any of the stranglers hiding near enough to overhear should he happen upon Chota Lal.

Nor had he held his vigil long before his servant came through the darkness. He walked openly as if he had nothing to conceal, yet when he reached his master he spoke low and hurriedly:

"Murder is to be done, heaven-born!" he hissed. "The prey has been marked down and the noose made ready. It is the old white captain-sahib and all the Japanese crew, who will die for the glory of Kali as soon as the land is reached and their usefulness be over."

The call to arms had come. The hours of waiting idly above the seething volcano had passed. And the need to be up and doing acted as a potent tonic upon Steele.

As a snake sheds its skin he abandoned his rôle of Thug. Once more he was blood and bone and brain, the white adventurer.

"I suspected as much when they took the omens to-day," he admitted; "and yet I thought that perhaps they were consulting the Auspices because it will be December before Cambodia is sighted, and as you said they will never start an expedition in that month."

"That, perhaps, was one of the reasons, Bahadur, but for all of that the captain-sahib and his men have long been marked. There has been little danger to us thus far, heaven-born, but the perilous part of the journey lies still ahead."

"Then it is time for us to go," Steele declared. "We must think of the women first, Chota Lal. Thou knowest what hath kept these dogs to heel! There upon the ship no omens could be heard."

"True, heaven-born, for where are lizards and jackals and asses to be found upon the sea?"

"But now it is different," Steele urged. "With thine own ears thou heardst the lizard speak and bid them kill; and they will obey as surely as the chetah drags down its prey! Let us warn Captain Bonin and join forces with him."

"Nay, *sahib*. Of what avail, think you, would he and his puny yellow men be against the Thugs? The stranglers will not move openly. A pod of the poisonous *datura* in the sailors' food some morning — and while they lie stupefied the noose falls! The old captain-sahib has stuck his head into the mouth of the lion. Let him get it free!"

Steele knew that Chota Lal spoke the truth. And yet he was loath to leave a white man to take his chances with that wolf-pack. His servant continued:

"Sawest thou not the dropping of the *lotah* ewer? The Nana's power will wane, for without doubt he hath done something displeasing to the goddess. Already is Bunyara prepared to take command should the hand of his fate strike down the Nana. And," he added grimly, "thou and I know whose hand it will be. There be two things to do: Take thou the boat and put to sea with the women, or remain here with me—"

Using the native speech, Steele cut in: "There be those whose fortunes are of more moment to me even than the fate of the empire. Make ready, I charge thee, Chota Lal. I go, and this night must find us on our way."

"Nay, heaven-born. It is written that thou goest alone. Remember the blood oath which I have taken against this man, this Nana Sahib. Can I then let him slip from my hands? And the omen—it has spoken. He must die—and I am the executioner!"

Ever the opportunist, the little brown man had read in the fall of the ewer a prophecy of his own success. Now more than ever he was determined to hold to the trail. He went on:

"What there is between me and him, heaven-born, it were ill that any should know. A shame was put upon

our blood by this man, and his life is forfeit."

Steele was impressed by his servant's earnestness. Yet he remained adamant. If they escaped, the aid that Chota Lal might give them in the boat would possibly mean much in the equation of their chances; and at that moment Douglas Steele, had the power been his, would have sent a universe tottering if by so doing he could serve the woman he had come to love. So he insisted:

"I have no wish to thwart thy vow or stay thy hand, Chota Lal. And yet if I should go with the women, leaving thee, my brother, behind, thy life would not be worth that of a timid hare in a tiger's den, for discovery would surely follow.

"Now listen. I have a plan by which we, perhaps, may detain the band upon the island."

But Chota Lal remained obstinate until the white man did what he otherwise would never have done. Turning on his servant he snapped:

"Hast thou then forgotten when I stood between thee and death?"

A look of pain swept across the Hindu's face. "Nay, Bahadur. And the shame that thou shouldst remind me of it! Have I not followed thee, obeyed thee—"

"Then," the white man went on inexorably, "the debt is acknowledged. And I demand the payment. Thou goest with me this night!"

"Yet is my oath more than my life," the Hindu defended. "Thou are demanding an usurious price, O heaven-born. And thou wilt not defer the settlement?"

"Patience, Chota Lal," the other returned more kindly. "Thy hands shall yet spill the blood of Nana Sahib. But there is no excuse for haste.

"Was there then time named in thy family vow? Will not next week, next month, if it be so decreed, suffice? I promise thee thy vengeance. But first must the women be taken to a place of safety.

"Once that is done—then, not Chota Lal alone, but thou and I, brothers of the blood, will take the trail again."

Sullenly, under his obligation to Steele, Chota Lal promised to obey. The night was well advanced and, watching their opportunity, they slipped from the rocks and struck out.

They had located the single Japanese sailor who constituted the anchor-watch at his lonely vigil on deck, and fortunately for them as they approached, swimming with as little ripple as possible, he made for the forecastle hatch, below which they knew his fellow countrymen were resting after their arduous day's labor with the cracked propeller-shaft.

Steele and Chota Lal chose to board the Matsu well aft, however, for this part of the ship, commonly occupied by the Thugs, would be most likely deserted.

There was one thing that Steele felt must be accomplished as soon as possible, and this time, when the Jap watchman had voluntarily taken himself out of the way, could not be improved.

So he stole to the upper half deck, making his way to the wheel-house. All was dark and silent within.

Steele felt his way to the after bulkhead, in which he knew should be a door leading into the chart-room.

He found it at last and pushed it open. By making his hands take the place of eyes he located a table on which a chart seemed to be held out flat by pins. This he removed carefully, taking the chance that it was the one he wanted, for to have struck a match, even could he have located one, would have been too much of a risk.

Steele was unwilling to leave the island without some means of relocating it, and he was certain that a bred-in-the-bone deep-waterman like Captain Bonin would certainly indicate the position of the island upon the chart.

The taking of the Auspices and the

coming of omens which had cast despair upon the Thug chieftain, together with what all this might mean to the safety of the girl he loved, had put quite a different complexion on the few plans Steele had made. Now it looked to him pretty much as though the pursuit of the Thugs, so far as he was concerned, must for a time degenerate into a flight to sea in an open boat upon the chance of being picked up and of getting into communication in some way with Captain Fitzallen Austin, though cable stations were not exactly numerous in the wide stretches of the China Sea.

If he could not communicate with the chief of the Dehli police, then must he and Chota Lal return to the trail and do their single-handed best to thwart the schemes of the stranglers.

Steele spent fifteen more of his precious minutes in the upper-deck cabins, and when at last he started for the deck again he carried a small but heavy box in addition to the chart which he had filched.

When he rejoined Chota Lal, the Jap was still below. So they set about preparing to provision the quarter-boat, which hung again in its davits on the seaward side of the Matsu.

From the lazaretto they brought tinned meats and sea-biscuit and a quantity of dried fish, which with rice so often is the staple diet of Jap sailormen. These stores they piled in an empty stateroom off the main deck, from which place they could be speedily transferred to the boat.

To the main cabin Steele then took his way, and returned with two long, sealing rifles from the racks of the Matsu, with ammunition. These would not leave them quite at the mercy either of pursuit, which was practically out of the question by reason of the fact that they were taking the only boat which the blow had left in the old sealer's equipment, or of any other danger they might encounter.

Their armament they placed with their supplies, and then betook themselves to the safety of the after-hold, there to await the change in the watch which Steele knew could not be far off.

As to the Thugs on the island, the white man was counting upon the excitement attendant upon the launching of the expedition and the evil which had overtaken the leader to cover absence from the camp. Anyway, it was but another risk they had to take.

Chota Lal, slipping on deck after an hour of waiting, brought back word that the watch had been changed. Together they crept to the deck, lying concealed in the starboard alleyway. They saw the sailor as he started on a perfunctory round of the main deck.

As the Jap turned into the port alleyway, Steele and Chota Lal sped aft on the opposite side.

The white man crouched at the break of the cabin. Chota Lal turned the corner and darted up the ladder to the after part of the upper half-deck, so that when the luckless yellow man turned to go back forward through the starboard alley the little Hindu, in much the same manner that he had sprung upon Steele in the House of Light, catapulted his weight upon the sailor, his lean fingers finding the throat of his victim before he could utter a squawk.

As the dull thud of his servant's descent upon the unsuspecting watchman came to him, Steele darted around the corner and flung himself into the mêlée. But Chota Lal already had the Jap by the throat with a grip which was rapidly becoming a menace to the sailor's chances of continuing in the land of the living.

Stripping off his turban, Steele wadded part of it into the sailor's gaping mouth, and wound the remainder about his head, effectually gagging him. Then, fetching some light line, the prisoner was trussed up in a brace of shakes and deposited in the room along with the stores, to wait the time he might be discovered and released after the impostors had escaped.

Within half an hour everything was in readiness. Nothing now remained but to get the women and put in operation the plan he had conceived for delaying the Matsu Maru at the island.

On his first trip below for stores that night, Steele had obtained from the tool-lockers two large augers. With these, after drawing the canvas cover over the stores they now had in the quarter-boat, Steele and Chota Lal crept for the last time into the after-hold.

Under the white man's instruction the Hindu helped to bore holes in the rotten strakes of the old sealer, each some distance from the others to provide ready jets of water which by morning should, without attracting attention, waterlog the Matsu to such an extent that she could not be moved until pumped clear again.

With much less risk than he was now taking, Steele could have sunk the Matsu by the simple expedient of opening her Kingston valves, which controlled the outboard ejection of her engines. But that method would have worked too fast. What he desired was a steady, gentle filling of the ship, so gradual that it might escape notice until the damage was done.

Once Chota Lal stopped his boring and, drawing close to Steele, whispered:

"*Sahib,* these holes be small and easily mended—"

"Aye, if they are discovered. But, ten chances to one, Captain Bonin will think that the storm started the seams. And the delay will be accomplished, Chota Lal, for they may never suspect the ruse at all."

By the time the two amateur scuttlers had completed their work sufficient of the harbor water was spurting into the Matsu in gentle gurgles to see her waterlogged and settled deep in the scant four fathoms in which she rode should the trick remain undiscovered.

"We've done all we can do," Steele panted as he dropped the augers into the rising water and sprang for the ladder. "It's quick, and away now. Put a few more holes in her while I lower the boat and get the women."

It would have simplified matters could Steele have lowered the little craft from the davits with the women aboard her; but he feared possible discovery, and Jhanavi and his aunt could be handed down over the side with little trouble, for the Matsu had scant freeboard.

So he hurriedly cast off the lashings, and hoisting first on the forward and then on the aft tackles, he labored until the boat cleared the rail. Then he swung her outward, letting the falls whine softly in their sheaves as the little craft went overside.

Swinging down into her, he quickly made fast the painter, regained the deck, and sought the women.

From the deck-house roof his signal was answered almost immediately, and worming his way forward he whispered to the girl, who looked up at him anxiously.

"The time has come, Miss Faron, when you'll have to trust yourself to me. There's murder afoot, and we must get you and my aunt clear. We've a boat provisioned and we start in ten minutes. You must deal with Aunt Minerva, too. Can you make it?"

Bravely the girl smiled up at him. She asked no questions, so strong had her faith, in the past week, grown in this big, sinewy man, whose matted whiskers and brown skin she knew concealed but too well her chance rescuer of the traffic crush.

"I will be ready," she replied simply.

Again on the after deck, Steele stood near the doorway of the main cabin awaiting the coming of Chota Lal and the women. Five minutes dragged slowly by.

A vague uneasiness came over him. He searched the shadows about the deck of the old ship, but could see no movement to alarm him. Overhead the gentle monsoon sang a low, sleep-

ing song. Off on the island night noises sounded faintly. On the ship there was no sound, save the swell splashing against her counter.

The noose fell without warning. It gripped Steele's throat as a boa constrictor winds its prey. In a horrible instant he could feel the hands of the strangler, twisting, twisting, twisting!

Red rage swept over him, and in the fraction of a second, with the surge of anger, his senses cleared.

In a supreme effort he lurched forward suddenly with all his mighty-muscled strength. The scrawny strangler, jerked loose from his footing, twisted half over Steele's back, rested a moment on swelling shoulder-muscles, to shoot forward and sprawl, hold broken, upon the deck.

With the swiftness of a mongoose striking a cobra the white man leaped. The Thug fought the fight of a cornered rat, while Steele, fingers sunk into his throat, drew back his free hand for a crashing, silencing blow.

But the brown man at that moment with a sidewise jerk tore his throat free, and before the blow fell sent a half-choked screech, ending in a guttural gurgle quavering through the night to his friends ashore.

Steele's blow fell, cutting short the warning cry. It died in the strangler's throat as he gasped and lay still.

Fascinated, Steele wasted a precious moment gazing at the huddled heap which had been an unleashed *phansigar*. The inert Hindu was Nathoo.

Down the deck leaped Chota Lal.

"Heaven-born! They be stirring ashore!" he cried, and Steele knew that the Call of Kali had carried to Nathoo's brethren.

"Into the boat!" Steele snapped, for now his ears caught faint footfalls on the deck above them. The women were coming.

Together they sprang to the side; Chota Lal, clinging to the still dangling falls, swung down while Steele leaped to the low, broad bulwark to hand the women overside.

For a moment he poised there, knife bared and ready, but when they stepped unhindered from the companion-ladder, he shoved the weapon into his loin-cloth.

"This way; quick!" he called.

He reached out to Jhanavi. Their finger-tips met. There came a lurch and, balance gone, Steele toppled backward into the sea, followed by a cry wrenched from Minerva Steele.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

AT REST

BY NORREYS JEPHSON O'CONOR

WHEN you first learned I loved you, did you say:
"I, too, will give my love to bless
The days he would have passed in weariness"?
You seemed to understand
A helping hand
Was what I lacked to guide me on my way.

But now a wondrous quietness has come
To me, who once was full of strife—
Hampered and harassed in my life.
My cares are now at rest,
And on your breast
I find of love and life the perfect sum.

The Injun Boss

by Chief Red Eagle

ON a flat piece of rocky ledge, a little group of men gazed with dull, staring eyes at the still, stark figure of their companion, lying at their feet.

Twenty feet below them, in a foaming sea of flying spray, Brandy Brook surged past at "driving pitch"; a hissing Titan of destruction and power.

Floating on its yeasty bosom came a seemingly interminable line of logs—pine, spruce, hemlock, cedar, and fir. The fruits of Dan McDade's winter operation were being driven to the mills of Umsasqua.

Save for the dull, throbbing roar of the falls above, the soft soughing of the April wind, and the swish of swift water as it whirled past, no sound broke the silence of the great woods—a silence that, in the presence of death, was strained to the tension of tautened catgut. The very air seemed charged with a vibrant force like that of a powerful coil.

Some one shifted his feet, and as the steel spikes of his driving boot bit the flinty surface with a rasping grate, edged teeth clamped to jaw as tautened nerves snapped.

From a husky throat came a smothered sob that swelled into a sigh of relief, as the spell was broken. Little Louie Billideaux blew his nose violently and surreptitiously wiped his eyes with a red bandanna. Jim Markham savagely chewed his quid. Beneath their rough demeanor and language hearts of gold beat in the breasts of these deep-chested men of the Maine lumber woods.

Floating bottom up in the eddy below the falls, its sides battered to splinters, a gaping hole in its bow, was the remains of a wrecked bateau—its story all too plainly told by the dripping figures on the bank and the silent stiffening form on the ground—swamped in attempting to run the falls.

"Boys," said Markham huskily, "it's tough. No whiter man ever wore spike shoes than Benny Britt. He were squar' as a die, an' one o' th' best bo'tmen as ever pulled an oar."

The idiosyncrasies of a man, his shortcomings and faults are forgotten at death, while his virtues and accomplishments are magnified a hundredfold.

There was a pause and Markham went on.

"Well—he'll never loosen another key-log, nor heave his shoulder ag'in' another peavey; an' all 'count of a foolheaded boss who don't know a skid from a jillpoke," he ended disgustedly.

The result of this unfortunate affair was a meeting, at which two men were delegated to accompany the body to Umsusqua, and with them they took

orders on various members of the crew amounting upward of $600, payable to Mrs. Benjamin Britt.

Dan McDade was a shrewd leader of men; his thirty years of experience had proved that. An operator of the old school, he brooked no opposition or insubordination. Yet, beneath his gruffness was a kindly strain that manifested itself in many inconspicuous ways.

Precise and crisp, he now called his foreman to the front.

"Martin, as near as I can learn, you are much to blame for this unfortunate accident. Had you used a grain o' common sense, you wouldn't have ordered that boat-crew over them falls."

"I didn't order 'em over the falls," protested Martin vigorously. "They run 'em o' their own accord."

"Yes," panted Markham, crowding forward, "arter you'd taunted us by saying th' Old Town crew run 'em last year when there wa'n't the head o' water there is now. Much as to say we didn't darst to run 'em. Arter that Benny Britt would 'a' run Niagary Falls an' every mother's son in the bateau crew would 'a' follered him."

"Well, you didn't have to run 'em, did you?" roared Martin, his six feet of physique quivering with anger. "I wa'n't 'sponsible."

"That'll do, Bud," cut in McDade. "From the very first you have shown yourself incompetent to take charge of a crew. You tied us up two whole days by ordering the upper landings broken first and opening the gates. I ought to have canned you then.

"Yesterday you went plumb ag'in' my orders by dynamitin' that small jam when it wa'n't necessary, and now this—oh, perhaps you didn't exactly order 'em to run the falls, but it 'mounts to the same. As a foreman, Bud, you've shown yourself to be a rattlin' good cant-dog man, and that lets you out.

"I'm payin' three dollars on the rear; you can stick or beat it. It's immaterial to me, but you are no longer foreman. Gimme them wangin keys and move your blankets to the 'baker' to-night. Lolar!"

A straight, athletic figure disentangled itself from the crowd and stepped forward.

"Yes, sir," he said quietly.

McDade allowed his gaze to rove swiftly from the battered Stetson to spike-soled boots; to the well-poised head set on wide, square shoulders; to the dark features with their aquiline profile; and lastly, he looked into a pair of black orbs that gazed steadily into his own steel gray eyes, without the flicker of an eyelash.

"Lolar, from now on I want you to take charge of the entire drive, under me, at foreman's pay. Think you can do it?"

"I'll do the best I can, sir."

"And that's all a horse can do," responded McDade heartily.

II.

EXCEPT for a few unaccountable jams that formed in uncanny places, the drive proceeded smoothly enough.

The Indian boss had gained the respect and admiration of the crew by his easy manner of directing; assuming none of the bruskness of McDade or the bullying tactics of his predecessor.

Instead of oaths he used the word "please," a mannerism that caused some of the older men to stare; took upon himself the hardest tasks rather than impose them on another, and joined in their good-natured raillery. But when he gave an order there was something in his tone that caused them to obey with alacrity.

All the landings had been broken and the crew of sixty men divided into two sections, a head crew to keep the river free and the "rear-sackers" whose duty it was to pick up stray logs.

To the latter crew Martin, the deposed boss, was assigned. Secretly he nursed his deep humiliation into a violent hatred, that manifested itself in

various little acts that caused his crony, Joe Marceau, to grin appreciatively.

As they labored waist deep in the icy water to extricate a log that had been capriciously driven into the alder growth, his resentment grew by leaps and bounds.

"I wouldn't care so much if Mac had put anybody 'sides Lolar in my place," he confided to Marceau as they paused to fill their pipes. "Jest 'cause Lolar's got the repetation o' bein' one of the best 'white water' men hereabouts, ain't no sign he can take charge o' a crew o' men, an' river hogs at that. One thing, he's too easy on 'em. Ye gotter crowd river hogs if ye want to make 'em respec' ye."

"Ah g'ess yo' ain' lak heem mooch befo' she is git your job too, ain' it?" asked Joe, wtih a smirk. "Ah t'ink petite Marie mak' de differance, ain' he?"

"Shut up," growled Martin. "Marie Latour will swap her mind 'bout Mitch Lolar afore long, jest wait."

Marceau grinned.

"Yo' goin' for go Wharton to git mar-ried?"

"I mought," leered Bud savagely, "but if I go you go too, you wizened-faced Canuck. They're jest as anxious to see you an' Roc up thar as they be me."

"Hello, fellers," broke in a voice behind them, "give me a light, will you?"

"Th' 'tenderfoot,'" muttered Martin.

The newcomer was a young man who seemed strangely incongruous with his surroundings. Though clad in the usual driving costume, certain evidences of refinement were easily discernible to more than the casual eye, as, for instance, in the care of his nails. His hands, while strong, were soft and unused to manual labor.

At his own request McDade had sent him to the rear, so he could "rough it." Bud chuckled.

"Well, guess you're gittin' all th' roughin' you want, ain't ye?" he asked jeeringly. "Sackin' the rear ain't no tango tea party same's I jedge you're more used to."

The young man carefully shielded the match in cupped hands and drew wheezily on the stem of his bulldog pipe. He made no reply.

"An' this gittin' turned out o' yer bunk at three o'clock is a tol'able sight diff'runt than snoozin' in the hay till nine or ten ev'ry mornin'," continued Martin. "You must 'a' been purty hard up to tackle drivin'. What possessed ye?"

"I was working in an office, and my health began to fail. My doctor ordered plenty of fresh air, and here I am. Fact is, I rather like it and expect to stick until we boom out."

Martin advanced and tapped him on the breast with his pipestem.

"This drive is a long way off o' bein' in the boom, son," he said impressively, "a long way off. So fur, we've had all th' breaks in our favor. We hain't had any jams o' conserquence an' the dam's been spillin' over th' top, when ord'nar'ly this stream don't open up to more'n six or seven foot head at th' most. Ain't that so, Joe?"

Marceau nodded vigorously. "*Oui, oui,* da's so, yes, sir."

"Wait till they jam in this narrer stream with a heavy head o' water an' begin pilin' up. Our Injun boss will commence to have his troubles then, believe me."

He shouldered his peavey and sauntered toward the stream, followed by Marceau. The "tenderfoot" grinned. "I got you, Steve," he muttered.

"Lolar," said McDade one night, "I'm going to Wharton to-morrow to clinch a contract with old man Gordon that I'll deliver three million feet into his boom at Umsasqua by the twenty-fourth.

"To-day's the sixteenth, and allowing for any ordinary delay we ought to make it easy. Soon's they pass the sluice my responsibility ends. It's only nine miles. We've got an exception-

ally good head of water, and with this crew I see no reason why I can't deliver.

"Move to the sluice-way camp and let the rear occupy this ground. Set four men to sluicing instead of two, and if anything unusual comes up, use your own judgment.

"I'll be back soon's I can—probably in three or four days. Let Weeks and Mayo help you take charge, and—push 'em, make 'em earn their pork an' beans."

Three days later the men were eating their crude breakfast by the guttering glimmer of two smoking lanterns, when the slight figure of Billy Weeks, the camp clerk, staggered in, the whiteness of his face accentuated by the dark shadows behind him; a deep, gaping wound in his forehead.

"Boys," he cried hoarsely, "Lolar's cleaned out with four hundred dollars in 'wangin' money."

Before they could recover from this announcement Old Jack Mayo, a veteran of "pod auger days," and who disdained the use of the tin washbasin, if the river were near by, threw a second bomb.

"Yes, and from the looks o' th' water backin' up, thar's a locked jam somewhere twixt here an' th' sluice. Order 'em to close th' gates."

III.

THE little village of Umsasqua, with its twelve hundred inhabitants, reposed snugly at the foot of the lake, the terminus of a narrow-gage railway that connected with the C. P. R. at Wharton, sixteen miles away.

McDade had just dismounted from the dilapidated, dusty coach, when one of his men came striding around the corner of the ramshackle building used as a station.

"Hello, Jeff," grunted he; "ain't quittin', are you?"

"Nope. Billy Weeks sent me out to see if I could reach you by wire with this."

McDade scowled blackly at the note apprising him of his Indian foreman's disappearance, together with four hundred dollars, then shook his head in his positive way.

"No, Lolar ain't that kind. I've got to have better proof."

"Well, he's the only man missin' from either crew. You an' him an' Weeks were th' only men as had keys to th' wangin box, an' th' lock is intact, which shows it were opened with a key. He laid Billy out with a caliper rule, then vamosed. Cookee brought Billy to with a dipper full of water when he went to call him an' Lolar this mornin'.

"An' here's another thing," he added, as the lumberman shook his head decidedly. "Lolar left th' prints o' his calks on th' 'deacon-seat' where he stood to reach Weeks's bunk."

"Well," snapped McDade, "every man on this drive wears spikes. That don't prove nothin'!"

"It does when they show a center row same as Mitch Lolar wears. Hain't another man in the outfit got center-spiked boots."

McDade swore.

"I won't believe it—yet. But if it is so, I'll not only send Lolar up, but I'll break him both as a boatman and 'white water' man, on every river in this section. Where's the drive?"

"Well," replied Jeff slowly, "most of it's jammed tighter'n a Chinese puzzle at the head o' th' sluice."

"It is?" roared McDade. "Why didn't you say so before? Why didn't Weeks say something about it?"

"Dunno," retorted Jeff. "As for me, I ain't had time to tell ye afore, 'cause I've been tellin' ye 'bout Lolar."

"T' 'ell with Lolar," spluttered Mac. "What's Lolar to me when I've got three million feet of lumber tied up? Where's the crews?"

"Head crew's at the sluiceway camp, an' old Jack Mayo's takin' charge temp'rar'ly. We been sluicin' right along since you left. Th' rear's down at the foot o' Big Logan."

They had proceeded toward the upper end of the town. McDade, his brow corrugated in furrows, was thinking deeply, entirely oblivious to all about him.

Suddenly Jeff caught his arm in a grip of iron and pointed excitedly at a figure that emerged from a shop of unsavory reputation kept by Antoine Latour.

"Lolar," gasped McDade through clenched teeth.

"Yep. He's been to see Antoine's gal, Marie. He's been sparkin' up to her since last fall. Antoine told Bud Martin he could marry Marie pervidin' he could produce five hunderd dollars as a guarantee that he could support her.

"Antoine may not be any white ribboner an' some o' his dealin's prob'bly ain't strictly 'cordin' to Hoyle; but he sure does love that gal o' his'n. Her mother were a half-breed gal from up St. John way. Purty as a picter, she were, an' how in tarnation she ever come to hook up with a man like Antoine is more'n I can savvy.

"Marie favors her c'nsid'able—purttier if anythin'—an' she's got th' spirit o' a lucivee—a reg'lar lynx. Soon's she hearn as how she was to be bartered like a hoss or sech, she up an' told her father she wouldn't marry Bud Martin if he was wuth a million.

"I heard afore I left camp that she an' Lolar was engaged to be spliced, soon's th' drive gets in, but his vamosin' this mornin' will spell his finish with her. I've known her since she were a little shaver, an' she'll have no more to do with Mitch Lolar; or I miss my guess."

McDade, with eyes intent on the figure ahead, made no reply.

"He's headin' right straight for home. Him an' his mother live thar alone since her secon' husband died. She had a boy by her fust husband—a no 'count cuss an' a bad Injun."

"I know him," said Mac laconically. "There he goes, Jeff. Come on, we've cornered him."

Their quarry had disappeared into a story-and-a-half dwelling near the edge of the lake, and they quickened their steps.

McDade's calloused knuckles rapped peremptorily. An old Indian woman, a corn-cob pipe held firmly between yellowing teeth, opened the door. Glancing past her, the men saw littered on the floor a mass of strippings from the ash-tree; while several baskets in various stages of construction were piled against the walls.

Save for the old squaw, the room was empty!

"Does Mitch Lolar live here?" shot Mac crisply.

"Ya-as—he live here—gone now—on drive."

Gazing into her calm, wrinkled countenance, McDade hesitated.

"Search th' place," panted Jeff. "He's here somewhere."

"Who here?" demanded the squaw.

"Lolar. I'm looking for him."

"No here," repeated the old squaw. "Gone!"

"I saw him come in here not three minutes ago with my own eyes. Where is he?"

His tone startled the Indian woman, her eyes grew wide. "Mitch no here—come see you'se'f."

She swung the door open and Mac, after admonishing Jeff to watch the rear, entered. A cry from the riverman brought him running.

"Thar goes yer game 'cross th' lake."

Two hundred yards away a bark canoe was headed toward Moccasin Brook, from which a spotted trail led to the Canadian border, eight miles away. Kneeling between the second and middle thwarts and plying the paddle with long, sweeping strokes was the unmistakable figure of Mitch Lolar; while leading to the water's edge, clearly defined on the hard clay, were tracks made by a pair of driving-boots with a center row of spikes.

"What better proof do ye want than that, Mac?" drawled Jeff.

McDade's answer was a growl. After a half-hearted attempt to follow in a flat-bottomed boat, they gave up, and proceeded to camp.

IV.

THE sluice was built at a point where a rocky ledge extended at right angles to the stream, leaving a space of about forty-five feet between the end of the bar and a high ledge that rose almost perpendicularly from the water.

The current shot away from the opposite shore, directed to the chute by a "fending-boom," one end of which was secured by chains to a large tree, the other to a huge bolt that had been drilled into the ledge. The water was sucked into a smooth sheet, over a natural apron of solid rock, with tremendous force.

The jam had formed here—a seemingly inextricable mass of logs that rose menacingly forty feet in height; forever like a set of giant jackstraws.

Mayo had caused the dam to be closed and "swing booms" strung across at intervals to intercept the following logs, resulting in a series of pockets which served to keep their weight off the jam.

Improperly placed dynamite affected it no more than a handful of lycopodium. The crew labored futilely.

"I don't understand how a jam could make there," said McDade to Mayo; "there ain't nothing to hold the end of a log ag'in' this ledge, and that fendin' boom should have kept 'em away from that bar there."

Mayo shook his head.

"I've druv this stream, off an' on, for nigh thutty year, an' I never knew a jam to make here. An' she's a bad one. Ye see th' top sort o' overhangs, an' it's much as a man's life is wuth to go down thar. *I* wouldn't, an' I'd never ask a man to do anythin' I wouldn't do myself."

"No, no," responded Mac listlessly. He thrust a pudgy hand up through his hair and shook his head despairingly.

Each moment interlocked the logs more firmly than ever. There was nothing to do but suspend operations on the rear. Those preferring to do so were allowed to return to their homes. Among them went Martin and Marceau.

As it was only four miles from Umsasqua, many visitors flocked to see this wonderful caprice of the elements, and man's futility in opposition.

McDade notified the Gordon Lumber Company of his predicament and back came the terse reply:

> Allow you three days' grace.
>
> J. R. GORDON.

"He might just as well have said three hundred," said Mac to Weeks, who, with bandaged head, sat in the camp. "I stand 'bout as much show of gettin' 'em out in that time."

Before him swept a panoramic view of his stormy career as a lumberman.

Beginning at twelve, as a cookee; boss at nineteen; and at twenty-four the owner of his own operation; he had gradually advanced until to-day he was a forceful figure among Maine lumbermen, and his influence was great.

He was considered strong financially, but the fact was, every available piece of property was heavily mortgaged in order to enable him to launch the present operation. It was by far his biggest effort and its success meant much; for, besides a socially inclined wife in town, he had a son and daughter whose college educations were proving expensive.

And now—

"This spells my finish, Billy. The fruits of the labors of thirty years are tied up in that stack of toothpicks out there. Every dollar. And only a few hundred yards away—just over that sluice—lies success. It's enough to drive a man to suicide."

The camp-door was pushed open

and Mitch Lolar stood before him, his face haggard and drawn; while beside him stood Marie Latour.

"So," roared the irate operator, his voice quivering with rage—"so you've come back, eh?" He pointed a shaking finger toward the stream. "Do you see what you have done, you treacherous cur?"

Lolar's teeth clicked and his eyes flashed ominously.

"Stop," he cried, "lest you be sorry."

"What! Do you threaten me, you —you thief? You'll sing a different tune shortly, my Indian friend. There's a warrant out for your arrest, and I am going to push you to the full extent of the law. Do you hear? The full extent of the law."

He smacked his fist into his open palm.

Lolar controlled himself with an effort and without a word strode outside. Mac glared after his retreating form and muttered an imprecation beneath his breath.

"Meester McDade," broke in a soft voice at his elbow. The operator turned to gaze into the deep black eyes of Marie, raised to his face appealingly.

"Pleas', Meester McDade, Mitch Lolar, he is—"

"I don't care to hear anything more about Mitch Lolar, except to hear that he is behind iron bars," interrupted Mac angrily. "Weeks, send a man out with a note to Lafe Newman, telling him Lolar's here."

He turned from the girl abruptly, and with a dejected mien Marie left the camp.

Just outside the dingy office she encountered the tenderfoot.

"I met Mitch Lolar on the way to the jam, and he said you had something important to tell me."

For five minutes they remained in earnest conversation, his questions eager—her answers positive, vehement.

Two minutes later the tenderfoot swung briskly into the "tote road" toward Umsasqua.

V.

THERE was an exceptionally large crowd of visitors that day, and as McDade sauntered wearily toward the jam, he became conscious of an air of suppressed excitement.

Quickening his pace, and reaching a point of vantage, he looked down into the miniature cañon and stifled a gasp of surprise.

Standing precariously on a log and swinging a heavy sledge with well-timed precision, was Mitch Lolar; while nonchalantly turning the drill for him was Jim Markham.

Towering over their heads, in a menacing mountain of destruction, was three hundred and fifty thousand feet of logs, any one of which, if loosened, would crush out their lives as though they were flies.

In breathless suspense the crowd on the banks above watched the pygmy-like figures beneath that wall of death, watched the ever-growing rush of water from the opened gates as it trickled through, and shuddered.

At the very edge of the precipitous bluff stood Marie Latour, her hands clenched so tightly that her knuckles showed white; her bosom rising and falling with her emotions.

At last they made ready to charge. McDade met Markham as he was hauled up, and to Mac's questioning look, he said:

"Th' fendin' boom's holdin' th' hull jam. Th' upper end's been swung 'cross th' sluice an' made fast to that big hemlock thar. Lolar seen it soon's he come. Th' only chance o' loosenin' of her up is in blowin' out th' bolt as holds th' lower end to th' ledge; an' th' chance is small at that."

"How'd th' boom—" began Mac.

But Markham was gone. Lolar had ignited the fuse and given the signal to be hauled up. Willing hands grasped the rope, but to the waiting crowd the

figure was all too slow in reaching safety; indeed, no sooner had his feet touched solid earth than there was a reverberating roar that shook the ground.

Many were thrown down from the force of the concussion, as the heavy charge exploded. In the great upheaval that followed, logs were thrown in the air like so many toothpicks.

For a second the great mass shook, gave a little, stopped, then its very core bulged outward. There was a lusty roar from a hundred throats—"She hauls!"—and the great mass plunged in a whirling maelstrom of upended logs through the sluice.

The sluicing of the remainder was an easy matter. In sections the swing booms were loosened, and by nightfall every stick was in the boom.

After leaving word with Jack Mayo for Lolar to come to Umsasqua, the overjoyed McDade hurried to the telegraph office to notify the Gordon Lumber Company that he would deliver according to his original contract. As he emerged from the office he noted a crowd gathered before Antoine's place.

In the center of the group, he discerned Lafe Newman, the sheriff, while shackled to the tenderfoot was Joe Marceau; beside them, handcuffed together, was Bud Martin and another man whom McDade took to be his Indian foreman.

Mac paused and thought quickly. In face of fact that Lolar had saved him thousands, the four hundred dollars meant little. He had earned it—and more. He would refuse to press the charge against him.

He touched the Indian on the arm. "Lolar," he began.

The prisoner turned, and Mac started back in astonishment. Though possessing Lolar's physique, the similarity went no further. The prisoner was swarthy, with black, bushy eyebrows that met above a pair of shifting, beady eyes. Extending from cheekbone to jaw, was an ugly scar, now tinged a purplish hue from suppressed rage.

"Joe Roc," Mac gasped.

"Yes," cried the tenderfoot triumphantly. "Black Joe, Lolar's half-brother, wanted by Uncle Sam for smuggling, and, incidentally, the man who stole your four hundred dollars, and laid out Billy Weeks. He, Martin, and Marceau here bound and gagged Lolar and carried him up to Roc's old camp at Big Logan and left him there to die.

"Secretly Roc loved Marie Latour, and it was she that lured him here at Antoine's last night, where he met these two," pointing at Martin and Marceau. "Marie overheard them talking and tramped the ten miles through that swamp last night and released Lolar.

"Martin and Marceau are also wanted by the Federal authorities at Portland, for that post-office break at Wharton last fall. That means a good long jail sentence for both, and after that you may settle your little score."

At the word "jail" Marceau's self-control broke.

"Ah ain' do it. Ah ain' do it," he sobbed wildly. "Bud she is break in de pos' office on Wharton for try git five hun'erd dollaire to give Antoine, so he will mak' Marie mar-ry heem. Ah ain' do not'in'; joost keep watch."

Martin lunged forward in a furious attempt to reach the little Canadian, a look of tigerish fury shining in his eyes; but Newman thrust him back roughly.

"An'," continued Joe, "she an' Roc is took dose fendin' boom an' swing heem 'cross de sluice for mak' dat big jam. Ah help, too. Den we go on office camp an' tie Mitch an' Roc is swap his moccasin for Lolar's shoe, w'ile Bud is took money from de wangin. Roc is git half an' me an' Bud is have res'. Roc hit Billy wid scale rule. Bud say he will show dat *sauvage* few t'ing. He is mad, too, 'cause Mac bounce heem from boss job."

"There you are, Mr. Mac," smiled the tenderfoot.

"But who are you?" asked the bewildered operator.

The young man, still smiling, quickly loosened his blue flannel shirt at the throat, and threw it back. Pinned to his undershirt was a badge, labeled "Secret Service."

"My name is Pierce," he said, and an exultant strain crept into his tone. "This day's work spells big for me. Roc has been wanted for nearly two years by the authorities, and by landing him and the perpetrators of the Wharton break I kill two birds with one stone, and I owe it chiefly to that little girl there."

He pointed to Marie who, with Lolar, had pressed into the inner ring of the circle, a little band of gold encircling the third finger of her left hand. Her eyes danced happily as the operator strode forward and grasped his foreman's hand.

"Lolar, I'll eat every word I said to-day. I'm sorry. If I can square myself by being your best man"—Marie blushed rosily—"why, I'll be only too glad to officiate."

Lolar grinned happily.

"Too late, Mr. Mac. Too late," he said. "Father François married us half an hour ago."

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun."

The Yellow Jinx

by Stephen Allen Reynolds

MORTON TERRY, senior member of the law firm of Terry & Gore, looked up from a volume of U. S. reports to find his stenographer standing at his elbow. "The sheriff wants a word with you on the phone," she said.

"Hello, Bill! What's doing?" called Terry through his desk instrument.

The officer's reply brought a smile to the lawyer's ruddy face. He fairly beamed as he hung up the receiver, turned to the stenographer, and said:

"You may go for the day, Miss West. Please get around by nine to-morrow."

As the door closed behind the departing girl Terry crossed the floor of his private office and halted before a shelf lined with filing cases. From a bulky case labeled "J. Barleycorn *et al.*," he produced a bottle of Scotch and a small tumbler.

His thirst quenched with neat liquor, the lawyer replaced the filing case, then rubbed his hands and smiled at his reflection in the office mirror.

"Pretty soft for Terry & Gore!" he chuckled to himself from time to time.

"Easy money! Just like taking worms away from crippled sparrows!"

Presently he helped himself to another look-in at the case of J. Barleycorn *et al.*, then seated himself at the window overlooking the main street of the northern New York border town. He was debating mentally whether he should buy a six-cylindered roadster or a speedy trotting horse when his partner entered.

Rudolph Gore, more familiarly known to the townsfolk of Tyrone as "Rudy," was radiant. He bore on this occasion the expression and bearing of a man who had just cashed a lottery ticket calling for the grand prize.

"There's no use talking," he said as he approached the senior partner and slapped him on the back, "we've got a gold mine. Put it all over the government again to-day. Had five chinks admitted out of seven. That means fifteen hundred more for us to divvy —besides expense money."

"I was digging up references for the Lee case when the sheriff phoned me about five minutes ago." Morton Terry grinned at Gore. Then added: "I thought I'd let Miss West go for the day, so we can kinda talk things over and celebrate a little as it were."

Rudolph Gore seated himself facing the other, bit off and spat out the end of a cigar, then said:

"That makes something over six thousand dollars clear for us since the first of the month. And it's pretty early in the month yet."

"Isn't it a wonder, though, that the D. A. isn't getting wise?" asked Terry.

Gore pulled thoughtfully at his cigar for a moment or two, then said through a cloud of smoke:

"Don't make any mistake about it; that district attorney *is* wise. Not about the identification racket though; and that's all we care."

Gore laughed softly, then went on: "He knows very well that our Chinese witnesses are coached; but he can neither catch 'em nor prove what he knows or what the judge suspects. The game's an open and shut proposition for us. And unless the law's changed we'll keep right on at the old stand, raking down three hundred bucks a head for turning Chinese coolies into free-born American citizens, and securing their admission into these great and glorious United States. Hooray for the present law! May it never be changed!"

Gore stood up, and assuming his best "jury attitude," waved his cigar as if it were a star-spangled banner.

"Nothing on the calendar before next week," said the senior partner when the noise had died away.

"Which 'll give me a chance to slip over the line to-morrow," Gore observed. "I'll see what's doing in Montreal; find out how many yellow boys we can expect next month; and I guess I'll have time to take in a show or two. Tyrone's a dead slow town. If it wasn't the county seat I'd 'a' pulled out long ago."

"But I was thinking of running down to N' York for a day or two," Terry demurred. "I've about made up my mind to buy a car that can burn up some of these country roads hereabouts. One of us has got to be on the job, though. Who'll go first?"

"We won't fight over it," laughed Gore. "We'll slip over to Eddy Bogle's and see if he's got a cold quart on the premises. Then we'll borrow his dice-box and settle who's to take a little vacation first."

"A *very* sensible suggestion," agreed the senior partner as he got up and reached for his hat.

II.

BARNARD, the brains and the law-clerk of that bureau of our national government which has to do with the exclusion and deportation of the unwelcomed John Chinaman, was at the Department of Justice, expostulating with the Attorney General.

"It's a positively disgraceful condition of affairs,' he was saying hotly, "these wholesale frauds which are being perpetrated up at Tyrone. And in spite of our best efforts the scheme has now been worked for months and months, and the scoundrels have been growing rich at it."

"You might give me a few particulars," said the Attorney General. He toyed with a batch of warrants from his division of investigation as he added: "You see, I haven't had time yet to familiarize myself thoroughly with Chinese matters. And I've been obliged heretofore to leave the cases in the hands of my assistants."

"It's easily explained," said Barnard. "All but one point, which I'll take up later. It's this way: These Chinese coolies, landed in Canada, have been crossing the border into New York State. They don't attempt to hide or run away from our officers, but give themselves up on sight. In several cases they've been bold enough to inquire their way to the county jail at Tyrone. They come in parties of from five to ten, and are, of course, apprehended and arrested and tried on the charges of being unlawfully within the United States. They submit very willingly to the detention, and when they are arraigned set up the remarkable plea that they were *born* in the United States, and returned to China in their infancy."

"And how do they attempt to prove it?" interjected the A. G.

"They do it by coached witnesses brought up from New York," Barnard explained. "Everything is arranged in advance by the powerful Chinese Six Companies, as planned by this shady law firm of Terry & Gore.

"Under their directions the young coolies are grouped in pairs, sometimes trios, and the claim is then made that they are two, or three, brothers, born in the United States twenty or more years ago, and taken to China while very young by their parents. A single Chinese witness poses on trial-day as an uncle or very near relative of two or more of the young coolies, and swears that, to his positive knowledge, the boys were born in San Francisco.

"Of course, they never produce a birth certificate or an attested copy. They claim almost invariably that it has been lost. And, since the original San Francisco records were destroyed by the fire of 1906, we can't offset the claim by proving that these boys were *not* born out there."

The Attorney-General lowered his shaggy eyebrows and pursed his lips. "Why not put the accused on the stand?" he asked. "Then you could exclude the witnesses from the room, and get enough contradictory testimony on which the trial-justice might base an exclusion."

But Barnard shook his head. "No," he declared. "Terry & Gore are far too clever to permit their clients to take the stand. They rely invariably on the uncontradicted testimony of the Chinese witness who poses as the relative. So, of course, under the law, there's nothing for the trial commissioner to do but to turn the prisoners loose after declaring them to be native-born citizens. And this, despite the fact that we all know that the rankest kind of fraud is being perpetrated."

The Attorney-General scowled. He was quick to grasp the gist of the matter. It was really very embarrassing.

"Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that the government is being defied by a pair of unprincipled rascals who, in return for a large fee, make full-fledged American citizens out of young Chinese coolies?"

"It's only too true, sir," the law clerk answered. "Why," he went on with a wry smile, "if the claims of the thousands of Chinese who've been admitted during the last year or two as native-born citizens are true, it follows that every Chinese woman living in this country during the eighties and nineties must have given birth to some forty or fifty sons. It's absurd!"

"Have you tested your Chinese interpreters?" asked the head of the Department of Justice. "It seems to me that if they're loyal to you they might secure evidence of subornation to perjury. Possibly by placing one or more of them in the Chinese detention-rooms in the Tyrone jail it might—"

"Quite useless," Barnard interrupted. "Our Chinese interpreters are loyal; there's no question about that. The other chaps are too slick for them—that's all. And as a matter of fact, the coaching of witnesses is done in New York and in the Tyrone offices of Terry & Gore. So there's no way of overhearing the coaching unless we can establish dictagraphs. We tried that without success at Tyrone."

"Why not secure Secret Service operatives to shadow the lawyers day and night?" the Attorney-General suggested. "If they could locate the New York City rendezvous where these coaching sessions are held, we might arrange to either establish a dictagraph on the premises or to have a faithful interpreter overhear what transpires. I take it that both Terry and Gore visit the city for conferences with representatives of the Six Companies?"

Barnard nodded. "Yes," he said; "they slip in and out of New York every few weeks; but it's impossible for Secret Service men to follow them."

"Why?"

"Since Congress has been raising such a row about using the Secret Service for various purposes, the Secretary of the Treasury has been unwilling to detail operatives for work outside his own department. The guards for the President are the only exception. And we've no funds in our bureau with which to hire private detectives."

The Attorney-General tapped the polished surface of his mahogany flat-top and waited for Barnard to continue. Trained lawyer that he was, the departmental head perceived that the law clerk had still more to say.

"My reason for coming to you personally," Barnard continued, "is that my chief is away on vacation just now, and I thought I'd come to you for advice. If I could only put a stop to this wholesale introduction of coolies before the chief gets back I'll have his undying gratitude. Now I come to the matter which so sorely puzzles us all: It's the identification by the witnesses of the relatives for whom they appear. And it's positively uncanny."

The Attorney-General wrinkled his brow; but the wrinkles dissolved as the law clerk proceeded to explain.

"You see, sir," he went on, "both Terry and Gore have access to their clients in the jail at all reasonable hours. But they don't use our government interpreters at these interviews.

"They have an interpreter of their own in the person of one Loo Ming, an English-speaking highbinder in the confidence of the Six Companies. And we have no right to deny them a *private* interview; so Messrs. Loo Ming, Terry, and Gore and the petitioners for admission have their whispered conferences whenever it pleases them.

"But we *have* a right to refuse to let these coached witnesses see the prisoners before their trial, and we *exercise* that right. We don't want to give Terry & Gore an opportunity of pointing out which of the prisoners a certain witness is appearing for, so that the witness can point him out at the hearing. So now comes the peculiar feature of the scheme:

"Suppose we have a witness on the stand, and he has testified to the American birth of two alleged brothers. Your district attorney asks him if he can identify the Chinese persons in whose behalf he has appeared. The witness invariably replies that he *can*. The test follows.

"We have thirty or forty Chinamen all dressed alike lined up in a

room with guards over them. We allow neither Loo Ming nor his employers in the room where the identifications are made. And as the witness walks down the line we take pains to see that none of the prisoners so much as bats an eyelash.

"And yet, in spite of all our precautions, the witness always points out the person or persons whom he has sworn are his blood relatives. Never yet has one failed. It's most remarkable! Time and time again I've proceeded from Washington to Tyrone and seen the identification test with my own eyes."

"It may be that these identifications are made possible through photographs mailed to New York from China or Canada."

Barnard shook his head. "No," he said; "photographs have never proven to be of particular value in Chinese work. These young coolies resemble each other too closely. Also it's quite unreasonable to suppose that the witnesses have crossed over into Canada so as to familiarize themselves with the features of the others, since they have no right to leave the States without permission and would have to be smuggled back themselves."

"Do you ask these witnesses how it is that after so many years they are able to recognize their relatives?"

"Sometimes. And the answer is always the same: 'I have not seen the nephew since he was a baby; but he is the living image of his father—my brother who died in the San Francisco fire of 1906.'"

Barnard folded his arms and crossed his knees as he ceased speaking. He had laid his case before the highest legal officer in the land—finished explaining the dilemma in which his bureau found itself.

For some moments the Attorney-General sat in silent thought. He liked Barnard, wanted to help him; furthermore, the integrity of the government was being violated; the fountain of citzenship was being poisoned.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Barnard," he said presently; "I'll lend you a man for a few weeks—a man who'll get to the bottom of this matter or die in the attempt. In my opinion, your Chinese interpreters have been intimidated. If not afraid of their own lives, they have other reasons for fearing to help you to the utmost. Probably they have relatives living in China. And of course you know that the Chinese have a favorite way of revenging themselves by setting the hatchet-men onto the relatives in China of those persons who get into the bad graces of the Six Companies over here. If they can butcher a man's father or mother or brother, and advise the man here of the killing abroad, it's considered a sweeter form of vengeance."

Barnard nodded. Versed in the mysterious ways of John Chinaman, he knew well of this custom of the tongmen.

"The man I'm going to let you have," the other went on, "is a native of the Province of Kwangtung, China, but was graduated from Yale University and is now in the investigation branch of my department. He's a jewel.

"Time and time again I've tested him, and never found him wanting. He speaks fluently English and French and many of the Chinese dialects. He is not known as a government man; and, best of all, he's just back from a trip to China, where he buried his father—his last surviving relative. He has nothing to lose but his own life, and I have reason to believe that he'll risk that for the government—*give* it, if necessary."

"He sounds good to me," commented Barnard, "this supereducated Chinaman."

"Just the man for you. I'll wire for him and send him over to-morrow or next day. And don't keep him any longer than necessary, for he's most invaluable to my department."

"Thank you, general," Barnard answered.

Then he picked up his hat and stick. The suspicion of a smile flitted across the Attorney-General's face as the door closed behind the man from the Chinese Bureau, but it vanished as he reached under the edge of his desk and pressed a push-button.

III.

MORT TERRY and his partner were playing billiards in the rear room of Bogle's café. They had the room to themselves, and their privacy was not intruded upon save when they pressed the button and ordered refreshments.

"What's the matter, Rudy?" asked Terry, when his partner for the tenth or twelfth time failed to score.

Gore gulped down two fingers of neat liquor, forgot his water, then sputtered:

"Th-that strange Chinaman in court this morning. He's gotten on my nerves."

"Who is he, anyway?"

"Nobody seems to know. He's registered up to the Adirondack House as 'Toy Jup Wong, New York City.' Loo Ming says he came up from the city on the night train together with him and the witnesses."

"I hardly noticed him in court."

"*I* did!" snarled Gore as he poked viciously at the cue-ball and missed a carom by fully a foot.

"What did he do?"

"Just watched the proceedings. He didn't mix in with any of the government people so far as I could see, but he watched *me* like a hawk. And when I didn't catch him watching me I could feel his beady black eyes boring a hole through the back of my head. What's he doing here in Tyrone? What does he want?"

Terry shrugged his shoulders.

"Loo says he'll bear watching," Gore went on, "and that on the train on the way up he kept his eyes and ears open a little too wide to suit Loo's ideas of what constitutes Chinese etiquette."

"You don't suppose he tumbled to the identification racket, do you?" A tremulous note in Terry's question indicated that he was becoming anxious himself.

"Impossible!" snorted the junior partner. "But," he added soberly, "if they ever *do* get wise we'll have to think up some new scheme — if we're still out of jail."

"Cheer up, Rudy!" exclaimed Terry at this juncture as he slapped his partner on the back. "Let's not bury our dead before the battle. We'll take a spin before lunch. The new car's a beaut. And what's the use of letting a strange chink worry us and put gray hairs in our heads? Drink up!"

"I s'pose you're right, Mort," averred Gore as he emptied his glass and put his cue away. "But," he added, "I don't like the way that fellow watched me, and I hope he won't be in court for this afternoon's session."

But the strange Chinaman was there —calm, watchful, and imperturbable— listening to the first case—that of the United States *versus* Lum San.

Together with a score or more of other Chinamen whose cases were still pending, the prisoner was waiting patiently in the detention-room adjoining the court-room—waiting for the identification test—then freedom.

The first and only witness for Lum San was a wizened old laundryman, who swore blandly that the Lum San in question was his brother's son; that he had been born in Dupont Street, San Francisco, in the late spring of 1895, and that the young man had been taken to China by his parents when he was about nine years of age.

Attorney Gore finished the direct examination of the polisher of collars and cuffs, then turned him over to the government people.

As the district attorney, in a futile attempt to get the wily witness to contradict himself, began to grill Lum San's alleged uncle, Gore strolled across the court-room and gazed out

of the window for several moments. From the window he sauntered slowly to a position before a county map of New York State, and gazed listlessly at its lithographed surface.

Narrowly, his keen brown eyes missing no movement of the junior law partner, Toy Jup Wong watched the attorney.

In singsong Cantonese the government interpreter was repeating the question: "Can you, and will you, identify the young man you claim to be your nephew?" when the eyes of the witness sought those of Rudolph Gore.

But the junior partner had his back turned to the witness-stand, and was tracing with his forefinger the boundaries of Lake Champlain. For the fraction of an instant his finger-tip rested on the salmon-colored square which represented Franklin County, then he yawned and turned wearily toward the window.

"The witness answers 'Yes,'" were the next words of the interpreter; whereupon the United States commissioner declared that inasmuch as no evidence had been produced by the United States to shake the testimony of the witness, and that no testimony had been offered tending to show that Lum San had *not* been born in San Francisco, the prisoner would be released and admitted to the United States as a native-born citizen thereof, subject to identification by the uncle.

At this, for the first time since his appearance in the court-room, Toy Jup Wong took action. With a wary eye on Loo Ming, he arose, approached the counsel rail, and whispered earnestly into the ready ear of the district attorney.

Surprise was written plainly on that official's face as Toy Jup Wong finished and resumed his seat. For an instant the district attorney hesitated and glanced uncertainly, first at the witness, and then at Rudolph Gore; then he approached the presiding justice and whispered to him.

"What's up?" muttered Terry into the ear of his partner.

"You can search *me!*" said Gore with a shrug.

The commissioner's face grew stern as he listened to the district attorney; then, when the latter had finished, he snapped:

"Contrary to usual custom, I'll hear the other three cases before witnessing any identifications. They may as well take place after *all* the hearings are over. Call the next case."

With these words the commissioner leaned back in his chair, and the clerk called the case of the United States *versus* Chow Foo.

The hearings dragged along.

Gore, puzzled and worried by the whispered conferences, finished one by one the direct examination of his witnesses, turned them over to the district attorney, and then sauntered around the court-room while the government's man tried vainly to entangle the perjurers.

As the last case was being heard, Toy Jup Wong left the court-room and approached the official in charge of the Chinese prisoners. A brief consultation followed the display of certain credentials, after which the Department of Justice man was permitted to enter the detention-room set apart for Chinese prisoners. A score or more of them were present, lounging around the room, dressed ready for the line-up and forthcoming identification tests.

Attired all alike in loose suits of plain white cotton furnished by the government, wearing straw sandals of uniform pattern, each man cleanly shaven and with his hair cut just like his neighbor's, it would seem that the young coolies were as much alike as so many pennies fresh from the mint. Even the soft white shirts with rolling collars were alike, save possibly for size.

But one thing Toy Jup Wong's keen eyes noted—the thing he had been led to expect to see. The mere suspicion

of a smile flitted across his immobile features, then he called softly:

"Lum San!"

A young Chinaman approached and stood ill at ease as the hawklike eyes of the Yale graduate scanned him from head to foot. A question or two followed, but Lum San stood mute.

He had been told to trust *no* one—no one but Loo Ming of the Six Companies. Upon his observance of these instructions depended his chances of entering the United States, where much gold and silver was to be earned in a short space of time.

"It matters not," said Toy Jup Wong to himself.

Then he turned away, just as the district attorney and others entered the room.

"Keep the witnesses outside for five minutes," whispered Toy Jup Wong to the commissioner.

Instructions were given to that effect, and some rapid work followed, much to the surprise of the prisoners. All in readiness, a line was formed; then the commissioner chuckled and ordered in the first witness.

Ten minutes later pandemonium reigned in the detention-room, and soon afterward, Toy Jup Wong, his hand in the pocket where a revolver reposed, strode depotward to catch the evening train.

His work in Tyrone was at an end, for he had seen to it that each petition for entrance to the United States had been denied. For, strange to say, *each witness had picked out the wrong prisoner!*

And even as Toy Jup Wong was on his way to the depot, the district attorney was entering the telephone booth in the Adirondack House. Calling up the long-distance operator, he was soon in touch with Washington and the head of the Department of Justice.

"Well, general," said the man at the Tyrone end of the wire, "we've put a crimp in the Chinese frauds in this district. I'm starting disbarment proceedings against both Terry and Gore. Don't see how we can hold 'em on a criminal charge, because none of the Chinese will turn State's evidence. Anyway, it's a clean job; and the credit's all due that Chinaman you sent up here."

"What was the scheme?" asked the Attorney General.

The district attorney chuckled into the receiver.

"The very simplest thing in the world," he explained. "That chink of yours came up in the train with the New York witnesses. He overheard a few bits of conversation before the others grew suspicious of him, and heard something Loo Ming said about watching what color Attorney Gore should point out in the court-room, and to remember that color when the identification test should be made.

"And to cut down the telephone charges I'll put it briefly to you. Gore has access to the prisoners up to the hour of the hearing. One of his confederates is the Chinese cook who serves the detention-room. Suppose six men are to be identified. They are all dressed alike with the exception of the neckties. Other prisoners in the line-up whose cases are still pending are given ties either of black or white.

"But the Chinese cook sees to it that the six men are each furnished with a different colored necktie.

"Gore visits his clients after they are dressed for the test, and makes a note of which particular colors the men are wearing. He has no opportunity of verbally coaching his witnesses as to the colors, because the bailiff takes charge of them as soon as they reach the court-house.

"On the wall of the court-room a county map of New York State hangs. The counties are lithographed in various colors, such as salmon, orange, green, and so forth. The neckties match the shades of the map. At a certain moment Gore strolls over to the wall and puts his finger on a certain—"

"I see," broke in the Attorney Gen-

eral, "I'll call up Barnard and let him know. And how did to-day's cases wind up?"

"All ordered deported," laughed the district attorney, "Toy Jup Wong changed around the ties!"

A laugh came over the wire from the Washington end, then the head of the Department of Justice inquired about his Chinese interpreter. Said the district attorney:

"He leaves in about half an hour; and I hope he reaches Washington safely. The Six Companies will surely set the hatchet-men after him now that their scheme is exploded. He's a very brave Chinaman and a most loyal one."

"You're wrong," said the Attorney General, "he's not a Chinaman at all. He—"

"What!"

"This is for your private ear. When Mr. Toy Jup Wong washes the walnut-juice off his face and hands, soaks off the collodion that holds up the outer corners of his eyes, he's Special Agent Deering of my division of investigation. He's a son of the late Rev. William Deering of the Changchaw Presbyterian Mission. He was born in China, knows more about Chinese dialects than any other white man I ever heard of, and I'm going to raise his salary before the Secret Service steals him."

And the Attorney General was as good as his word.

Noah and the Ark

by Alex Shell Briscoe

HIS name really was Noah, and it fitted, too, in a way, for while his namesake of antiquity probably figured in the greatest spring rise in all history, Noah Beedle of Miami Landing was associated with several that still are talked of in the Mississippi Valley.

He was a thick-shouldered hulk of a man in his early forties. Quiet and diffident in manner and seemingly dull of mind, still there was within him a romantic desire for adventure which was fettered by his timidity and lack of initiative.

Noah had the soul of an adventurer and the spirit of a stay-at-home. As a boy he wanted to run away with every circus that came to town, but shrank when opportunity arrived.

He wanted to sail distant seas and see foreign lands and the strange places of the world, but always had hesitancy intervened; so he had kept to the beaten path till the youthful flame of ambition seemingly flickered and died, till habit had neutralized the wanderlust in his blood, and his horizon was limited to the narrow section of river valley where he lived and worked and his two-dollar-a-day job.

In the transportation world Noah was neither fish nor fowl. On the rolls of the O. K. and St. L. he was listed as a bargeman, while among regular rivermen he was regarded as a railroader.

To explain, he worked on a car ferry at Miami where freight-trains were transported across the river in the days before the bridge was finished. Passenger-trains were not sent across the ferry, being routed over a C. P. and L. bridge a score of miles north, incidentally paying heavy toll, since the O. K. and St. L. was not a member of the bridge combine that, in those days, controlled every span up and down the river for two hundred miles on each side of Cairo.

The directors of the line writhed over the tribute paid to rival lines till they could finance a plan to build a bridge at Miami, and it just happened that the year the steel-work was begun was marked by the biggest flood in twenty years.

The piers of the structure were finished and the false-work stretched from the Illinois shore to beyond the middle span when the June rise came down in a swirling rush and operations were promptly abandoned. The car ferry at that point suspended making trips when the water reached a certain stage, and the crew turned to the work of guarding the company's property from the flood.

Noah found the change not unwelcome. He possessed many of the characteristics of the typical riverman, particularly the capacity for loafing; so he was not entirely pleased the day after the barge ceased its daily round of crossings to be summoned to the slip by three long blasts of the towboat Paducah Belle's whistle.

Peters, foreman of the Miami yards, was talking to Adams, boss of the ferry crew and the captain of the towboat, when Noah arrived; and he lingered in hearing long enough to get an idea of what was afoot. A trestle had been washed out a few miles above Miami, and, with freight accumulating in the yards, orders had been issued for the ferry to resume operations and keep going as long as practicable.

None of the bargemen relished the prospect. It would be a difficult and dangerous task to warp the barge into the slip on the Missouri side where the current swirled in; but orders were orders, and within a half-hour the first string of ten cars were shunted across the stream.

The first two trips were made without incident, though the water was now within three feet of the rails over which the cars were run aboard the slip, but the return to the Illinois shore after the second found Peters, decidedly worried, waiting at the landing.

Beside the yard boss stood an alert individual with a coldly determined eye, and Noah heard him present an ultimatum as he helped warp the barge into place.

"I know it's taking a chance," the stranger said, "but that's my business. I lose two thousand dollars every day I'm kept from crossing this river. It would cost me ten thousand dollars to make a détour the way you suggest, for we'd lose at least five engagements. Now, you've got your orders from the superintendent to put us across to-day, and I insist you do it."

Peters glanced out over the broad expanse of the river and nodded slowly. The Mississippi in flood-time is not particularly attractive from a scenic standpoint. Its magnitude impresses one, but not pleasantly. One appreciates the tremendousness of the rolling mass of water, but also sees its muddiness.

"All right," Peters snapped at last. "I'll put you across. You've got twenty-nine cars, and that means three trips between now and dark; so let's go to it."

Noah gaped at the first string of gaudy cars that were eased over the float and aboard the barge. They were painted a bright yellow, with

"Ring Brothers' Consolidated Shows" in vivid letters on the sides. Faces filled the windows of the passenger-coaches which were taken over on the first trip; for crossing the Mississippi on a car-barge in flood-time is a novelty even for circus folks.

None emerged, however, and Noah found them decidedly commonplace individuals when seen at close range; but the string of cars carried on the second trip proved of vast interest to the riverman.

As they were shunted aboard there came to Noah's nostrils the pungent odor of animals, and from closed box cars and the canvas covers over the cages on the flats there was heard a medley of strange noises—the chatter and squeal of monkeys, the rumbling snarl of great cats, the bellow of a water-buffalo—sounds that told of the fear of jungle denizens of a danger of which they instinctively were aware.

Several men whose duty it was to watch constantly over the animals while *en route* gathered in a group as the heaving engines of the Paducah Belle drew the barge out of the slip and nosed it around for the long slant across the current.

Noah coiled down his hawsers, then wandered along the runway, peering under the canvas covers in an effort to catch a glimpse of the animals. From a few feet away came the coughing roar of Titan, billed as the "Most Mastodonic Black-Maned Lion in Captivity," and the bargeman, amid jeers, ceased exploring.

The feeling of uneasiness among the beasts increased as the barge pushed farther into the stream. There was a whistling snort from a great river-horse sniffing its native habitat. Mahomet, advertised as "Larger than Jumbo," trumpeted an answering blast to the metallic yapping of hyenas, and again and again rose the tremendous roar of the big male lion.

It was the breath of the life of his dreams to Noah. He thrilled with the strangeness of it—the odors and noises of the wilds—and that longing which comes to a boy with the sight of his first circus, and which is never entirely eradicated, seized him.

There was a wistful look in his eyes as he stared at the row of cages, mysterious under their close-drawn covers, then he shook his head.

The old hesitancy which ever had held him back from any new enterprise was too strong. Reawakened, keener than ever before, he felt the stir of desire for the sight of new fields, of ambition to do something besides fill a two-dollar-a-day job.

But he still doubted his own powers. He would remain in the rut, as he had done in the past.

The drizzle which had fallen at intervals all day became a steady downpour as the barge neared the center of the stream; and it was this, probably, that caused the pilot of the Paducah Belle not to observe the snag floating with the current until it was too late to avoid it.

Only a few feet away was the drifting menace when it was sighted, and the jangle of bells was echoed by the crash when it fouled the bow of the towboat. The stout hull of the vessel was not damaged as it rode over the snag, but out of the water arose a great limb, like a dripping fang.

Through the flimsy wooden wall of the engine-room it drove; a great spurt of steam told of a riven pipe, and the Paducah Belle and the barge were floating helpless with the stream.

And further disaster threatened. The uncompleted bridge was hardly half a mile below, and the set of the current was carrying the two craft toward the false-work which stretched between the second and third piers.

Only one chance there was apparently to avoid a collision which probably would mean the loss of the two boats and the destruction of the false work of the bridge. It was the Lucy Lee, a powerful little tug which was on duty shunting drift away from the uncompleted structure.

But the tug at that particular moment chanced to be on the far side of the stream, and though it immediately started to the rescue, the odds were even whether it would be able to arrive in time.

With the crash and the yells of warning the barge crew and the circus men had run toward the Paducah Belle. Only Noah remained aboard. His post of duty was near the hawsers and he stayed there.

Across the river, yellow spume boiling up under her blunt nose as she bucked the current, raced the Lucy Lee, making a speed for which she had not been designed, and shot in between the Paducah Belle and the bridge, now hardly two hundred yards distant.

Still, the battle was only half won when the tug shoved its bow against the side of the towboat and buckled down to the task of trying to shove it past the point to which the false work extended.

If the helpless craft could be guided through the gap, it would be a simple matter to effect a landing lower down the river, and for a moment it looked as though the efforts of the plucky little tug would be successful.

But the powerful current, partly diverted by the mass of timber choked with drift, was too much for the Lucy Lee. Deliberately, but with tremendous momentum, the barge started swinging. Another instant and it was broadside with the stream. Disaster was certain.

With reversed propeller thrashing furiously the tug tried to back out, leaving the other boats to their fate, but it was too late.

Broadside on the Paducah Belle smashed into the false-work, and the Lucy Lee's stout timbers were crushed against the masonry of a pier.

With her hull ripped and torn, the Paducah Belle was wedged deep into the mass of beams and piling of the half-wrecked temporary structure, and as she settled slowly the members of her crew, with that of the barge and the circus men, too, swarmed up into the false-work over which they could make their way in safety to the shore.

Only Noah stuck to his post.

And the barge? It had partly cleared the mass when the towboat hit, and the hawsers parted as it swung in the grip of the current, missing the pier entirely and striking the uncompleted false-work a glancing blow.

There was a ripping and rending of wood as jutting beams raked and gouged the box cars and cages, then there swelled the spitting squallings of great cats, the trumpet blasts of elephants, roars and bellows and screams —a diapason of animal fear.

And shrill and piercing above it all was the scream of a child, affrighted and in pain.

Three of the cars were thrust over the side of the barge. Cages were broken open by projecting beams, jammed together and overturned. The stout side of a box car containing the elephants was torn out. The great cage containing the hippopotamus was twisted around, and one end dropped to the deck of the barge, the iron bars bursting like fly-screen wire as the weight of the river-horse landed against them.

Then as the barge cleared the bridge and floated away into the gray drizzle, from out wrecked cars and twisted cages leaped fearsome creatures of the jungle.

Noah did not come unscathed through the smash. He had been jammed against one of the cars, narrowly escaping being crushed. When he arose he limped badly, one arm hung almost helpless, severely strained, and he realized it would be impossible for him to swim the long distance to the shore.

Half-dazed he stared around him at the wreck, then in a sudden panic he scrambled to the top of the nearest box car, watching over his shoulder a huge cat slinking along the barge deck.

The top of the car already was occupied by a dozen monkeys and a long-

muzzled baboon, all scared and shivering in the drizzle. The baboon bounded away with a flash of its doglike teeth and Noah seized the first weapon that came to his hand, a red-painted pole that projected from a wrecked car of acrobats' and other circus equipment.

As Noah brandished the stick the monkeys fled a little distance, then turned with shrill screeches and bounded past him to the end of the car where they crouched in a group, chattering in fear.

And the man, too, backed away from the lithe thing, mottled with yellow and black, which had leaped to the roof of a car beyond and lay flattened, its amber-colored eyes fixed on Noah.

While the man confronted the sinuous terror, there sounded a prodigious grunt and the barge deck trembled. The hippopotamus had forced its way through the broken bars of its cage and stood on its postlike legs slowly wagging its great square head from side to side, its red-rimmed eyes blinking from knoblike projections.

From beyond came a coughing roar and the river-horse turned with clumsy swiftness when a tawny animal wedged its way through a gap between two cages and stood with its maned head upreared and tail slowly lashing.

It was Titan, and his appearance was greeted by a burst of shrill cries from the monkeys and a growl from the leopard that deepened as the head of a lioness was pushed into view.

Through the torn side of a box car which had been turned half around was thrust the head of a great bull elephant, its tusks mounted with brass balls, and its trunk went up in a whistling blast as it caught sight of the lions.

Titan had ignored the hippopotamus, but he whirled at the challenge of Mahomet, crouching low as the elephant finished the demolition of the car door with a single ponderous shove and stepped to the deck with an ease astonishing for its bulk.

Very steadily the little pig-eyes of the great beast regarded the crouching lion, and in the silence Noah again heard the sobbing of the child in a wrecked car of equipment a few feet away.

The lions heard it, too, and the massive heads lifted slightly. Only for a moment, however, did the tension last, then, deliberately, trunk upcurled and ears spread like fans, Mahomet started forward, seemingly more concerned over the uneasy motion of the barge than over the tawny beasts that faced him.

There came a tremendous splash. The hippopotamus went over the side with a grunt of vast satisfaction as it landed in the water, and the lions whirled and bounded away from the advancing elephant, taking refuge under a box car which still remained upright, which happened to be the one where Noah had sought safety.

One at a time three more elephants had emerged from the broken box car and stood with Mahomet, sniffing toward the shore, evidently considering plunging into the river. Three hyenas pattered whining along the side of the barge. The monkeys crowded closer together and turned implike faces toward Noah.

Still came the cries of the child, and Noah shifted his position till he could see the mass of gear and equipment which had tumbled from the torn side of a car. A movement of a flap of canvas caught his eye, then a small, brown hand thrust aside the cloth, revealing the freckled, tear-stained face of a small boy.

Noah did not need to be told how the lad came to be there. There had been days when he, too, had thought of running away with a circus, and he had planned to hide in one of the cars until it was too late to send him back home.

The difference had been that Noah had lacked the initiative to carry out his plans, and this boy—he couldn't have been more than ten years old—

had mustered the nerve to follow the lure of adventure.

And the predicament in which he had landed seemed serious. Apparently his legs were caught fast in the wreckage, and he moaned with pain as he writhed and tugged in a vain effort to free himself.

Noah called to him encouragingly, and the boy looked up, his eyes curiously round.

"I can't get loose—and it hurts," he piped; and as Noah stood irresolute there came a sharp blast from the big elephant.

The barge was drifting by a low-lying island and Mahomet, with a second call, went over the side. One after another the other elephants followed with shrill trumpetings, and made their way ashore.

Noah started down from the car to the boy's rescue, moving slowly because of his injuries, when he heard a snarl, and scrambled back to his perch. He had forgotten the lions!

As he regained the roof the two great beasts emerged, and Noah shouted a warning to the boy to draw the canvas over his face and lie still.

"Lay quiet, kid," Noah called out as the canvas moved; then a chill crept into his heart as the lioness stalked into view.

Fascinated, he watched the play of huge shoulders as she padded along. He hoped she would pass, but as she came opposite the car where the boy was hidden she stopped, motionless except for a slight twitching of her tufted tail.

The barge, swinging with a twist of the current, lurched slightly; the mass of equipment shifted, and the boy cried out sharply.

Instantly the lioness crouched, shoulders bunched angularly, belly touching the deck, yellow eyes ablaze.

Sick with horror, Noah watched one broad paw slide forward, the bristling of hair along the spine.

Again the wail of the boy and the lioness flattened closer to the deck, silent, deadly, its eyes, glowing with blood-lust, fixed on the torn canvas.

Noah yelled at the beast and hurled a piece of board ripped from the torn car. The answer was a deep snarl, echoed by a wild scream from the lad, who had pushed aside the canvas and faced the crouching terror.

A pause for a heart-beat, and Noah turned his eyes away. Another instant and—he didn't dare think!

The shrieks of the child swelled higher, cutting like a knife into the man's heart. Something dragged his eyes back to the spot. The thing had crept a few inches closer.

Then suddenly indecision left Noah. Gone was hesitancy and terror of the beast below. He only knew a blind rage, and he swung over the side of the car, forgetting the pain of his injured shoulder as he reached the deck and advanced straight toward the lioness, brandishing the red pole.

For just a moment the big animal confronted him, muscles taut for a spring. Noah lowered the pole and it gave way.

Strangely unafraid, Noah followed, jabbing with the stick, reviling the lioness, driving it before him.

At the side of one of the cars it paused, ears flattened, fangs agleam; then, in a seeming panic, with a snarl that was almost a whine, it fled out of sight.

When a swift launch loaded with animal men from the circus sputtered through the mist to the side of the barge a half hour later, Noah sat on the car-roof comforting a badly scared boy with a twisted ankle.

Near by a group of monkeys and a long-nosed baboon crouched together, and beyond a mottled leopard kept a wary eye on two lions that ranged uneasily up and down the deck.

It was a vastly different Noah who greeted the circus men as they scrambled aboard with whips and sharp iron bars. He had gained confidence and a new belief in himself. Coolly he de-

scended to the deck, and with a wave of the pole drove the lions to cover. It was sheer bravado, the showing-off of a boy, but it was characteristic of the new spirit which was to rule Noah —a spirit which would send him far afield to win belated success, to be something of a man among men.

Later, when the story of how Noah had faced the lioness and had driven her away from her intended prey was told, a veteran animal trainer chuckled, glanced again at the red pole, and turned to a companion.

"Say, pal," he laughed; "there's the original man with the horseshoe," and he indicated Noah, who was lifting the boy into the launch. "Remember last week in Peoria when old Titan and his mate got to fighting and we used hot irons to separate them? Cats don't forget the irons, ever. You see," and he pointed to the red pole, "they thought that was a hot iron."

A H, M E N !

BY ELIZABETH G. REYNOLDS

THEY'VE a plenty ways uncertain
Have this world of men we meet!
We laughing lead them through a path
Rose-petaled at their feet.
We call them to come after,
The sunny meadows through.
Do they follow us?
Why, certainly they do.

Like the changing skies of spring-time,
Sun smiling through a cloud,
With a tear we call them to us
Where we stand all April-browed.
Surely they will haste to kiss
The rose-leaf, sweet with dew!
Do they follow us?
Yes, cautiously they do.

Then we turning, bid them follow
By a rocky way and steep,
By cruel thorns our feet are torn—
Alone we pause to weep—
And half doubting, give our sadness voice,
Piercing the stillness through.
Do they follow us?
Reluctantly they do.

Far, far away we spy them
Where the shade and sunshine meet
With troubled brow and aching heart
And too reluctant feet.
Laughing, dancing flits a stranger,
Through the meadows sweet with dew—
Do they follow her?
Why, certainly they do.

The Joy Germs

by Hy Gage

IT was breakfast hour in the rejuvenated city of Panama.

This means that Old Sol was flirting with the meridian.

In the half-sheltered harbor back of the ancient Spanish sea-wall flashed and glinted the white enamel and polished brass of a seventy-foot motor-cruiser.

Conspicuous by contrast with the nondescript mosquito fleet that surrounded it, the graceful Tramp seemed suspended in mid air, so clear was its shimmering reflection.

Wafted therefrom on the gentle breeze of the Pacific came the chords of a college song that would have delighted the ear of any Pennsylvanian:

"Rah, rah, Pennsylvania,
Rah for the red and the blue!
Rah, rah, rah-ah-ah,
Rah for the red and blue!"

"Gee, Babe, that tenor's sour!" sniffed Dick Pemberton.

"Aw, you can't expect a man's pipes to yodel properly before breakfast!"

"Oo-he! Señor Pemberton!" came a hail from overside, and a barefooted native lad jumped aboard from a flat-bottomed rowboat. "Cablegram, Señor Pemberton!"

"Greetings, O lemon-skinned bearer of joyful tidings!" bubbled Dick. "Dad's loosened up again, say we."

He danced across the deck, snatched open the envelope and read:

Sail home immediately. Final thousand Panama Bank.

FATHER.

"Listens like papa means business this trip," commented Dick. "We've got to step along to get to Philly on that thousand. Hey, cap!" he called to the navigator. "We head for home soon as I can slip over to the bank."

Briefly this explains why the Tramp sped past the American-built town of Balboa about two hours later, and made fast before the Miraflores locks, awaiting opportunity to be boosted through.

Eventually the great steel gates shut them in the bottomless cement cañon, the waters boiled and welled; they rose skyward and moved into the second chamber. Then up, up, and out into the tiny lake for a five-mile stretch to the "Peter McGill" lock.

A single lift here and they reached the eighty-five foot level, free to be on their merry way under the slowly sliding cliffs of the awesome Culebra Cut.

On and on they wound past the much abused Rio Chagres, twisting

and turning into Gatun Lake, the man-made inland sea.

As the tropical sun, seeming to have lost its bearings, was setting over the Atlantic Ocean, they dropped anchor near Gatun locks, in water where, two years before, wild and impenetrable jungle had flourished.

Early morning saw them locked down the three massive Gatun steps. They slid into Limon Bay and on to Colon.

In this ex-pest-hole-of-creation, now clean, businesslike, and modern, they loaded their capacity supply of gasoline and immediately set their course for Limon, the Costa Rican port.

Having circled down the West Indies to Trinidad and Venezuela, it was their plan to skirt the coast of Central America homeward bound.

For the motor yachtsman this is coming to be the ideal tour. Perhaps nowhere in the world can one put into so many unusual ports, salute such a number of different flags, and investigate a like variety of peoples within the same distance.

This cruise in his father's motor yacht was Dick's final fling before settling down as office boy under pa's paternal wing. His three guests, "Babe" Butler, "Bud" Simpson and "Chick" Wright, had all just graduated in the same class, and were having the great adventure of their lives.

The afternoon of the second day the mountains of Costa Rica pierced the hazy horizon line and rose steadily until the fringe of palms along the shore was visible.

"Another one of those banana burgs, I s'pose!" sniffed Dick, as the white houses of Port Limbao, the Chiraguan town, began to peep out from the velvety green. "Got a railroad up the mountains to San Illario. Wish we had time to make the climb. Looks inviting."

Before the anchor-chain rattled, a rowboat put out from the jungle above the town and headed for the yacht.

Awash with ooze from rowing, the lone boatman tumbled up the companion steps in wild haste to get aboard, and a yellow leather suit-case rolled at his feet.

He stood about fourteen hands high in his buckskins, generous of equator, gowned in a bedraggled near-white linen suit and hatted in one of those delicately woven Panamas which only the natives of Ecuador can produce. He had a sallow skin of a nameless shade somewhere between russet, orange, elephant's breath, taupe, London smoke and *tête-de-nègre*.

"H-m! Funny way for the quarantine doc to come aboard!" chuckled Dick aside. Then: "What's up, doc?" to the visitor.

"Gentlemans—excuse please—*Madre de Dios!* I am so excite!" this between porpoise puffs, and ably assisted by eloquent hands. "The robber—he has escape—one hundred thousand dollar—not pesos, but dollar of those Estados Unidos! *Car-r-amba!* Me? Ah, *sí, señor*—excuse!—I am General Alfonso Castillas José Gondara Baccallao. It is that I am command the gr-r-reat armee of Chiragua!"

"Well, General Bock, what's the big row?" blurted Babe.

"See—that way he vamose in that boat — pop-pop-pop-pop, he go like thees one—not yet so much beeg!" and the general pointed up the coast. "He is—what you call him—treasurer of my so glor-r-ious countree—he steel the oh so much dollar, and pouf! He out of sight go. The fruit ship sail from Greytown at daylight—sure he catch ship and we no more see bad mans!

"You take me to those fruit ship, queeck? Yes? No? We catch—we make two piece—you get half—me I get half, yes?"

"Split fifty-fifty, eh?" said Dick "What do you say, boys? Let's catch the fruit ship and see what happens. Can't be over eighty miles to Greytown, and we can do it before daylight in a walk."

"You can't get the mud-hook up quick enough to suit me," agreed Babe Butler.

"Say, boys," Dick suggested, "if we can make love to a slice of that reward we'll tell dad to fire when ready, cut the cable, and dilly-dally among these barefoot banana republics as long as we have a peso left to pay the check for our lotus-eating."

They all shook hands with General Baccallao, then danced around him singing

"Drink a high-ball at nightfall
To Pennsyl-va-ni-ah—"

the which they proceeded to do.

The engines throbbed beneath and the chase was on.

"General Bock," said Dick Pemberton before they turned in that night, "the motor tender will be overside ready to take you to the steamer in the morning. You will be called as soon as she is sighted."

"One thousand times *gracias!*" gushed the general. "Does the *señor* mean it that I go in those leetle pop-pop boat?"

"Yeah. She's got an outboard motor and will get you alongside *pronto.*"

"But the noise she make it! Oo-he! It will the bad mans acquaint that I am come catch him for shoot!" protested the Costa Rican.

"Oh, well, the sailor boys can row it, then. That's easy. It'll be pretty early for us to see you off, so I'll wish you luck now. We'll hang around and send for you on signal. Cap has the orders. *Buenas noches.*"

The general was assigned to bunk with Bud Simpson in the after-cabin. Bud retired early with a headache.

Later, he decided to take a headache tablet, a package of which he always carried in the suit-case under his berth. After some fumbling and sleepy swearing, he found his tablet and went back to bed.

Soon after the general turned in. It seemed to the general that he had gurgled and snoozed not more than two minutes when he was gently shaken by one of the sailors, who said quietly:

"Greytown harbor, sir. The fruit ship is anchored near."

"Ah-h! Veree good. The leetle boat—he is wait, yes?"

"All ready, sir, at the companion ladder."

When the sailor had left, the general took up the yellow leather case, slipped on deck and deposited it carefully in the tender, throwing his linen coat over it. Then he hurried back to the after-cabin and scrambled into his clothes.

"Veree quiet! Do not those splashings make with such loudness!" hissed the general as he was rowed under the great ship's stern. "I will in go by those beeg hole," indicating where side plates had been removed.

Noiselessly he poked the case in on the green bananas and crawled after it. The sailors returned to the Tramp.

For an hour the captain of the yacht watched the fruiter for the general's signal, but no flag fluttered up to the yard arm. Then he noted a hurried closing of plates and hatches, and a long blast from the steamer's whistle. The steam capstan hoisted anchor, and the great rusty-brown, red-spotted hulk vanished seaward in the morning mist.

"Well, what d'you know about that?" he queried of the rising sun, and slipped hurriedly to the owner's cabin. "She's gone! Vamosed!" he spluttered in Dick's ear, at the same time shaking him out of his sleep.

"Whassamatter? Who's gone?" gurgled Dick, half awake.

"We put the general aboard, and he's still aboard! He never gave us the signal!"

"Dunno whasher talkin' 'bout. G'way 'n' lemme sleep!"

Two hours later breakfast was served.

"Where's his royal nibs?" interrogated Babe.

"Gone." Dick blew a farewell kiss

by way of illustration. "Steamer kidnaped him. Yee hee! The old duffer got aboard and they trotted off with him. O-ho, ho! Isn't that rich!"

"Waw hoo, hoo!" roared Babe. "Honest? I'll bet there's some hot spinach lingo flying about that old tub right now!" and the boys rolled around the cabin in delight.

"May be rich, but it leaves us poor!" exclaimed Bud suddenly sobering. "How about the reward, and our extra month's cruise?"

"Oi yoi! Never thought of that!" burst from one of the crew.

"What's the idea, anyway?" inquired Chick Wright. "D'you s'pose the general found the crook aboard, and stuck so as not to lose the money? Maybe it had been hidden in the bananas or something."

"Ye-as, and maybe he did it so as to cut us out of the divvy!" ventured Dick, as if seeing a sudden light.

"Oh, let's forget it. He's skipped, and that ends it. Ends our cruise, too, more's the pity," added Chick.

They breakfasted dolefully while Old Man Gloom stalked through the cabin.

"This 'll never do, mates," piped Bud Simpson. "I've something that 'll inoculate this undertakers' convention with the joy germ.

"Steward, bring my suit-case from the after cabin, will you? It's a bottle of *aguardiente*—got it in Panama—guaranteed to curl the hair on a bald-headed man. Ah, here we come! Open the case and ditto the bottle, friend steward!"

"It's locked, sir."

"Locked? Na-ah! I never locked it. Hey, let's see. That isn't my case! What the—how the— Oh, that belongs to the general. Get mine. It's under the other berth."

In five minutes the steward returned. "It's gone, sir. The sailors who rowed the general say he took a yellow suit-case with him, sir."

"*Took it with him!*" exploded Bud. "What possible use—"

"Steward, a hammer and chisel, quick!" interrupted Dick.

The tools brought, Dick dismissed the man, clipped off the lock with one blow, placed the case on the table and opened it.

A few shirts and ties and a white crash suit were in evidence. These removed, there were revealed to the startled gaze of the four university graduates more bundles of bank-notes than they imagined existed in the world!

Packages of hundreds, five hundreds, and—yes—of thousand-dollar bills filled all but one corner.

From that they dragged forth a bag of gold coins—U. S. most of it, with a few sovereigns sprinkled in. And beneath that a package of the thin white fi' pun' notes of England.

"Well, Bud," drawled Babe, "guess you kept your promise when you said something about joy germs. There they are in the original packages."

"Boys," said Dick, "we've got the swag, even if we did help that fake general to make his getaway. Not a word of this!" and he shut the case and placed it under the table.

He sent for the captain.

"Cap, give her full speed back to Port Limbao. We must make it before dark!"

And they did.

Before the Tramp lost headway, Dick had selected two sailors to go ashore and bring the American consul aboard.

The story was soon told and the money counted. It so happened that the Chiraguan president had come down from the capital to help in the search for the missing treasure, and their late guest, the missing treasurer.

By the consul's request he hurried aboard the Tramp. The reward was paid immediately by the president's own hand.

"Now, boys," laughed Dick, waving the bank-notes, "all we've got to do is to keep shy of dad's cablegrams. Cap, back to the Pacific."