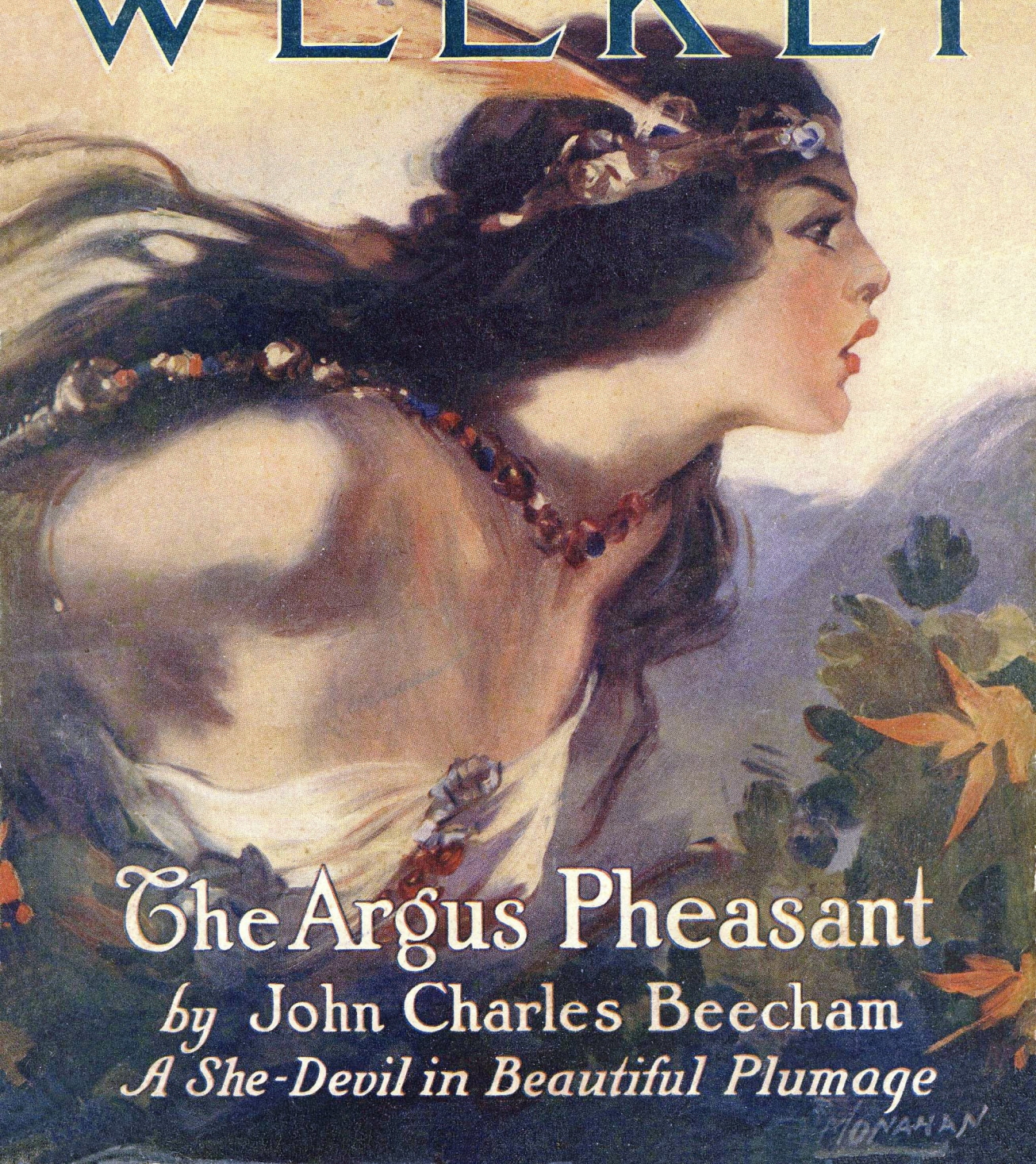


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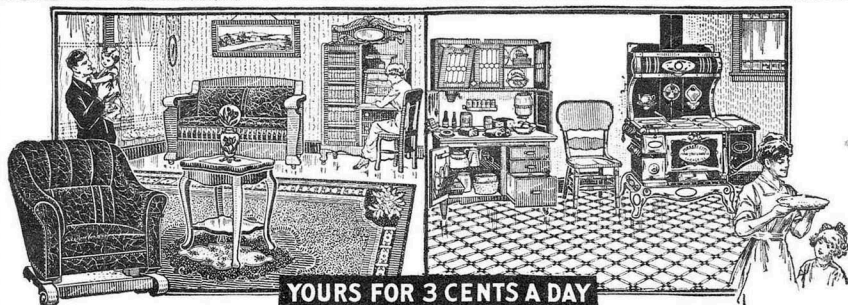
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VOL. LXVII

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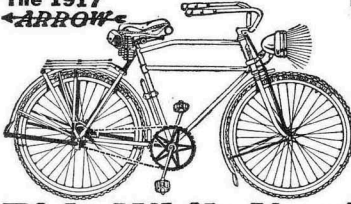
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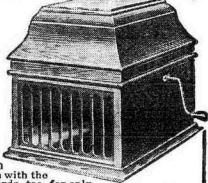
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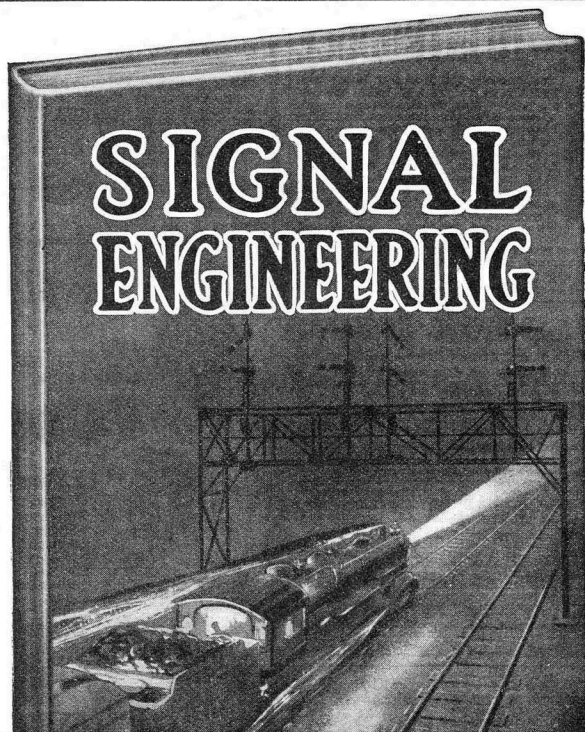
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The Argus Pheasant

by John Charles Beecham

Author of "Leah," "That Affair of Dahjangsari," etc., etc.

MANY of you probably remember "Leah" and "That Affair of Dahjangsari." Peter Gross is a character who, once met, remains a friend forever. In these two stories Peter is an elderly man resting on his honors, and he furnishes only the background of the tales; in this new serial that interest is satisfied; he is a young man here, and if you will follow him into the turbulent, unruly Residency of Dutch Borneo, whither he is sent as a last desperate resort by His Excellency Jonkheer Adriaan Van Schouten, you will learn how he earned his title of "White Father." You will meet Koyala, too, Bintang Burung—"The Argus Pheasant"—and she is very much worth while.—THE EDITOR.

AH, God, for a man with a heart, head, hand,
Like some of the simple great ones gone
Forever and ever by;
One still, strong man in a blatant land,
Whatever they call him—what care I?—
Aristocrat, democrat, autocrat—one
Who can rule and dare not lie!

Tennyson.

CHAPTER I.

THE OMNISCIENT SACHSEN.

IT was very apparent that his Excellency Jonkheer Adriaan Adriaanszoon Van Schouten, governor-general of the Netherlands East Indies, was in a temper. His eyes sparkled like an emery-wheel

biting cold steel. His thin, sharp-ridged nose rose high and the nostrils quivered. His pale, almost bloodless lips were set in rigid lines over his finely chiseled, birdlike beak with its aggressive Vandyke beard. His hair bristled straight and stiff, like the neck-feathers of a ruffled cock, over the edge of his linen collar. It was this latter

evidence of the governor's unpleasant humor that his military associate, General Gysbert Karel Vanden Bosch, observed with growing anxiety.

The governor took a pinch of snuff with great deliberation and glared across the great table of his cabinet-room at the general. Vanden Bosch shrank visibly.

"Then, my dear *generaal*," he demanded, "you say we must let these sons of Jezebel burn down my residencies, behead my residents, and feed my *controlleurs* to the crocodiles without interference from the military?"

"Ach no, your excellency!" General Vanden Bosch expostulated hastily. "Not that!"

"I fear I have not understood you, my dear *generaal*. What do you advise?"

The icy sweetness of the choleric Van Schouten sent a cold shiver along the commander's spine. He wriggled nervously in the capacious armchair that he filled so snugly. Quite unconsciously he mumbled to himself the clause which the pious Javanese had added to their prayers since Van Schouten's coming to Batavia: "And from the madness of the *orang blanda* devil at the *paleis*, Allah deliver us."

"Ha! *generaal*, what do you say?" the governor exclaimed.

Vanden Bosch coughed noisily and rallied his wits.

"Ahem, your excellency; ah-hum! It is a problem, as your excellency knows. I could send Colonel Heyns and his regiment to Bulungan, if your excellency so desires. But—ahem—as your excellency knows, all he will find is empty huts. Not a prau on the sea; not a Dyak in his field."

"You might as well send that many wooden men!" Van Schouten snapped.

The general winced. His portentously solemn features that for forty years had impressed the authorities at The Hague with his sagacity in military affairs became severely grave. Oracularly he suggested:

"Would it not be wise, your excellency, to give Mynheer Muller, the *controlleur*,

more time? His last report was very satisfactory. Very satisfactory, indeed!" He smacked his lips at the satisfactoriness thereof.

"*Donder en bliksem!*" the governor swore, crashing his lean fist on the table. "More time for what? The taxes have not been paid for two years. Not a kilo of rice has been grown on our plantations. Not a liter of dammargum has been shipped here. The cane is left to rot uncut. Fire has ravaged the cinchona-groves my predecessors set with such care. Every ship brings fresh reports of piracies, of tribal wars, and head-hunting. How much longer must we possess our souls in patience while these things go on?"

The general shook his head with a brave show of regret.

"Ach! your excellency," he replied sadly; "he promised so well."

"Promises," the governor retorted, "do not pay taxes."

Vanden Bosch rubbed his purple nose in perplexity.

"I suppose it is the witch woman again," he remarked, discouragedly.

"Who else?" Van Schouten growled. "Always the witch woman. That spawn of Satan, Koyala, is at the bottom of every uprising we have in Borneo."

"That is what we get for letting half-breeds mingle with whites in our mission schools," Vanden Bosch observed bitterly.

The governor scowled. "That folly will cost the state five hundred *gulden*," he remarked. "That is the price I have put on her head."

The general pricked up his ears. "H-m, that should interest Mynheer Muller," he remarked. "There is nothing he likes so well as the feel of a guilder between his fingers."

The governor snorted. "*Neen, generaal*," he negatived. "For once he has found a sweeter love than silver. The fool fairly grovels at Koyala's feet, Sachsen tells me."

"So?" Vanden Bosch exclaimed with quickened interest. "They say she is very fair."

"If I could get my hands on her once, the Argus Pheasant's pretty feathers would molt quickly," Van Schouten snarled. His fingers closed like an eagle's talons.

"Argus Pheasant, Bintang Burung, the Star Bird—'tis a sweet-sounding name the Malays have for her," the general remarked musingly. There was a sparkle in his eye—the old warrior had not lost his fondness for a pretty face. "If I was younger," he sighed, "I might go to Bulungan myself."

The governor grunted.

"You are an old cock that has lost his tail-feathers, *generaal*," he growled. "This is a task for a young man."

The general's chest swelled and his chin perked up jauntily.

"I am not so old as you think, your excellency," he retorted with a trace of asperity.

"*Neen, neen, generaal*," the governor negated, "I cannot let you go—not for your own good name's sake. The gossips of Amsterdam and The Hague would have a rare scandal to prate about if it became whispered around that Gysbert Vanden Bosch was scouring the jungles of Bulungan for a witch woman with a face and form like Helen of Troy's."

The general flushed. His peccadillos had followed him to Java, and he did not like to be reminded of them.

"The argus pheasant is too shy a bird to come within gunshot, your excellency," he replied somberly. "It must be trapped."

"Aye, and so must she," the governor assented. "That is how she got her name. But you are too seasoned for bait, my dear *generaal*." He chuckled.

Vanden Bosch was too much impressed with his own importance to enjoy being chaffed. Ignoring the thrust, he observed dryly:

"Your excellency might try King Saul's plan."

"Ha!" the governor exclaimed with interest. "What is that?"

Van Schouten prided himself on his knowledge of the Scriptures, and the gen-

eral could not repress a little smirk of triumph at catching him napping.

"King Saul tied David's hands by giving him his daughter to wife," he explained. "In the same way, your excellency might clip the Argus Pheasant's wings by marrying her to one of our loyal servants. It might be managed most satisfactorily. A proper marriage would cause her to forget the brown blood that she hates so bitterly."

"It is not her brown blood that she hates, it is her white blood," Van Schouten contradicted. "But who would be the man?"

"Why not Mynheer Muller, the *controleur*?" Vanden Bosch asked. "From what your excellency says, he would not be unwilling. Then our troubles in Bulungan would be over."

Van Schouten scowled thoughtfully.

"It would be a good match," the general urged. "He is only common blood—a Marken herring fisher's son by a Celebes woman. And she"—he shrugged his shoulders—"for all her pretty face and plump body she is Leveque, the French trader's daughter, by a Dyak woman."

He licked his lips in relish of the plan.

Van Schouten shook his head.

"No, I cannot do it," he said. "I could send her to the coffee plantations—that would be just punishment for her transgressions. But God keep me from sentencing any woman to marry."

"But, your excellency," Vanden Bosch entreated.

"It is ridiculous, *generaal*," the governor cut in autocratically. "The argus pheasant does not mate with the vulture."

Vanden Bosch's face fell. "Then your excellency must appoint another resident," he said, in evident disappointment. "It will take a strong man to bring those Dyaks to time."

Van Schouten looked at him fixedly for several moments. A miserable sensation of having said too much crept over the general.

"Ha!" Van Schouten exclaimed. "You say we must have a new resident. That

has been my idea, too. What bush-fighter have you that can lead two hundred cut-throats like himself and harry these tigers out of their lairs till they crawl on their bellies to beg for peace?"

Inwardly cursing himself for his folly in ceasing to advocate Muller, the general twiddled his thumbs and said nothing.

"Well, *generaal*?" Van Schouten rasped irascibly.

"Ahem—you know what troops I have, your excellency. Mostly raw recruits, here scarce three months. There is not a man among them I would trust alone in the bush. After all, it might be wisest to give Mynheer Muller another chance." His cheeks puffed till they were purple.

Van Schouten's face flamed.

"Enough! Enough!" he roared. "If the military cannot keep our house in order, Sachsen and I will find a man. That is all, *generaal*. *Goedendag*!"

Vanden Bosch made a hasty and none too dignified exit, damning under his breath the administration that had transferred him from a highly ornamental post in Amsterdam to live with this pepper-pot. He was hardly out of the door before the governor shouted:

"Sachsen! *Hola*, Sachsen!"

The sound of the governor's voice had scarcely died in the marbled corridors when Sachsen, the omniscient, the indispensable secretary, bustled into the sanctum. His stooped shoulders were crooked in a perpetual obeisance, and his damp, gray hair was plastered thinly over his ruddy scalp; but the shrewd twinkle in his eyes and the hawklike cast of his nose and chin belied the air of humility he affected.

"Sachsen," the governor demanded, the eagle gleaming in his lean, Cæsarian face, "where can I find a man that will bring peace to Bulungan?"

The wrinkled features of the all-knowing Sachsen crinkled with a smile of inspiration.

"Your excellency," he murmured, bowing low, "there is Peter Gross, freeholder of Batavia."

"Pieter Gross, *Pieter Gross*," Van Schouten mused, his brow puckered with a thoughtful frown. "The name seems to have slipped my memory. What has Pieter Gross, freeholder of Batavia, done to merit such an appointment at our hands, Sachsen?"

The secretary bowed again, punctiliously.

"Your excellency perhaps remembers," he reminded, "that it was Peter Gross who rescued Lieutenant Hendrik De Koren and twelve men from the pirates of Lombock."

"Ha!" the governor exclaimed, his stern features relaxing a trifle. "Now, Sachsen, answer me truthfully, has this Peter Gross an eye for women?"

The secretary bent low.

"Your excellency, the fairest flowers of Batavia are his to pick and choose. The good God has given him a brave heart, a comely face, and plenty of flesh to cover his bones. But his only mistress is the sea."

"If I should send him to Bulungan, would that she-devil Koyala make the same fool of him that she has of Muller?" the governor demanded sharply of his secretary.

"Your excellency, the angels above would fail sooner than he."

The governor's fist crashed on the table with a resounding thwack.

"Then he is the man we need!" he exclaimed. "Where shall I find this Pieter Gross, Sachsen?"

"Your excellency, he is now serving as first mate of the Yankee barkantine Coryander, anchored in this port. He was here at the *paleis* only a moment ago inquiring for news of three of his crew who had exceeded their shore leave. I think he has gone to Ah Sing's *rumah makan*, in the Chinese campong."

Van Schouten sprang from his great chair of state like a cockerel fluttering from a roost. He licked his thin lips and curved them into a smile.

"Sachsen," he said, his eyes shining with satisfaction, "except myself you are

the only man in Java that knows anything. My hat and coat, Sachsen, and my cane!"

CHAPTER II.

AH SING COUNTS HIS NAILS.

CAPTAIN THRETHAWAY, of the barkantine *Coryander*, of Boston, should have heeded the warning he received from his first mate, Peter Gross, to keep away from the roadstead of Batavia. He had no particular business in that port. But an equatorial sun, hot enough to melt the marrow in a man's bones, made the *Coryander's* deck a blistering griddle; there was no ice on board, and the water in the casks tasted foul as bilge. So the captain let his longing for iced tea and the cool depths of a palm-grove get the better of his judgment.

Passing Timor, Floris, and the other links in the Malayan chain, Captain Threthaway looked longingly at the deeply shaded depths of the mangrove jungles. The lofty tops of the cane swayed gently to a breeze scarcely perceptible on the *Coryander's* sizzling deck. When the bankantine rounded Cape Karawang, he saw a bediamonded rivulet leap sheer off a lofty cliff and lose itself in the liana below. It was the last straw; the captain felt he had to land and taste ice on his tongue again or die. Calling his first mate, he asked abruptly:

"Can we victual at Batavia as cheaply as at Singapore, Mr. Gross?"

Peter Gross looked at the shoreline.

"One place is as cheap as the other, Mr. Threthaway; but if it's my opinion you want, I advise against stopping at Batavia."

The captain frowned.

"Why, Mr. Gross?" he asked sharply.

"Because we'd lose our crew, and Batavia's a bad place to pick up another one. That gang for'ard isn't to be trusted where there's liquor to be got. 'Twouldn't be so bad to lose a few of them at Singapore — there's always English-speaking

sailors there waiting for a ship to get home on; but Batavia's Dutch. We might have to lay around a week."

"I don't think there's the slightest danger of desertions," Captain Threthaway replied testily. "What possible reason could any of our crew have to leave?"

"The pay is all right, and the grub is all right; there's no kicking on those items," Peter Gross said, speaking guardedly. "But most of this crew are drinking men. They're used to their rations of grog regular. They've been without liquor since we left Frisco, except what they got at Melbourne, and that was precious little. Since the water fouled on us, they're ready for anything up to murder and mutiny. There'll be no holding them once we make port."

Captain Threthaway flushed angrily. His thin, ascetic jaw set with Puritan stubbornness as he retorted:

"When I can't sail a ship without supplying liquor to the crew, I'll retire, Mr. Gross."

"Don't misunderstand me, captain," Peter Gross replied, with quiet patience. "I'm not disagreeing with your teetotaler principles. They improve a crew if you've got the right stock to work with. But when you take grog away from such dock-sweepings as Smith and Jacobson and that little Frenchman, Le Beouf, you take away the one thing on earth they're willing to work for. We had all we could do to hold them in hand at Melbourne, and after the contrary trades we've bucked the past week, and the heat, their tongues are hanging out for a drop of liquor."

"Let them dare come back drunk," the captain snapped angrily. "I know what will cure them."

"They won't come back," Peter Gross asserted calmly.

"Then we'll go out and get them," Captain Threthaway said grimly.

"They'll be where they can't be found," Peter Gross replied.

Captain Threthaway snorted impatiently.

"Look here, captain!" Peter Gross ex-

claimed, facing his skipper squarely. "Batavia is my home when I'm not at sea. I know it's ins and outs. Knowing the town, and knowing the crew we've got, I'm sure a stop there will be a mighty unpleasant experience all around. There's a Chinaman there, Ah Sing, a public house proprietor and a crimp, that has runners to meet every boat. Once a man goes into his *rumah makan*, he's as good as lost until the next skipper comes along short-handed and puts up the price."

Captain Threthaway smiled confidently.

"Poor as the crew is, Mr. Gross, there's no member of it will prefer lodging in a Chinese crimp's public house ten thousand miles from home to his berth here."

"They'll forget his color when they taste his hot rum," Peter Gross returned brusquely. "And once they drink it, they'll forget everything else. Ah Sing is the smoothest article that ever plaited a queue, and they don't make them any slicker than they do in China."

Captain Threthaway's lips pinched together in irritation.

"There are always the authorities," he remarked pettishly, to end the controversy.

Peter Gross restrained a look of disgust with difficulty.

"Yes, there are always the authorities," he conceded. "But in the Chinese campong they're about as much use as a land-lubber aloft in a blow. The campong is a little republic in itself, and Ah Sing is the man that runs it. If the truth was known, I guess he's the boss Chinaman of the East Indies—pirate, trader, politician—anything he can make a guilder at. From his rum shop warrens run into every section of Chinatown, and they're so well hid that the governor, though he's sharp as a weasel and by all odds the best man the Dutch ever had here, can't find them. It's the real port of missing men."

Captain Threthaway looked shoreward, where dusky, breech-clouted natives were resting in the cool shade of the heavy-leaved mangroves. A bit of breeze stirred just then, bringing with it the rich spice-grove and jungle scents of the thickly

wooded island. A fierce longing for the shore seized the captain. He squared his shoulders with decision.

"I'll take the chance, Mr. Gross," he said. "This heat is killing me. You may figure on twenty-four hours in port."

Twelve hours after the Coryander cast anchor in Batavia harbor, Smith, Jacobson, and Le Beouf were reported missing. When Captain Threthaway, for all his Boston upbringing, had exhausted a prolific vocabulary, he called his first mate.

"Mr. Gross," he said, "the damned renegades are gone. Do you think you can find them?"

Long experience in the vicissitudes of life, acquired in that best school of all, the forecandle, had taught Peter Gross the folly of saying, "I told you so." Therefore he merely replied: "I'll try, sir."

So it befell that he sought news of the missing ones at the great white *stadhuis*, where the Heer Sachsen, always his friend, met him and conceived the inspiration for his prompt recommendation to the governor-general.

Peter Gross ambled on toward Ah Sing's *rumah makan* without the slightest suspicion he was being followed. On his part, Governor-General Van Schouten was content to let his quarry walk on unconscious of observation while he measured the man.

"God in Israel, what a man!" his excellency exclaimed admiringly, noting Peter Gross's broad shoulders and stalwart thighs. "If he packs as much brains inside his skull as he does meat on his bones, there are some busy days ahead for my Dyaks." He smacked his lips in happy anticipation.

Ah Sing's grog-shop, with its colonnades and porticoes and fussy gables and fantastic cornices terminating in pigtail curls, was a squalid place for all the ornamentation cluttered on it. Peter Gross observed its rubbishy surroundings with ill-concealed disgust.

"'Twould be a better Batavia if some

one set fire to the place," he muttered to himself. "Yet the law would call it arson."

Looking up he saw Ah Sing seated in one of the porticoes, and quickly masked his face to a smile of cordial greeting, but not before the Chinaman had detected his ill humor.

There was a touch of three continents in Ah Sing's appearance. He sat beside a table, in the American fashion; he smoked a long-stemmed hookah, after the Turkish fashion, and he wore his clothes after the Chinese fashion. The bland innocence of his pudgy face and the seraphic mildness of his unblinking almond eyes that peeped through slits no wider than the streak of a charcoal-pencil were as the guilelessness of Mother Eve in the garden. Motionless as a Buddha idol he sat, except for occasional pulls at the hookah.

"Good morning, Ah Sing," Peter Gross remarked happily, as he mounted the colonnade.

The tiny slits through which Ah Sing beheld the pageantry of a sun-baked world opened a trifle wider.

"May Allah bless thee, Mr. Gross," he greeted impassively.

Peter Gross pulled a chair away from one of the other tables and placed it across the board from Ah Sing. Then he succumbed to it with a sigh of gentle ease.

"A hot day," he panted, and fanned himself as though he found the humidity unbearable.

"Belly hot," Ah Sing gravely agreed in a guttural voice that sounded from unfathomable abysses.

"A hot day for a man that's tasted no liquor for nigh three months," Peter Gross amended.

"You makee long trip?" Ah Sing inquired politely.

Peter Gross's features molded themselves into an expression eloquently appreciative of his past miseries.

"That's altogether how you take it, Ah Sing," he replied. "From Frisco to Melbourne to Batavia isn't such a thunderin' long ways, not to a man that's done the

full circle three times. But when you make the voyage with a Methodist captain who doesn't believe in grog, it's the longest since Captain Cook's. Ah Sing, my throat's drier than a sou'east monsoon. Hot toddy for two."

Ah Sing clapped his hands and uttered a magic word or two in Chinese. A Cantonese waiter paddled swiftly outside bearing a lacquered tray and two steaming glasses. One he placed before Ah Sing and the other before Peter Gross, who tossed a coin on the table.

"Pledge your health, sir," Peter Gross remarked and reached across the board to clink glasses with his Chinese friend. Ah Sing lifted his glass to meet the sailor's and suddenly found it snaked out of his hands by a deft motion of Peter Gross's middle finger. Gross slid his own glass across the table toward Ah Sing.

"If you don't mind," he remarked pleasantly. "Your waiter might have mistaken me for a plain A. B., and I've got to get back to my ship to-night."

Ah Sing's bland and placid face remained expressionless as a carved god's. But he let the glass stand, untasted, beside him.

The Coryander's mate sipped his liquor and sank deeper into his chair. He studied with an air of affectionate interest the long lane of quaintly colonnaded buildings that edged the city within a city, the Chinese campong. Pigtailed Orientals, unmindful of the steaming heat, squirmed across the scenery. Ten thousand stench were compounded into one, in which the flavor of garlic predominated. Peter Gross breathed the heavy air with a smile of reminiscent pleasure and dropped another notch into the chair.

"It feels good to be back ashore again for a spell, Ah Sing," he remarked. "A nice, cool spot like this, with nothing to do and some of your grog under the belt, skins a blistery deck any day. I don't wonder so many salts put up here."

Back of the curtain of fat through which they peered Ah Sing's oblique eyes quivered as they watched the sailor keenly.

"By the way," Peter Gross observed, stretching his long legs out to the limit of their reach, "you haven't seen any of my men, have you? Smith, he's pock-marked and has a cut over his right eye; Jacobson, a tall Swede, and Le Beouf, a little Frenchman with a close-clipped black mustache and beard?"

Ah Sing gravely cudged his memory.

"None of your men," he assured, "was here."

Peter Gross's face fell.

"That's too bad!" he exclaimed in evident disappointment. "I thought sure I'd find 'em here. You're sure you haven't overlooked them? That Frenchy might call for a hop; we picked him out of a hop-joint at Frisco."

"None your men here," Ah Sing repeated gutturally.

Peter Gross rumbled his tousled hair.

"We-ell," he drawled unhappily, "if those chaps don't get back on shipboard by nightfall I'll have to buy some men from you, Ah Sing. Have y'got three good hands that know one rope from another?"

"Two men off schooner Marianna," Ah Sing replied in his same thick monotone. "One man, steamer Callee-opie. Good strong man. Work hard."

"You stole 'em, I s'pose?" Peter Gross asked pleasantly.

Ah Sing's heavy jowls waggled in gentle negation.

"No stealum man," he denied quietly. "Him belly sick. Come here, get well. Allie big, strong man."

"How much a head?"

"Twlenty dolla."

"F. O. B. the Coryander and no extra charges?"

Ah Sing's inscrutable face screwed itself into a maze of unreadable wrinkles and lines.

"Him eat heap," he announced. "Five dlolla more for board."

"You go to blazes," Peter Gross replied cheerfully. "I'll look up a couple of men somewhere else or go shorthanded if I have to."

Ah Sing made no reply and his impassive face did not alter its expressionless fixity. Peter Gross lazily pulled himself up in his chair and extended his right hand across the table. A ring with a big bloodstone in the center, a bloodstone cunningly chiseled and marked, rested on the middle finger.

"See that ring, Ah Sing?" he asked. "I got that down to Mauritius. What d'ye think it's worth?"

Ah Sing's long, clawlike fingers groped avariciously toward the ring. His tiny, fat-incased eyes gleamed with cupidity.

With a quick, catlike movement, Peter Gross gripped one of the Chinaman's hands.

"Don't pull," he cautioned quickly as Ah Sing tried to draw his hand away. "I was going to tell you that there's a drop of adder's poison inside the bloodstone that runs down a little hollow pin if you press the stone just so—" He moved to illustrate.

"No! No!" Ah Sing shrieked piglike squeals of terror.

"Just send one of your boys for my salts, will you?" Peter Gross requested pleasantly. "I understand they got here yesterday morning and haven't been seen to leave. Talk English—no China talk, savvy?"

A flash of malevolent fury broke Ah Sing's mask of impassivity. The rage his face expressed caused Peter Gross to grip his hand the harder and look quickly around for a possible danger from behind. They were alone. Peter Gross moved a finger toward the stone, and Ah Sing capitulated. At his shrill cry there was a hurried rustle from within. Peter Gross kept close grip on the Chinaman's hand until he heard the shuffling tramp of sailor feet. Smith, Jacobson and Le Beouf, blinking sleepily, were herded on the portico by two giant Tibetans.

Peter gross shoved the table and Ah Sing violently back and leaped to his feet.

"You'll — desert — will you?" he ex-

claimed. Each word was punctuated by a swift punch to the chin of one of the unlucky sailors and an echoing thud on the floor. Smith, Jacobson, and Le Beouf lay neatly cross-piled on one of Ah Sing's broken chairs.

"I'll pay for the chair," Peter Gross declared, jerking his men to their feet and shoving them down the steps.

Ah Sing shrilled an order in Chinese. The Tibetan giants leaped for Peter Gross, who sprang out of their reach and put his back to the wall. In his right hand a gun flashed.

"Ah Sing, I'll take you first," he shouted.

The screen separating them from the adjoining portico was pushed aside.

"Ah Sing!" exclaimed a sharp, authoritative voice.

Ah Sing looked about, startled. The purpled fury his face expressed sickened to a mottled gray. Adriaan Adriaanszoon Van Schouten, governor-general of Java, leaning lightly on his cane, frowned sternly at the scene of disorder. At a cry from their master the two Tibetans backed away from Peter Gross, who lowered his weapon.

"Is it thus you observe our laws, Ah Sing?" Van Schouten demanded coldly.

Ah Sing licked his lips. "Light of the Sun—" he began, but the governor interrupted shortly:

"The magistrate will hear your explanations." His eagle eyes looked penetratingly upon Peter Gross, who looked steadfastly back.

"Sailor, you threatened to poison this man," the governor accused harshly, indicating Ah Sing.

"You excellency, that was bluff," Peter Gross replied. "The ring is as harmless as you excellency's own."

Van Schouten's eyes twinkled.

"What is your name, sailor, and your ship?" he demanded.

"Peter Gross, your excellency, first mate of the barkantine Coryander of Boston, now lying in your excellency's harbor of Batavia."

"Ah Sing," Van Schouten rasped sternly, "if these drunken louts are not aboard their ship by nightfall you go to the coffee fields."

Ah Sing's gimlet eyes shrank to pinpoints. His face was expressionless, but his whole body seemed to shake with suppressed emotion as he choked in guttural Dutch:

"Your excellency shall be obeyed." He salaamed to the ground.

Van Schouten glared at Peter Gross.

"Mynheer Gross, the good name of our fair city is very dear to us," he said sternly. "Scenes of violence like this do it much damage. I would have further discourse with you. Be at the *paleis* within the hour."

"I shall be there, your excellency," Peter Gross promised.

The governor shifted his frown to Ah Sing.

"As for you, Ah Sing, I have heard many evil reports of this place," he said. "Let me hear no more."

While Ah Sing salaamed again, the governor strode pompously away, followed at a respectful distance by Peter Gross. It was not until they had disappeared beyond a curve in the road that Ah Sing let his face show his feelings. Then an expression of malignant fury, before which even the two Tibetans quailed, crossed it.

He uttered a harsh command to have the débris removed. The Tibetans jumped forward in trembling alacrity. Without giving them another glance he waddled into the building into a little den screened off for his own use. From a patent steel safe of American make he took an ebony box, quaintly carved and colored in glorious pinks and yellows with a flower design. Opening this he exposed a row of glass vials resting on beds of cotton. Each vial contained some nail parings.

He took out the vials, one by one, looked at their labels inscribed in Chinese characters, and placed them on an ivory tray. As he read each label a

curious smile of satisfaction spread over his features.

When he had removed the last vial he sat at his desk, dipped a pen into India ink, and wrote two more labels in similar Chinese characters. When the ink had dried he placed these on two empty vials taken from a receptacle on his desk. The vials were placed with the others in the ebony box and locked in the safe.

The inscriptions he read on the labels were the names of men who had died sudden and violent deaths in the East Indies while he had lived at Batavia. The labels he filled out carried the names of Adriaan Adriaanszoon Van Schouten and Peter Gross.

CHAPTER III.

PETER GROSS IS NAMED RESIDENT.

"SAILOR, the penalty for threatening the life of any citizen is penal servitude on the state's coffee plantations."

The governor's voice rang harshly, and he scowled across the big table in his cabinet room at the Coryander's mate, sitting opposite him. His hooked nose and sharp-pointed chin with its finely-trimmed Vandyke beard jutted forward rakishly.

"I ask no other justice than your excellency's own sense of equity suggests," Peter Gross replied quietly.

"H-mm!" the governor hummed. He looked at the Coryander's mate keenly for a few moments through half-closed lids. Suddenly he said:

"And what if I should appoint you a resident, sailor?"

Peter Gross's lips pressed together tightly, but otherwise he gave no sign of his profound astonishment at the governor's astounding proposal. Sinking deeper into his chair until his head sagged on his breast he deliberated before replying.

"Your excellency is in earnest?"

"I do not jest on affairs of state, Mynheer Gross. What is your answer?"

Peter Gross paused. "Your excellency overwhelms me—" he began, but Van Schouten cut him short.

"Enough! When I have work to do I choose the man who I think can do it. Then you accept?"

"Your excellency, to my deep regret I must most respectfully decline."

A look of blank amazement spread over the governor's face. Then his eyes blazed ominously.

"Decline! Why?" he roared.

"For several reasons," Peter Gross replied with disarming mildness. "In the first place I am under contract with Captain Threthaway of the Coryander—"

"I will arrange that with your captain," the governor broke in.

"In the second place I am neither a soldier nor a politician—"

"That is for me to consider," the governor retorted.

"In the third place, I am a citizen of the United States and therefore not eligible to any civil appointment from the government of the Netherlands."

"*Donder en bliksem!*" the governor exclaimed. "I thought you were a freeholder here."

"I am," Peter Gross admitted. "The land I own is at Ryswyk. I expect to make it my home when I retire from the sea."

"How long have you owned that land?"

"For nearly seven years."

The governor stroked his beard. "You talk Holland like a Hollander, Mynheer Gross," he observed.

"My mother was of Dutch descent," Peter Gross explained. "I learned the language from her."

"Good!" Van Schouten inclined his head with a curt nod of satisfaction. "Half Holland is all Holland. We can take steps to make you a citizen at once."

"I don't care to surrender my birth-right," Peter Gross negatived quietly.

"What!" Van Schouten shouted.

"Not for a resident's post? And eight thousand guilders a year? And a land grant in Java that will make you rich for life if you make those hill tribes stick to their plantations? What say you to this, Mynheer Gross?" His lips curved with a smile of anticipation.

"The offer is tempting and the honor great," Peter Gross acknowledged quietly. "But I can not forget I was born an American."

Van Schouten leaned back in his chair with a look of astonishment.

"You refuse?" he asked incredulously.

"I am sorry, your excellency!" Peter Gross's tone was unmistakably firm.

"You refuse?" the governor repeated, still unbelieving. "Eight—thousand—guilders! And a land grant that will make you rich for life!"

"I am an American, and American I shall stay."

The governor's eyes sparkled with admiration.

"By the beard of Orange!" he exclaimed, "it is no wonder you Yankees have sucked the best blood of the world into your country." He leaned forward confidentially.

"Mynheer Gross, I cannot appoint you resident if you refuse to take the oath of allegiance to the queen. But I can make you special agent of the *gouverneur-generaal*. I can make you a resident in fact, if not in name, of a country larger than half the Netherlands, larger than many of your own American States. I can give you the rewards I have pledged you, a fixed salary and the choice of a thousand hectares of our fairest state lands in Java. What do you say?"

He leaned forward belligerently. In that posture his long, coarse hair rose bristly above his neck, giving him something of the appearance of a game-cock with feathers ruffled. It was this peculiarity that first suggested the name he was universally known by throughout the Sundas, "De Kemphaan" (The Game-cock).

"To what province would you appoint me?" Peter Gross asked slowly.

The governor hesitated. With the air of a poker player forced to show his hand he confessed:

"It is a difficult post, *mynheer*, and needs a strong man as resident. It is the Residency of Bulungan, Borneo."

There was the faintest flicker in Peter Gross's eyes. Van Schouten watched him narrowly. In the utter stillness that followed the governor could hear his watch tick.

Peter Gross rose abruptly, leaped for the door, and threw it open. He looked straight into the serene, imperturbable face of Chi Wung Lo, autocrat of the governor's domestic establishment. Chi Wung bore a delicately lacquered tray of Oriental design on which were standing two long, thin, daintily cut glasses containing cooling limes that bubbled fragrantly. Without a word he swept grandly in and placed the glasses on the table, one before the governor, and the other before Peter Gross's vacant chair.

"Ha!" Van Schouten exclaimed, smacking his lips. "Chi Wung, you peerless, priceless servant, how did you guess our needs?"

With a bland bow and never a glance at Peter Gross, Chi Wung strutted out in Oriental dignity, carrying his empty tray. Peter Gross closed the door carefully, and walked slowly back.

"I was about to say, your excellency," he murmured, "that Bulungan has not a happy reputation."

"It needs a strong man to rule it," the governor acknowledged, running his glance across Peter Gross's broad shoulders in subtle compliment.

"Those who have held the post of resident there found early graves."

"You are young, vigorous. You have lived here long enough to know how to escape the fevers."

"There are worse enemies in Bulungan than the fevers," Peter Gross replied. "It is not for nothing that Bulun-

gan is known as the graveyard of Borneo."

The governor glanced at Peter Gross's strong face and stalwart form regretfully.

"Your refusal is final?" he asked.

"On the contrary, if your excellency will meet one condition, I accept," Peter Gross replied.

The governor put his glass down sharply and stared at the sailor.

"You accept this post?" he demanded.

"Upon one condition, yes!"

"What is that condition?"

"That I be allowed a free hand."

"H-mm!" Van Schouten drew a deep breath and leaned back in his chair. The sharp, Julian cast of countenance was never more pronounced, and the eagle eyes gleamed inquiringly, calculatingly. Peter Gross looked steadily back. The minutes passed and neither spoke.

"Why do you want to go there?" the governor exclaimed suddenly. He leaned forward in his chair till his eyes burned across a narrow two feet into Peter Gross's own.

The strong, firm line of Peter Gross's lips tightened. He rested one elbow on the table and drew nearer the governor. His voice was little more than a murmur as he said:

"Your excellency, let me tell you the story of Bulungan."

The governor's face showed surprise. "Proceed," he directed.

"Six years ago, when your excellency was appointed governor-general of the Netherlands East Indies," Peter Gross began, "Bulungan was a No Man's land, although nominally under the Dutch flag. The pirates that infested the Celebes sea and the straits of Macassar found ports of refuge in its jungle-banked rivers and marsh mazes where no gunboat could find them. The English told your government that if it did not stamp out piracy and subjugate the Dyaks, it would. That meant loss of

the province to the Dutch crown. Accordingly you sent General Van Heemkerken there with eight hundred men who marched from the lowlands to the highlands and back again, burning every village they found, but meeting no Dyaks except old men and women too helpless to move. General Van Heemkerken reported to you that he had pacified the country. On his report you sent Mynheer Van Scheltema there as resident, and Cupido as *controlleur*. Within six months Van Scheltema was bitten by an adder placed in his bedroom and Cupido was assassinated by a hill Dyak who threw him out of a dug-out into a river swarming with crocodiles.

"*Lieve Hemel*, no!" Van Schouten cried. "Van Scheltema and Cupido died of the fevers."

"So it was reported to your excellency," Peter Gross replied gravely. "I tell you the facts."

The governor's thin, spiked jaw shot out like a vicious thorn and his teeth clicked. "Go on," he directed sharply.

"For a year there was neither resident nor *controlleur* at Bulungan. Then the pirates became so bold that you again took steps to repress them. The stockade at the village of Bulungan was enlarged and the garrison was increased to fifty men. Lieutenant Van Slyck, the commandant, was promoted to captain. A new resident was appointed, Mynheer De Jonge, a very dear friend of your excellency. He was an old man, estimable and honest, but ill-fitted for such a post, a failure in business, and a failure as a resident. Time after time your excellency wrote him concerning piracies, hillmen raids, and head-hunting committed in his residency or the adjoining seas. Each time he replied that your excellency must be mistaken, that the pirates and head-hunters came from other districts."

The governor's eyes popped in amazement. "How do you know this?" he exclaimed, but Peter Gross ignored the question.

"Finally about two years ago Mynheer De Jonge, through an accident, learned that he had been deceived by those he had trusted, had a right to trust. A remark made by a drunken native opened his eyes. One night he called out Captain Van Slyck and the latter's commando and made a flying raid. He all but surprised a band of pirates looting a captured schooner and might have taken them had they not received a warning of his coming. That raid made him a marked man. Within two weeks he was poisoned by being pricked as he slept with a thorn dipped in the juice of the deadly upas tree."

"He was a suicide!" the governor exclaimed, his face ashen. "They brought me a note in his own handwriting."

"In which it was stated that he killed himself because he felt he had lost your excellency's confidence?"

"You know that too?" Van Schouten whispered huskily.

"Your excellency has suffered remorse without cause," Peter Gross declared quietly. "The note is a forgery."

The governor's hands gripped the edge of the table.

"You can prove that?" he cried.

"For the present your excellency must be satisfied with my word. As resident of Bulungan I hope to secure proofs that will satisfy a court of justice."

The governor gazed at Peter Gross intently. A conflict of emotions, amazement, unbelief, and hope were expressed on his face, as he demanded fiercely: "Why should I believe you?"

Peter Gross's face hardened. The sternness of the magistrate was on his brow as he replied:

"Your excellency remembers the schooner Tetrina, attacked by Chinese and Dyak pirates off the coast of Celebes three years ago? All her crew were butchered except two left on the deck that night for dead. I was one of the two, your excellency. My dead comrades have left me a big debt to pay. That is why I will go to Bulungan."

The governor rose. Decision was written on his brow.

"Meet us here to-night, Mynheer Gross," he said. "There is much to discuss with Mynheer Sachsen before you leave. God grant you may be the instrument of His eternal justice." Peter Gross raised a hand of warning.

"Sometimes the very walls have ears, your excellency," he cautioned. "If I am to be resident of Bulungan no word of the appointment must leak out until I arrive there."

CHAPTER IV.

KOYALA'S PRAYER.

IT was a blistering hot day in Bulungan. The heavens were molten incandescence. The muddy river that bisected the town wallowed through its estuary a steaming tea-kettle. The black muck-fields baked and flaked under the torrid heat. The glassy surface of the bay, lying within the protecting crook of a curling tail of coral reef, quivered under the impact of the sun's rays like some sentient thing.

In the village that nestled where fresh and salt water met the streets were deserted, almost lifeless. Gaunt pariah dogs, driven by the acid-sharp pangs of a never-satiated hunger, sniffed among the shadows of the bamboo and palm-leaf huts, their backs arched and their tails slinking between their legs. Too weak to grab their share of the spoil in the hurly-burly, they scavenged in these hours of universal inanity. The doors of the huts were tightly closed—barricaded against the heat. The merchant in his dingy shop, the fisherman in his house on stilts, and the fashioner of metals in his thatched cottage in the outskirts slept under their mats. Apoplexy was the swift and sure fate of those who dared the awful torridity.

Dawn had foretold the heat. The sun shot above the purple and orange waters of the bay like a conflagration. The miasmal vapors that clustered thickly about

the flats by night gathered their linen and fled like the hunted. They were scurrying upstream when Bogoru, the fisherman, walked out on his sampan landing. He looked at the unruffled surface of the bay, and then looked upward quickly at the lane of tall kenari trees between the stockade and government buildings on an elevation a short distance back of the town. The spindly tops of the trees pointed heavenward with the rigidity of church spires.

"There will be no chaetodon sold at the *visschersmarkt* (fishmart) to-day," he observed. "Kismet!"

With a patient shrug of his shoulders he went back to his hut and made sure there was a plentiful supply of sirih and cooling limes on hand.

In the fruit market Tagotu, the fruiterer, set out a tempting display of mangosteen, durian, dookoo, and rambutan, pineapples, and pomegranates, jars of agar-agar, bowls of rice, freshly cooked, and pitchers of milk.

The square was damp from the heavy night dew when he set out the first basket, it was dry as a fresh-baked brick when he put out the last. The heavy dust began to flood inward. Tagotu noticed with dismay how thin the crowd was that straggled about the market-place. Chepang, his neighbor, came out of his stall and observed:

"The monsoon has failed again. Bulungan will stay in his huts to-day."

"It is the will of Allah," Tagotu replied patiently. Putting aside his offerings he lowered the shades of his shop and composed himself for a siesta.

On the hill above the town, where the rude fort and the government buildings gravely faced the sea, the heat also made itself felt. The green blinds of the milk-white residency building that was patterned as closely as tropical conditions would permit after the quaint architecture of rural Overysel, were tightly closed. The little cluster of residences around it, the *controlleur's* house and the homes of Marinus Blauwpot and Wang Fu, the

leading merchants of the place, were similarly barricaded. For "Amsterdam," the residential suburb of Bulungan village, was fighting the same enemy as "Rotterdam," the town below, an enemy more terrible than Dyak blowpipes and poisoned arrows, the Bornean sun.

Like Bogoru, the fisherman, and Tagotu, the fruit vendor, Cho Seng, Mynheer Muller's valet and cook, had seen the threat the sunrise brought. The sun's copper disk was dyeing the purple and blue waters of the bay with vermilion and magentas when he pad-padded out on the veranda of the *controlleur's* house. He was clad in the meticulously neat brown jeans that he wore at all times and occasions except funeral festivals, and in wicker sandals. With a single sweep of his eyes he took in the kenari-tree-lined lane that ran to the gate of the stockade where a sleepy sentinel, hunched against a pert brass cannon, nodded his head drowsily. The road was tenantless. He shot another glance down the winding pathway that led by the houses of Marinus Blauwpot and Wang Fu to the town below. That also was unoccupied. Stepping off the veranda he crossed over to an unshaded spot directly in front of the house and looked intently seaward to where a junk lay at anchor. The brown jeans against the milk-white paint of the house threw his figure in sharp relief.

Cho Seng waited until a figure showed itself on the deck of the junk. Then he shaded his eyes with his arm. The Chinaman on the deck of the junk must have observed the figure of his fellow countryman on the hill, for he also shaded his eyes with his arm.

Cho Seng looked quickly to the right—to the left. There was no one stirring. The sentinel at the gate drowsed against the carriage of the saucy brass cannon. Shading his eyes once more with a quick gesture, Cho Seng walked ten paces ahead. Then he walked back five paces. Making a sharp angle he walked five paces to one side. Then he turned abruptly and faced the junk.

The watcher on the junk gave no sign that he had seen this curious performance. But as Cho Seng scuttled back into the house, he disappeared into the bowels of the ugly hulk.

An hour passed before Cho Seng reappeared on the veranda. He cast only a casual glance at the junk and saw that it was being provisioned. After listening for a moment to the rhythmic snoring that came from the chamber above—Mynheer Muller's apartment—he turned the corner of the house and set off at a leisurely pace toward the tangle of mangroves, banyan, bamboo cane, and ferns that lay a quarter of a mile inland on the same elevation on which the settlement and stockade stood.

There was nothing in his walk to indicate that he had a definite objective. He strolled along in apparent aimlessness, as though taking a morning's constitutional. Overhead hundreds of birds created a terrific din, green and blue-billed gapers shrilled noisily; lories piped their matin lays, and the hoarse cawing of the trogons mingled discordantly with the mellow notes of the mild cuckoos. A myriad insect life buzzed and hummed around him, and scurried across his pathway. Pale white flowers of the night that lined the walk shrank modestly into their green cloisters before the bold eye of day. But Cho Seng passed them by unseeing, and unhearing. Nature had no existence for him except as it ministered unto his physical needs. Only once did he turn aside—a quick, panicky jump—and that was when a little spotted snake glided in front of him and disappeared into the underbrush.

When he was well within the shadows of the mangroves, Cho Seng suddenly brightened and began to look about him keenly. Following a faintly defined path he walked along in a circuitous route until he came to a clearing under the shade of a huge banyan tree whose aerial roots rose over his head. After peering furtively about and seeing no one he uttered a hoarse, guttural call, the call the

great bird of paradise utters to welcome the sunrise—"Wowk, wowk, wowk."

There was an immediate answer—the shrill note of the argus pheasant. It sounded from the right, near by, on the other side of a thick tangle of cane and creeper growth. Cho Seng paused in apparent disquietude at the border of the thicket, but as he hesitated, the call was repeated more urgently. Wrenching the cane apart he stepped carefully into the underbrush.

His progress through it was slow. At each step he bent low to make certain where his foot fell. He had a mortal fear of snakes—his nightmares were ghostly dreams of a loathsome death from a serpent's bite.

There was a low ripple of laughter—girlish laughter. Cho Seng straightened quickly. To his right was another clearing, and in that clearing there was a woman, a young woman just coming into the bloom of a glorious beauty. She was seated on a gnarled aerial root. One leg was negligently thrown over the other, a slender, shapely arm reached gracefully upward to grasp a spur from another root, a coil of silky black hair, black as tropic night, lay over her gleaming shoulder. Her sarong, spotlessly white, hung loosely about her wondrous form and was caught with a cluster of rubies above her breasts. A sandal-covered foot, dainty, delicately tapering, its whiteness tanned with a faint tint of harvest brown, was thrust from the folds of the gown. At her side, in a silken scabbard, hung a light, skilfully wrought kris. The handle was studded with gems.

"Good morning, Cho Seng," the woman greeted demurely.

Cho Seng, making no reply, snapped the cane aside and leaped through. Koyala laughed again, her voice tinkling like silver bells. The Chinaman's laborious progress through the cane had amused her. She knew why he stepped so carefully.

"Good morning, Cho Seng," Koyala repeated. Her mocking dark brown eyes

tried to meet his, but Cho Seng looked studiously at the ground, in the affected humility of Oriental races.

"Cho Seng here," he announced. "What for um you wantee me?" He spoke huskily; a physician would instantly have suspected he was tubercular.

Koyala's eyes twinkled. A woman, she knew she was beautiful. Wherever she went, among whites or Malays, Chinese, or Papuans, she was admired. But from this stolid, unfathomable, menial Chinaman she had never been able to evoke the one tribute that every pretty woman, no matter how good, demands from man—a glance of admiration.

"Cho Seng," she pouted, "you have not even looked at me. Am I so ugly that you cannot bear to see me?"

"What for um you wantee me?" Cho Seng reiterated. His neck was crooked humbly so that his eyes did not rise above the hem of her sarong, and his hands were tucked inside the wide sleeves of his jacket. His voice was as meek and mild and inoffensive as his manner.

Koyala laughed mischievously.

"I asked you a question, Cho Seng," she pointed out.

The Chinaman salaamed again, even lower than before. His face was imperturbable as he repeated in the same mild, disarming accents:

"What for um you wantee me?"

Koyala made a moue.

"That isn't what I asked you, Cho Seng," she exclaimed petulantly.

The Chinaman did not move a muscle. Silent, calm as a deep-sea bottom, his glance fixed unwaveringly on a little spot of black earth near Koyala's foot, he awaited her reply.

Leveque's daughter shrugged her shoulders in hopeless resignation. Ever since she had known him she had tried to surprise him into expressing some emotion. Admiration, fear, grief, vanity, cupidity—on all these chords she had played without producing response. His imperturbability roused her curiosity, his indifference to her beauty piqued her, and

womanlike, she exerted herself to rouse his interest that she might punish him. So far she had been unsuccessful, but that only gave keener zest to the game. Koyala was half Dyak, she had in her veins the blood of the little brown brother who follows his enemy for months, sometimes years, until he brings home another dripping head to set on his lodge-pole. Patience was therefore her birthright.

"Very well, Cho Seng, if you think I am ugly—" She paused and arched an eyebrow to see the effect of her words. Cho Seng's face was as rigid as though carved out of rock. When she saw he did not intend to dispute her, Koyala flushed and concluded sharply:

"—then we will talk of other things. What has happened at the residency during the past week?"

Cho Seng shot a furtive glance upward. "What for um?" he asked cautiously.

"Oh, everything." Koyala spoke with pretended indifference. "Tell me, does your *baas*, the *mynheer*, ever mention me?"

"Mynheer Muller belly much mad, belly much drink *jenever* (gin), belly much say 'damn-damn, Cho Seng,'" the Chinaman grunted.

Koyala's laughter rang out merrily in delicious peals that started the rain-birds and the gapers to vain emulation. Cho Seng hissed a warning and cast apprehensive glances about the jungle, but Koyala, mocking the birds, provoked a hubbub of furious scolding overhead and laughed again.

"There's nobody near to hear us," she asserted lightly.

"Mebbe him in bush," Cho Seng warned.

"Not when the southeast monsoon ceases to blow," Koyala negatived. "Mynheer Muller loves his bed too well when our Bornean sun scorches us like to-day. But tell me what your master has been doing?"

She snuggled into a more comfortable position on the root. Cho Seng folded his hands over his stomach.

"Morning him sleep," he related laconically. "Him eat. Him speakee *Orang Kaya Wobanguli*, drink *jenever*. Him speakee Kapitein Van Slyck, drink *jenever*. Him sleep some more. Bimeby when sun so-so—" Cho Seng indicated the position of the sun in late afternoon—"him go speakee Mynheer Blauwpot, eat some more. Bimeby come home, sleep. Plenty say 'damn-damn, Cho Seng.'"

"Does he ever mention me?" Koyala asked. Her eyes twinkled coquettishly.

"Plenty say nothing," said Cho Seng.

Koyala's face fell. "He doesn't speak of me at all?"

Cho Seng shot a sidelong glance at her.

"Him no speakee Koyala, him plenty drink *jenever*, plenty say 'damn-damn, Cho Seng.' " He looked up stealthily to see the effect of his words.

Koyala crushed a fern underfoot with a vicious dab of her sandaled toes. Something like the ghost of a grin crossed the Chinaman's face, but it was too well hidden for Koyala to see it.

"How about Kapitein Van Slyck? Has he missed me?" Koyala asked. "It is a week since I have been at the residency. He must have noticed it."

"Kapitein Van Slyck him no speakee Koyala," the Chinaman declared.

Koyala looked at him sternly. "I cannot believe that, Cho Seng," she said. "The captain must surely have noticed that I have not been in Amsterdam. You are not telling me an untruth, are you, Cho Seng?"

The Chinaman was meekness incarnate as he reiterated:

"Him no speakee Koyala."

Displeasure gathered on Koyala's face like a storm cloud. She leaped suddenly from the aerial root and drew herself upright. At the same moment she seemed to undergo a curious transformation. The light, coquettish mood passed away like dabs of sunlight under a fitful April sky, an imperious light gleamed in her eyes and her voice rang with authority as she said:

"Cho Seng, you are the eyes and the ears of Ah Sing in Bulungan—"

The Chinaman interrupted her with a sibilant hiss. His mask of humility fell from him and he darted keen and angry glances about the cane.

"When Koyala Bintang Burung speaks it is your place to listen, Cho Seng," Koyala asserted sternly. Her voice rang with authority. Under her steady glance the Chinaman's furtive eyes bushed themselves in his customary pose of irreplicable meekness.

"You are the eyes and ears of Ah Sing in Bulungan," Koyala reaffirmed, speaking deliberately and with emphasis. "You know that there is a covenant between your master, your master in Batavia, and the council of the *Orang Kayas* of the sea Dyaks of Bulungan, whereby the children of the sea sail in the praus of Ah Sing when the *Hanu Token* come to Koyala on the night winds and tell her to bid them go."

The Chinaman glanced anxiously about the jungle, fearful that a swaying cluster of cane might reveal the presence of an eavesdropper.

"S-s-s-st," he hissed.

Koyala's voice hardened. "Tell your master this," she said. "The spirits of the highlands speak no more through the mouth of the Bintang Burung till the eyes and ears of Ah Sing become her eyes and ears too."

There was a significant pause. Ah Sing's face shifted and he looked at her slantwise to see how seriously he should take the declaration. What he saw undoubtedly impressed him with the need of promptly placating her, for he announced:

"Cho Seng tellee Mynheer Muller Koyala go hide in bush—big *baas* in Batavia say muchee damn-damn, give muchee gold for Koyala."

The displeasure in Koyala's flushed face mounted to anger.

"No, you cannot take credit for that, Cho Seng," she exclaimed sharply. "Word came to Mynheer Muller from

the governor direct that a price of many guilders was put on my head."

Her chin tilted scornfully. "Did you think Koyala was so blind that she did not see the gunboat in Bulungan harbor a week ago to-day?"

Cho Seng met her heat with Oriental calm.

"Bang-bang boat, him come six-seven day ago," he declared. "Cho Seng, him speakee Mynheer Muller Koyala go hide in bush eight-nine day."

"The gun-boat was in the harbor the morning Mynheer Muller told me," Koyala retorted, and stopped in sudden recollection. A tiny flash of triumph lit the Chinaman's otherwise impassive face as he put her unspoken thought into words:

"*Kapitein* him bang-bang boat come see Mynheer Muller *namiddag*," (afternoon) he said, indicating the sun's position an hour before sunset. "Mynheer Muller tellee Koyala *voormiddag*" (forenoon). He pointed to the sun's morning position in the eastern sky.

"That is true," Koyala assented thoughtfully, and paused. "How did you hear of it?"

Cho Seng tucked his hands inside his sleeves and folded them over his paunch. His neck was bent forward and his eyes lowered humbly. Koyala knew what the pose portended; it was the Chinaman's refuge in a silence that neither plea nor threat could break. She rapidly recalled the events of that week.

"There was a junk from Macassar in Bulungan harbor two weeks—no, eleven days ago," she exclaimed. "Did that bring a message from Ah Sing?"

A startled lift of the Chinaman's chin assured her that her guess was correct. Another thought followed swift on the heels of the first.

"The same junk is in the harbor to-day—came here just before sundown last night," she exclaimed. "What message did it bring, Cho Seng?"

The Chinaman's face was like a mask. His lips were compressed tightly—it was

as though he defied her to wedge them open and to force him to reveal his secret. An angry sparkle lit Koyala's eyes for a moment, she stepped a pace toward him and her hand dropped to the hilt of the jeweled kris, then she stopped short. A fleeting look of cunning replaced the angry gleam; a half-smile came and vanished on her lips almost in the same instant.

Her face lifted suddenly toward the leafy canopy. Her arms were flung upward in a supplicating gesture. The Chinaman, watching her from beneath his lowered brow, looked up in startled surprise. Koyala's form became rigid, a Galatea turned back to marble. Her breath seemed to cease, as though she was in a trance. The color left her face, left even her lips. Strangely enough, her very paleness made the Dyak umber in her cheeks more pronounced.

Her lips parted. A low crooning came forth. The Chinaman's knees quaked and gave way as he heard the sound. His body bent from the waist till his head almost touched the ground.

The crooning gradually took the form of words. It was the Malay tongue she spoke—a language Cho Seng knew. The rhythmic beating of his head against his knees ceased and he listened eagerly, with face half-lifted.

"*Hanu token, hanu token*, spirits of the highlands, whither are you taking me?" Koyala cried. She paused, and a deathlike silence followed. Suddenly she began speaking again, her figure swaying like a tall lily stalk in a spring breeze, her voice low-pitched and musically mystic like the voice of one speaking from a far distance.

"I see the jungle, the jungle where the mother of rivers gushes out of the great smoking mountain. I see the pit of serpents in the jungle—"

A trembling seized Cho Seng.

"—the serpents are hungry, they have not been fed, they clamor for the blood of a man. I see him whose foot is over the edge of the pit, he slips, he falls, he

tries to catch himself, but the bamboo slips out of his clutching fingers—I see his face—it is the face of him whose tongue speaks double, it is the face of—”

A horrible groan burst from the Chinaman. He staggered to his feet.

“*Neen, neen, neen, neen,*” he cried hoarsely in an agonized negative. “Cho Seng tellee Bintang Burung—”

A tremulous sigh escaped from Koyala’s lips. Her body shook as though swayed by the wind. Her eyes opened slowly, vacantly, as though she was awakening from a deep sleep. She looked at Cho Seng with an absent stare, seeming to wonder why he was there, why she was where she was. The Chinaman, made voluble through fear, chattered:

“Him junk say big *baas gouverneur* speakee muchee damn-damn; no gambir, no rice, no copra, no coffee from Bulungan one-two year; sendee new resident bimeby belly quick.”

Koyala’s face paled.

“Send a new resident?” she asked incredulously. “What of Mynheer Muller?”

The look of fear left Cho Seng’s face. Involuntarily his neck bent and his fingers sought each other inside the sleeves. There was cunning mingled with malice in his eyes as he looked up furtively and feasted on her manifest distress.

“Him chop-chop,” he announced laconically.

“They will kill him?” Koyala cried.

The Chinaman had said his word. None knew better than he the value of silence. He stood before her in all humbleness and calmly awaited her next word. All the while his eyes played on her in quick, cleverly concealed glances.

Koyala fingered the handle of the kris as she considered what the news portended. Her face slowly hardened—there was a look in it of the tigress brought to bay.

“Koyala bimeby mally him Mynheer Muller, go hide in bush?” Cho Seng ventured. The question was asked with such an air of simple innocence and friendly interest that none could take offense.

Koyala flushed hotly. Then her nose and chin rode high with pride.

“The Bintang Burung will wed no man, Cho Seng,” she declared haughtily. “The blood of Chawatangi dies in me, but not till Bulungan is purged of the *orang blanda*” (white race). She whipped the jeweled kris out of its silken scabbard. “When the last white man spills his heart on the coral shore and the wrongs done Chawatangi’s daughter, my mother, have been avenged, then Koyala will go to join the *hanu token* that call her, call her—”

She thrust the point of the kris against her breast and looked upward toward the far distant hills and the smoking mountain. A look of longing came into her eyes, the light of great desire, almost it seemed as if she would drive the blade home and join the spirits she invoked.

With a sigh she lowered the point of the kris and slipped it back into its sheath.

“No, Cho Seng,” she said, “Mynheer Muller is nothing to me. No man will ever be anything to me. But your master has been a kind elder brother to Koyala. And like me, he has had to endure the shame of an unhappy birth.” Her voice sank to a whisper. “For his mother, Cho Seng, as you know, was a woman of Celebes.”

She turned swiftly away that he might not see her face. After a moment she said in a voice warm with womanly kindness and sympathy:

“Therefore you and I must take care of him, Cho Seng. He is weak, he is untruthful, he has made a wicked bargain with your master, Ah Sing, which the spirits of the hills tell me he shall suffer for, but he is only what his white father made him, and the *orang blada* must pay!” Her lips contracted grimly. “Aye, pay to the last drop of blood! You will be true to him, Cho Seng?”

The Chinaman cast a furtive glance upward and found her mellow dark-brown eyes looking at him earnestly. The eyes seemed to search his very soul.

"Ja, ja," he pledged.

"Then go tell the captain of the junk to sail quickly to Macassar and send word by a swift messenger to Ah Sing that he must let me know the moment a new resident is appointed. There is no wind and the sun is high; therefore the junk will still be in the harbor. Hurry, Cho Seng!"

Without a word the Chinaman wheeled and shuffled down the woodland path that led from the clearing toward the main highway. Koyala looked after him fixedly.

"If his skin were white he could not be more false," she observed bitterly. "But he is Ah Sing's slave, and Ah Sing needs me, so I need not fear him—yet."

She followed lightly after Cho Seng until she could see the prim top of the residency building gleaming white through the trees. Then she stopped short. Her face darkened as the Dyak blood gathered thickly. A look of implacable hate and passion distorted it. Her eyes sought the distant hills:

"*Hanu token, hanu token*, send a young man here to rule Bulungan," she prayed. "Send a strong man, send a vain man, with a passion for fair women. Let me dazzle him with my beauty, let me fill his heart with longing, let me make his brain reel with madness, let me make his body sick with desire. Let me make him suffer a thousand deaths before he gasps his last breath and his dripping head is brought to thy temple in the hills. For the wrongs done Chawatangi's daughter, *hanu token*, for the wrongs done me!"

With a low sob she fled inland through the cane.

CHAPTER V.

SACHSEN'S WARNING.

ELECTRIC tapers were burning dimly in Governor-General Van Schouten's sanctum at the *paleis* that evening as Peter Gross was ushered in.

The governor was seated in a high-backed, elaborately carved mahogany chair before a highly polished mahogany table. Beside him was the omniscient, the indispensable Sachsen. The two were talking earnestly in the Dutch language. Van Schouten acknowledged Peter Gross's entrance with a curt nod and directed him to take a chair on the opposite side of the table.

At a word from his superior, Sachsen tucked the papers he had been studying into a portfolio. The governor stared intently at his visitor for a moment before he spoke.

"Mynheer Gross," he announced sharply, "your captain tells me your contract with him runs to the end of the voyage. He will not release you."

"Then I must fill my contract, your excellency," Peter Gross replied.

Van Schouten frowned with annoyance. He was not accustomed to being crossed.

"When will you be able to take over the administration of Bulungan, *mynheer*?"

Peter Gross's brow puckered thoughtfully. "In three weeks—let us say thirty days, your excellency."

"*Donder en bliksem!*" the governor exclaimed. "We need you there at once."

"That is quite impossible, your excellency. I will need help, men that I can trust and who know the islands. Such men cannot be picked up in a day."

"You can have the pick of my troops."

"I should prefer to choose my own men, your excellency," Peter Gross replied.

"Eh? How so, *mynheer*?" The governor's eyes glinted with suspicion.

"Your excellency has been so good as to promise me a free hand," Peter Gross replied quietly. "I have a plan in mind—if your excellency desires to hear it?"

Van Schouten's face cleared.

"We shall discuss that later, *mynheer*. You will be ready to go the first of June, then?"

"On the first of June I shall await your excellency's pleasure here at Batavia," Peter Gross agreed.

"*Nu!* that is settled!" The governor gave a grunt of satisfaction and squared himself before the table. His expression became sternly autocratic.

"Mynheer Gross," he said, "you told us this afternoon some of the history of our unhappy residency of Bulungan. You demonstrated to our satisfaction a most excellent knowledge of conditions there. Some of the things you spoke of were—I may say—surprising. Some touched upon matters which we thought were known only to ourselves and to our privy council. But, *mynheer*, you did not mention one subject that to our mind is the gravest problem that confronts our representatives in Bulungan. Perhaps you do not know there is such a problem. Or perhaps you underestimate its seriousness. At any rate, we deem it desirable to discuss this matter with you in detail that you may thoroughly understand the difficulties before you and our wishes in the matter. We have requested Mynheer Sachsen to speak for us."

He nodded curtly at his secretary.

"You may proceed, Sachsen."

Sachsen's white head, that had bent low over the table during the governor's rather pompous little speech, slowly lifted. His shrewd gray eyes twinkled kindly. His lips parted in a quaintly humorous and affectionate smile.

"First of all, Vrind Pieter, let me congratulate you," he said, extending a hand across the table. Peter Gross's big paw closed over it with a warm pressure.

"And let me thank you, Vrind Sachsen," he replied. "It was not hard to guess who brought my name to his excellency's attention."

"It is Holland's good fortune that you are here," Sachsen declared. "Had you not been worthy, Vrind Pieter, I should not have recommended you." He looked at the firm, strong face and the deep, broad chest and massive shoulders of his protégé with almost paternal fondness.

"To have earned your good opinion is reward enough in itself," Peter Gross asserted.

Sachsen's odd smile, that seemed to find a philosophic humor in everything, deepened.

"Your reward, Vrind Pieter," he observed, "is the customary recompense of the man who proves his wisdom and his strength—a more onerous duty. Bulungan will test you severely, *vrind* (friend). Do you believe that?"

"Aye," Peter Gross assented soberly.

"Pray God to give you wisdom and strength," Sachsen advised gravely. He bowed his head for a moment, then stirred in his chair and sat up alertly.

"*Nu!* as to the work that lies before you. I need not tell you the history of this residency. For Sachsen to presume to instruct Peter Gross in what has happened in Bulungan would be folly. As great folly as to lecture a dominie on theology."

Again the quaintly humorous quirk of the lips.

"If Peter Gross knew the archipelago half so well as his good friend Sachsen he would be a lucky man," Peter Gross retorted spiritedly.

Sachsen's face became suddenly grave.

"We do not doubt your knowledge of conditions in our unhappy province, Vrind Pieter. Nor do we doubt your ability, your courage, or your sound judgment. But, Pieter—"

He paused. The clear gray eyes of Peter Gross met his questioningly.

"—You are young, Vrind Pieter."

The governor rose abruptly and plucked down from the wall a long-stemmed Dutch pipe that was suspended by a gaily colored cord from a stout peg. He filled the big china bowl of the pipe with nearly a half-pound of tobacco, touched a light to the weed, and returned to his chair. There was a pregnant silence in the room meanwhile.

"How old are you, Vrind Pieter?" Sachsen asked gently.

"Twenty-five, *mynheer*," Peter Gross

replied. There was a pronounced emphasis on the "*mynheer*."

"Twenty-five," Sachsen murmured fondly. "Twenty-five! Just my age when I was a student at Leyden and the gayest young scamp of them all." He shook his head. "Twenty-five is very young, Vrind Pieter."

"That is a misfortune which only time can remedy," Peter Gross replied dryly.

"Yes, only time." Sachsen's eyes misted. "Time that brings the days 'when strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders shall cease because they are few, and the grasshopper shall become a burden, and desire shall fail.' I wish you were older, Vrind Pieter."

The old man sighed. There was a far-away look in his eyes as though he were striving to pierce the future and the leagues between Batavia and Bulungan.

"Vrind Gross," he resumed softly, "we have known each other a long time. Eight years is a long time, and it is eight years since you first came to Batavia. You were a cabin-boy then, and you ran away from your master because he beat you. The wharfmaster at Tanjong Priok found you, and was taking you back to your master when old Sachsen saw you. Old Sachsen got you free and put you on another ship under a good master, who made a good man and a good *zeeman* (seaman) out of you. Do you remember?"

"I shall never forget!" Peter Gross's voice was vibrant with emotion.

"Old Sachsen was your friend then. He has been your friend through the years since then. He is your friend today. Do you believe that?"

Peter Gross impulsively reached his hand across the table. Sachsen grasped it and held it.

"Then to-night you will forgive old Sachsen if he speaks plainly to you, more plainly than you would let other men talk? You will listen, and take his words to heart, and consider them well, Pieter?"

"Speak, Sachsen!"

"I knew you would listen, Pieter."

Sachsen drew a deep breath. His eyes rested fondly on his protégé, and he let go Gross's hand reluctantly as he leaned back in his chair.

"Vrind Pieter, you said a little while ago that old Sachsen knows the people who live in these *kolonien* (colonies). His knowledge is small—"

Peter Gross made a gesture of dissent, but Sachsen did not let him interrupt.

"Yet he has learned some things. It is something to have served the state for over two score years in the Netherlands East Indies, first as *controlleur*, then as resident in Celebes, in Sumatra, in Java, and finally as secretary to the *gouverneur*, as old Sachsen has. In those years he has seen much that goes on in the hearts of the black, and the brown, and the yellow, and the white folk that live in these sun-seared islands. Much that is wicked, but also much that is good. And he has seen much of the fevers that seize men when the sun waves hot and the blood races madly through their veins. There is the fever of hate, and the fever of revenge, the fever of greed, and the fever to grasp God. But more universal than all these is the fever of love and the fever of lust!"

Peter Gross's brow knit with a puzzled frown. "What do you mean, Sachsen?" he demanded.

Sachsen smoothed back his thinning white hair.

"I am an old, old man, Vrind Pieter," he replied. "Desire has long ago failed me. The passions that our fiery Java suns breed in men have drained away. The light that is in a comely woman's eyes, the thrill that comes at a touch of her warm hand, the quickened pulse-beat at the feel of her silken hair brushing over one's face—all these things are ashes and dust to old Sachsen. Slim ankles, plump calves, and full rounded breasts mean nothing to him. But you, Vrind Pieter, are young. You are strong as a buffalo, bold as a tiger, vigorous as a banyan tree. You have a young man's warm blood in your veins. You have the

poison of youth in your blood. You are a man's man, Peter Gross, but you are also a woman's man."

Peter Gross's puzzled frown became a look of blank amazement. "What in the devil are you driving at, Sachsen?" he demanded, forgetting in his astonishment that he was in the governor's presence.

Sachsen leaned forward, his eyes searching his protégé's.

"Have you ever loved a woman, Pieter?" he countered softly.

Peter Gross appeared to be choking. The veins in his forehead distended.

"What has that to do with Bulungan?" he demanded. "You've known me since I was a lad, Sachsen; you've known all my comings and goings; why do you ask me such—rot?"

A grimly humorous smile lit the governor's stern visage.

"Let the strong take heed lest they fall," Sachsen quoted quietly. "Since you say that you love no woman, let me ask you this—have you ever seen Koyala?"

The little flash of passion left Peter Gross's face but the puzzled frown remained.

"Koyala," he repeated thoughtfully. "It seems to me I have heard the name, but I cannot recall how or when."

"Think, think!" Sachsen urged, leaning eagerly over the table. "The half-white woman of Borneo, the French trader's daughter by a native woman, brought up and educated at a mission school in Sarawak. The Dyaks call her the Bintang Burung. Ha! I see you know her now."

"Leveque's daughter, Chawatangi's grandchild?" Peter Gross exclaimed. "Of course I know her. Who doesn't?" His face sobered. "The unhappiest woman in the archipelago. I wonder she lives."

"You have seen her?" Sachsen asked.

Peter Gross's eyes twinkled reminiscently. "Aye, that I have."

"Tell me about it," Sachsen urged, with an imperceptible gesture to the

governor to say nothing. He leaned forward expectantly.

Peter Gross cocked an eye at the ceiling. "Let me see, it was about a year ago," he said. "I was with McCloud, on the brig Mary Dietrich. McCloud heard at Macassar that there was a settlement of Dyaks at the mouth of the Abbas that wanted to trade in dammar gum and gambir and didn't ask too much *balas* (tribute money). We crossed the straits and found the village. Wolang, the chief, gave us a big welcome. We spend one day palavering; these natives won't do anything without having a *bitchara* first. The next morning I began loading up, while McCloud entertained the *Orang Kaya*, Wolang, with a bottle of gin.

"The natives crowded around pretty close, particularly the women, anxious to see what we were bringing ashore. One girl, quite a pretty girl, went so far as to step into the boat, and one of my men swung an arm around her and kissed her. She screamed."

The governor took his pipe out of his mouth and looked up with interest.

"The next minute the mob of Dyaks parted as though cut with a scythe. Down the lane came a woman, a white woman."

He turned to the secretary. "You have seen her, Sachsen?"

"Ja, Pieter."

"Then you can guess how she keeled me over," Peter Gross said. "I took her for a white woman, a pure blood. She is white; the brown in her skin is no deeper than in a Spaniard's. She walked up to me—I could see a hurricane was threatening—and she said:

"'You are English? Go back to your ship, now; don't wait a minute, or you will leave your heads here.'

"'Madam,' I said, 'the lad was hasty but meant no harm. It will not happen again. I will make the lady a present.'

"She turned a look on me that fairly withered me. 'You think you can buy our women, too?' she said, fairly spitting the words. 'Go! go! Don't you see my Dyaks fitting arrows in their blowpipes?'

"McCloud came running up with Chief Wolang. 'What's this?' he blustered, but Koyala only pointed to the sea and said the one word:

"Go!"

"McCloud spoke to Wolang, but at a nod from Koyala the chief gave an order to his followers. Fifty Dyaks fitted poisoned arrows into their *sumpitans*. McCloud had good judgment; he knew when it was no use to *bitchara* and show gin. We rowed back to the ship without the cargo we expected to load and set sail at once. Not an arrow followed us, but the last thing I saw of the village was Koyala on the beach watching us dip into the big rollers of the Celebes Sea."

"She is beautiful?" Sachsen suggested softly.

"Aye, quite an attractive young female," Peter Gross agreed in utmost seriousness. The governor's grim smile threatened to break out into an open grin.

Sachsen looked at the tabletop thoughtfully and rubbed his hands. "She lost you a cargo," he stated. "You have a score to settle with her."

The secretary flashed a keen glance at his protégé.

"By God, no!" Peter Gross exclaimed. He brought his fist down on the table. "She was right, eternally right. If a scoundrelly scum from over the sea tried to kiss a woman of my kin in that way I'd treat him a lot worse than we were treated."

Van Schouten blew an angry snort that cut like a knife the huge cloud of tobacco-smoke in which he had enveloped himself. Peter Gross faced him truculently.

"We deserved what we got," he asserted. "When we whites get over the notion that the world is a playground for us to spill our lusts and vices on and the lower races the playthings we can abuse as we please, we'll have peace in these islands. Our missionaries preach morals and Christianity; our traders, like

that damned whelp, Leveque, break every law of God and man. Between the two the poor benighted heathen loses all the faith he has and sinks one grade lower in brutishness than his ancestors were before him. If all men were like Brooke of Sarawak we'd have had the East Indies Christianized by now. The natives were ready to make gods out of us—they did it with Brooke—but now they're looking for a chance to put a knife in our backs—a good many of them are."

He checked himself. "Here I'm preaching. I beg your pardon, your excellency."

Van Schouten blew another great cloud of tobacco-smoke and said nothing. Through the haze his eagle-keen eyes searched Peter Gross's face and noted the firm chin and tightly drawn lips with stern disapproval. Sachsen flashed him a warning glance to keep silent.

"Mynheer Gross," the secretary entreated, "let me again beg the privileges of an old friend. Is it admiration for Koyala's beauty or your keen sense of justice that leads you to so warm a defense?"

Peter Gross's reply was prompt and decisive.

"Vrind Sachsen, if she had been a hag I'd have thought no different."

"Search your heart, Vrind Pieter; is it not because she was young and comely, a woman unafraid, that you remember her?"

"Women are nothing to me," Peter Gross retorted irritably. "But right is right, and wrong is wrong, whether in Batavia or Bulungan."

Sachsen shook his head.

"Vriend Pieter," he declared sadly, "you make me very much afraid for you. If you had acknowledged, 'The woman was fair, a fair woman stirs me quickly,' I would have said: 'He is young and has eyes to see with, but he is too shrewd to be trapped.' But when you say: 'The fault was ours, we deserved to lose the cargo,' then I know that you are blind, blind to your own weakness, Pieter.

Clever, wicked women make fools of such as you, Pieter."

One eyebrow arched the merest trifle in the direction of the governor. Then Sachsen continued:

"Vriend Pieter, I am here to-night to warn you against this woman. I have much to tell you about her, much that is unpleasant. Will you listen?"

Peter Gross shrugged his shoulders.

"I am at your service, Sachsen."

"Will you listen with an open mind? Will you banish from your thoughts all recollection of the woman you saw at the mouth of the Abbas River, all that you know or think you know of her fancied wrongs, and hear what old Sachsen has to say of the evil she has done, of the crimes, the piracies, aye, even rebellions and treasons for which she has been responsible? What say you, Vriend Pieter?"

Peter Gross swallowed hard. Words seemed to be struggling to his lips, but he kept them back. His teeth were pressed together tightly. The silence became tense.

"Listen, Sachsen," he finally said. His voice was studiously calm. "You come from an old, conservative race, a race that clings faithfully to the precepts and ideals of its fathers and is certain of its footing before it makes a step in advance. You have the old concept of woman, that her lot is to bear, to suffer, and to weep. I come from a fresher, newer race, a race that gives its women the same liberty of thought and action that it gives its men. Therefore there are many things concerning the conduct of this woman that we look at in different ways. Things that seem improper, aye, sometimes treasonable to you, seem a perfectly natural protest to me. You ignore the wrongs she has suffered, wrongs that must make life a living hell to her. You say she must be content with the place to which God has called her, submerge the white blood in her, and live a savage among savages."

Peter Gross pulled his chair nearer the table and leaned forward. His face glowed with an intense earnestness.

"Great Scott, Sachsen, think of her condition! Half white, aye, half French, and that is as proud a race as breathes. Beautiful—beautiful as the sunrise. Taught in a missionary school, brought up as a white child among white children. And then, when the glory of her womanhood comes upon her, to learn she is an illegitimate, a half-breed, sister to the savage Dyaks, her only future in their filthy huts, to kennel with them, breed with them—God, what a horror that revelation must have been!"

He raked his fingers through his hair and stared savagely at the wall.

"You don't feel these things, Sachsen," he concluded. "You're Dutch to begin with, and so a conservative thinker. Then you've been ground through the routine of colonial service so many years that you've lost every viewpoint except the state's expediency. Thank God I haven't! That is why I think I can do something for you in Bulungan—"

He checked himself. "Common sense and a little elemental justice go a long, long ways in dealing with savages," he observed.

Sachsen's eyes looked steadily into Peter Gross's. Sachsen's kindly smile did not falter. But the governor's patience had reached its limit.

"Look you here, Mynheer Gross," he exclaimed, "I want no sympathy for that she-devil from my resident."

An angry retort leaped to Peter Gross's lips, but before it could be uttered Sachsen's hand had leaped across the table and had gripped his warningly.

"She may be as beautiful as a *houri*, but she is a witch, a very Jezebel," the governor stormed. "I have nipped a dozen uprisings in the bud, and this Koyala has been at the bottom of all of them. She hates us *orang blandas* with a hate that the fires of hell could not burn out, but she is subtler than the serpent that taught Mother Eve. She has bewitched my *controleur*; see that she does not bewitch you. I have put a price on her head; your first duty will

be to see that she is delivered for safe-keeping here in Batavia."

The governor's eyes were sparkling fire. There was a like anger in Peter Gross's face; he was on the point of speaking when Sachsen's nails dug so deeply into his hand that he winced.

"Mynheer Gross is an American, therefore he is chivalrous," Sachsen observed. "He aims to be just, but there is much that he does not understand. If your excellency will permit me—"

Van Schouten gave assent by picking up his pipe and closing his teeth viciously on the mouthpiece.

Sachsen promptly addressed Peter Gross.

"Vrind Pieter," he said, "I am glad you have spoken. Now we understand each other. You are just what I knew you were, fearless, honest, frank. You have convinced me the more that you are the man we must have as resident of Bulungan."

Peter Gross looked up distrustfully. Van Schouten, too, evinced his surprise by taking the pipe from his mouth.

"But," Sachsen continued, "you have the common failing of youth. Youth dreams dreams, it would rebuild this sorry world and make it Paradise before the snake. It is sure it can. With age comes disillusionment. We learn we cannot do the things we have set our hands to do in the way we planned. We learn we must compromise. Once old Sachsen had thoughts like yours. To-day"—he smiled tenderly—"he has the beginnings of wisdom. That is, he has learned that God ordains. Do you believe that, Vrind Pieter?"

"Aye, of course," Peter Gross acknowledged, a trifle bewildered. "But—"

"Now, concerning this woman," Sachsen cut in briskly. "We will concede that she was wronged before she was born. We will concede the sin of her father. We will concede his second sin, leaving her mother to die in the jungle. We will concede the error, if error it was, to educate Koyala in a mission school

among white children. We will concede the fatal error of permitting her to return to her own people, knowing the truth of her birth."

His voice took a sharper turn as he continued:

"But there are millions of children born in your own land, in my land, in every land, with deformed bodies, blind perhaps, crippled, with faces uglier than baboons. Why? Because one or both of their parents sinned. Now I ask you," he demanded harshly, "whether these children, because of the sin of their parents, have the right to commit crimes, plot murders, treasons, rebellions, and stir savage people to wars of extermination against their white rulers? What is your answer?"

"That is not the question," Peter Gross began, but Sachsen interrupted.

"It is the question. It was the sin of the parent in both cases. Leveque sinned; his daughter, Koyala, suffers. Parents sin everywhere, their children must suffer."

Peter Gross stared at the wall thoughtfully.

"Look you here, Vrind Pieter," Sachsen said, "learn this great truth. The state is first, then the individual. Always the good of the whole people, that is the state, first, then the good of the individual. Thousands may suffer, thousands may die, but if the race benefits, the cost is nothing. This law is as old as man. Each generation says it a new way, but the law is the same. And so with this Koyala. She was wronged, we will admit it. But she cannot be permitted to make the whole white race pay for those wrongs and halt progress in Borneo for a generation. She will have justice; his excellency is a just man. But first there must be peace in Bulungan. There must be no more plottings, no more piracies, no more head-hunting. The spearheads must be separated from their shafts, the krisses must be buried, the *sumpitans* must be broken in two. If Koyala will yield, this can be done. If you can persuade her

to trust us, Pieter, half your work is done. Bulungan will become one of our fairest residencies, its trade will grow, the piracies will be swept from the seas, and the days of head-hunting will become a tradition."

Peter Gross bowed his head.

"God help me, I will," he vowed.

"But see that she does not seduce you, Vrind Pieter," the old man entreated earnestly. "You are both young, she is fair, and she is a siren, a vampire. Hold

fast to your God, to your faith, to the oath you take as a servant of the State, and do not let her beauty blind you—no, nor your own warm heart either, Pieter."

Sachsen rose. There were tears in his eyes as he looked fondly down at the young man that owed so much to him.

"Pieter," he said, "old Sachsen will pray for you. I must leave you now, Pieter; the governor desires to talk to you."

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.



Wages of Virtue

by
Mary Lerner

ALICE nodded with grim approval. "She'll pay, now," she told herself. "She'll pay. About time, too. A woman can't expect to carry on as she has, always. 'Tisn't natural or right that she should."

She began to get her things together. Pretty soon the train would run into the terminal and she would alight. She would give the slip bearing Hester's address to a cab-driver—yes, she would take a cab and arrive in state, to show Hetty how virtue prospered.

Poor Hetty! Her days of prosperity and defiance were about over. She was getting on; no use trying to blink that fact. Time was when her youth and

beauty had ousted Belding's fading wife; the hour had come when she, too, must step aside; she was nearly forty. Hetty, of course, would wail. Indeed, her letter held a tone to make one waste no time. There was no telling what she might do in her first despair. She had always been intense.

Seated at last in an ancient four-wheeler, she wondered whether it wouldn't have been better to take one of those motor vehicles; they seemed to be just the thing. But no doubt this mode of conveyance lent more dignity, suited better her black silks and graying hair. She smoothed out her skirts with sudden critical scrutiny; her clothes looked

rather rusty in this city glare, somehow; her gloves positively shabby. Altogether, she hardly fitted into the scheme of things.

She began to wish she'd had time to get something fresh to wear. But the winter had been hard, funds were low—funds were always low with her. Well, never mind; *her* things were honestly come by, and she'd her own place, too. Hetty wouldn't turn up her nose now, she'd wager. She'd have a chance at last to learn what it meant to work and earn her living.

How she used to hate work! This or that was always too hard, or too stupid, or not worth doing. "How can you spend your life cooking for people who have to be fed all over again in a couple of hours?" she'd say. "You never get anywhere." How would Hetty like a chamber-maid's place now, she wondered. Well, she wouldn't be too hard on her at first.

Alice Andrews checked the smile that came at the thought of that impatient, eager-faced girl, who had seemed, somehow, to concentrate all available sunlight on her face and hair; who had seemed always to be holding out her hands to life.

"She won't look like that now," she reminded herself placidly. "I wonder how she does look, anyway. Too fat, of course; she was always the plump one. And that hair of hers will be drab now—'Sunshine,' he used to call her! Or perhaps it will be dyed, like that Montvale woman's. Her color will be faded, like mine, only worse. Of course she is younger, but think of the life she's led! Out all hours, I'll warrant—city life, too. Oh, she'll show what she's been through—conviction of sin, remorse—"

The splendor of the apartment hotel dazzled her small-town eyes, confined so many years to boarding-house kitchens. "She'll have to forget all this," she thought with a certain satisfaction. After all, Hetty had lain on beds of ease while she had kindled early fires in many a shivery dawn, groping about the kitchen

with sleep-burdened eyes and sluggish brain.

She resented being obliged to go into this house which sheltered Hetty. Even now people were looking at her—all these fine-looking, lavishly dressed ladies—speculating on her purpose. Out of countenance, she hung her head as she stammered her sister's name to the elevator boy; of course, he knew all about her.

If so, he did not condemn her apparently, for he smiled broadly, hospitably.

"Miss Andrews? You mean Dr. Andrews, I guess. Second floor. Step right in, please."

Dr. Andrews? she wondered. She hadn't had three letters from Hetty in fifteen years; they had broken definitely. She knew Hetty had been the doctor's assistant—Hetty always had the deffest fingers; she would be invaluable passing him his dental instruments, sterilizing things. They made such a fuss over that business now—not that she knew very much about it; she couldn't afford to.

From the moment that she had entered the building, found herself graciously received, mingled with these ladies who radiated such an atmosphere of buoyant well-being, she had felt suddenly and inexplicably easy, happy—gay, almost; as if she herself, cramped as she had been all her life by poverty and toil, had begun, chameleonlike, to reflect the comfort and brightness about her. Her heart beat higher; her thin cheeks burned; she found enjoyment in the good looks and apparent freedom of the other women.

As she moved forward at the call "Second!" however, colliding with a man who drew aside to let her pass, a haggard face stared wistfully at her from a narrow strip of mirror in the elevator paneling. Contrasted with the bright, self-indulgent faces round her, it seemed incredibly old and worn. Immediately the glow that had warmed her chilled.

"Why, I look as if I ought to be in my bed," she thought, amazed. "I guess that crazy letter of Hetty's and the long trip upset me more than I thought."

At her ring the door opened. She saw a tall, graceful young woman, daintily dressed. The young woman's back was to the light, so she could not see her face very well. She was good to look at, however, with bright, soft hair about her smooth temples and a round, white throat. The westering sun picked out a lot of little curls about her ears, and the well-rounded outlines of her bare forearms caught the light. A vague fragrance came from her soft garments.

"Does a Miss Andrews—" Alice began timidly.

The young woman threw up both hands with a quick cry.

"Alice! Alice! This can't be you!" She peered into her face as if to discover something maliciously hidden. "Heavens!" Then, grasping her by the shoulders: "Come here to the window."

The two women faced each other.

For Alice, at least, no doubts now remained. Her delinquent sister stood before her, miraculously young, miraculously lovely. Of course she had changed—but not much, and that all for the better.

Her rather formlessly chubby face had gained in subtlety and expression. Her fair hair was darker, but shining and well nourished. The staring pink and white of her complexion had softened; she was a little tanned by the sun, and there was a healthy outdoor glow on her smooth cheeks. The few faint character lines seemed but to accentuate the firmness of her flesh. Her figure was as straight as ever, and more muscular-looking. Yes, this was Hester.

With an effort, she gave heed to her sister's crowding words.

"Oh, Alice! You've been ill; you've been poor; you've suffered! All these years! How you must have suffered! Why didn't you let me know? I would have done anything to help you for all you cast me off so bitterly. Here, let me take your things. Sit down. I'll get you something to drink." Quickly, deftly, she possessed herself of Alice's wraps and hat, bundled her into a deep chair.

Then, as she swung away with her spoils, she suddenly halted. As if hypnotized, she stood gazing at the miserable little rusty black hat with its forlorn broken feather. Tears gathered in her eyes.

"What's the matter with you?" Alice demanded sharply. After all, she was virtue triumphant, though she did not look very triumphant just now. "I didn't leave my house and trapes 'way on here to have you cry over my feather. That feather's good enough for me, I want you to know, and bought with honest money. Here, give it to me. And I don't want anything to drink in this house of his."

"House of his'?" Hester queried blankly.

"Quick, now, tell me why you sent me such a help-or-I-perish letter. Thought I'd find you on your last legs, but it seems to me you look pretty good for a woman of your years. Come, let's have it over with and get out of this place; you can start home with me to-night. Now that he's cast you off, I'm glad I've a roof to offer you. Sit you down there and get to the point."

Hester Andrews stood motionless for a moment, returning her sister's gaze; then, with a graceful shrug of her fine shoulders, dropped into a chair.

"As you will, Alice," she replied in a voice that contrasted sharply with the other's harsh accents. She even smiled, showing beautiful white teeth. Alice would have sworn they were false but for well-remembered and piquant irregularities.

"It's all over between you?"

"All over."

"You don't look as if you were breaking your heart."

Hester hesitated.

"Well, hardly. Only idle women break their hearts."

"But I thought you were in love with him," Alice insisted, with the confirmed sentimentality of one who knows nothing of love.

"As to that—well, we've been just good friends for years. All the same, when his wife died, I rather thought—hoped—"

"And he won't marry you—make it up to you? Why not? You're a fine-looking woman yet, if you are all of thirty-eight; you don't look a day over twenty-five. Why, I looked older when I was twenty-two than you do this minute, but I had to work hard."

"You'd advise him to make another marriage—of convenience? You saw how the first worked out."

"But after the way he treated you—"

"I don't complain of his 'treatment.'" Hester leaned forward; her well-shaped, clever-looking hands made eloquent gestures. "You talk of 'this house of his.' Why, this is *my* house, run by *my* money. I'm afraid you don't know what my income is. Listen. Through him I was able to get my dental training, pass my State board examination, set up as an independent dentist. You never guessed, did you?"

"Why, I've had my degree, my own office—adjoining his—my own patients, for more than ten years." Her face flushed vividly. "You ought to see my porcelain inlays, my bridge-work, my regulation cases! Some of the biggest physicians in the city send children to me for regulation."

She jumped up and stepped to a cabinet. From a drawer she drew out casts, photographs, X-ray prints.

"Here, look at these. This child saved from a disfigured life. See, this was the original formation of the jaw. Look at the incisors—crowded, unhealthy, hideous. Then look at *this* cast." Expertly she fitted upper and lower jaws together. "What do you think of that occlusion? Perfect! His parents are my lifelong friends. And but for Vincent, what would have been my life? A maid's cap, or a butler for a husband!"

Alice gasped.

Her sister, bending over her, frowned with professional intentness.

"My dear, how you've neglected your teeth! They're in a frightful condition."

"Look here, now, I didn't come here—"

"Never mind, Alice, there's a good girl. I'll fix them up for you, and it won't cost you a cent. Some I'll fill and some I'll crown. You wouldn't believe what a difference it will make in your health."

"I've managed to get along a good many years without such new fangles. I won't begin now."

"But, Alice—"

"Listen to me, now. Why did you send for me? You made out you were in such a bad way I packed up and left a house full of good-paying lodgers. Goodness knows, I can't afford such jaunts."

Hester sighed.

"Well, if you must have it, Alice, I'm not in any bad way, but I had to make the letter pretty strong, or you'd not have come. Of course, I *was* disappointed when I found Vincent's plans for the future didn't include me. After all, you know, we're used to each other's ways; I could be a help to him, by way of repayment. I'd like to repay him. But, when I came to think it over, I saw he was right."

"It's all over—that young madness; you can't bring it to life again. So why hamper our new free friendship with empty vows? Besides, no one has ever questioned us; we've escaped—miraculously—all suspicion—oh, we were very careful! An alliance now would start up all sorts of doubts. Then, just lately—Alice, don't be hard on me—"

Hester's color rose; her eyes fell to a little ring which she turned again and again on one of her slender, supple fingers. Her voice was low, her words halting.

"You know, Vincent's an old man now, Alice—over sixty. Sixty, sixty! I've been trying to think of him as you must see him still—straight and strong and compelling. Those black eyes of his,

how they used to glow! How his wife must have loved him! He was very young when she married him; *she* was much older—and rich. Forgive me, Alice, but I used to think you were half in love with him yourself—with his good looks and gay, disarming smile—for all your severity. Perhaps you didn't realize it; you were too strict with yourself to admit such a possibility.

"But I remember how your eyes used to follow him round if he came into your kitchen, and how sharply you watched me when I waited on the table. My! I was almost afraid of you. Then the night you met us coming through the wood. I heard you take him to task for it the next day in the library; I listened at the door. He laughed at your scared daring, and I heard him say:

"*'There are girls quite as pretty as you, Alice, and twice as wise. You know, if you want to get anything out of life, you must meet it half-way.'*

"*'We'll both leave this house!'* you cried.

"*'She won't,'* he laughed. *'Ask her. And don't imagine you are doing her a kindness. She won't lose anything by me, my good girl.'*

"And he laughed at you again in that daring way he had. I thought you were going to strike him. And that night, when you thought I was asleep, you bent over me and looked and looked at me. I didn't dare to move. *'Quite as pretty,'* you kept murmuring, *'and twice as wise.'*

"Then you began to cry. After that we had our—quarrel, and you went away."

Alice remained motionless, her eyes fixed on her sister's fair face.

"And he—how happy I was! All life that had seemed so achingly empty, so mean and gray and toil-filled—why, he made it bloom for me. I had a little place of my own, good books, long talks, music—love. At once I came to help him in his office; his wife liked me—never seemed to guess. Why, I was his valued assistant, well paid, respected—I,

who had been a maid in his wife's employ.

"She used to rally me on being with him more than she was—all day, waiting on him, anticipating his needs, learning every minute. At first I just wanted to show him how smart I was—what a help I could be; but soon I was interested in the work itself. Inside of a year he said:

"*'You can go further than this. I can't have you waste yourself sterilizing instruments.'*

"He had me take courses. Evenings and holidays he helped me. Our work together came to be our strongest bond."

Hester drew a long breath, stared off into vacancy.

"And he was such a lover—more than I had ever hoped or wished or dreamed of. In the spring we used to go out into the country and walk and walk—over hills, through woods. Sometimes we would spend the night outdoors. There'd be moonlight, and he'd be like a boy. *'Hester,'* he used to say, *'you've given me back my youth.'*

"And now he says he's too old for me; he's finished. And I—" She stretched her fine arms over her head. "Why, I've time and energy enough to live a complete life yet. You know, our people have always been noted for their physiques—the women particularly. You know they have, Alice." Her eyes sought Alice's beseechingly. "Why, I've ten good years yet—fifteen. Remember Aunt Clara's second family of ten!

"So Vincent said: *'Why don't you send for your sister? It's time you two made it up. She'll forgive us by this time. What a tigress she was! But a mighty fine figure of a woman at twenty-five. Hard, though, and cold, and intolerant of little follies. Well, she'll have learned tolerance from the years. Life's a great conciliator.'* That's what *he* said.

"So I sent for you. I *am* lonely, in spite of friends. I long for *folks*—my own kin. And, Alice, there's another man, a man my own age, with *'round, strong arms,'* like Cleopatra's young Antony.

And when he comes, you can chaperon me, for I mean to marry this time."

She leaned forward and put an urgent hand on Alice's black-clad knee.

"Alice, we can help each other. You're tired and I'm lonely. What do you say? A free, sheltered life, new strength and well-being—what do you say? Have you had enough of small-town lodging-houses—enough of hot stoves and greasy pots? Though that's all by the way; we need each other."

Graceful, free from self-consciousness, she held out her beautiful arms. The gesture was that of a woman not ashamed of or unused to endearments.

"You will stay?"

There was a silence. The older woman, in her rusty black, so angular and faded, with her recovered hat in her lap, dangling its broken feather, looked cold and hard, although she was really trembling. She sat up with a sudden catch of breath. As her sister had said, she had been visualizing the doctor as he had been in his mature prime—adventurous, gallant, compelling. Well, it was finished now for him—all finished; just as it was for her. Only *he* had had his joys, his successes. Her own bare life repassed before her—the longings of years denied, the wooing beauty of dead seasons, the gradual stifling of desire in toil.

She jammed on her shapeless hat and sprang from her chair, pushing aside the white, rounded arms that sought to hold her.

"Don't you touch me!" she cried savagely. "Let me get out of this house—it stifles me!"

"But there's no train to-night. Stay till to-morrow, anyway. Don't leave me like this. Where will you go?"

Alice tore herself free and stalked to the door.

"Where? I guess there's places open to respectable people. I've the price."

"Alice—"

The closing door cut short Hester's appeal.

With whirling senses, Alice made her

way out of the building. In the street she looked about her blindly. No cab now; nothing to suggest luxury, compromise. She bethought herself of a rooming-house known in earlier days. She had stayed there several times when new to "the States," and looking for "a place." It had been cheap, but clean and respectable.

She was near the end of her forces when she dragged herself up the steps and asked for a room. The house had changed hands, she found. It was dingy-looking, run-down. She did not mind; its very poverty was, in her Spartan eyes, a virtue. The unadorned chamber, the gray-white spread, the peeling wall-paper—all these she found in pleasing contrast to Hester's sunny, daintily ordered apartment.

Declining supper, she stripped off her black clothes. At the sight of her bony arms and yellowed throat in the blurred bit of mirror, she smiled with grim satisfaction. After Hester's curved whiteness, they seemed, in some fashion, decent, commendable. She was almost resentful at the length and thickness of her fast-graying hair.

In the hard bed at last, she felt a sudden weariness engulf her. How deadily tired she was! Well, she had been tired before; most of her life she had been tired. *That* was nothing new. To-morrow she would start home. The round would begin all over again. Well, she might as well get to sleep. A grateful numbness spread over her; consciousness lapsed.

She slept perhaps an hour, then suddenly woke. An unbearable awareness of misfortune flooded her, an inappeasable sense of loss. Life seemed all at once tragic, bitter, unendurable. It was as if some awful calamity against which she had always succeeded in armoring her waking hours had sprung upon her now, relaxed in the weakness of sleep. A great sob rose in her throat.

She saw pass before her long-banished figures, heard forbidden words. That chance which the adventurous Hester had

seized—opening all doors of opportunity to her eager touch—that chance had been *hers* first, and Hester had never guessed. Let Hester talk of her clever hands, her quickness. Ah, she had been no match for her older sister, either in brains or beauty—though who would believe that now, confronted with this toil-hardened maker of beds and sweeper of floors? But *she* had refused to compromise.

Hester, with her profession, her money, her position! More than that, Hester with her youth—still—and her beauty, her new, undeserved love. If *she* had once been his, she would never have known of another man's existence. Turn away from *him*, with his gay, caressing smile? She brought herself up short. But he was old now, and "past desire"—like herself. It was all over for both of them; only he had lived and she had not.

She envisaged the future. No change, no choice, no possible respite. She saw herself old and broken, still haggling with relentless dealers, still bewailing "bad bills." How mean and poor her erstwhile adequate house looked! How steep its narrow stairs! How damp and dark its basement kitchen! And she would live and work there—until the end, and die among strangers. She saw herself dying, alone. Fear possessed her, fear of pain and weariness and solitude. She turned over and stifled her sobs in the pillow.

In the morning things bore a more endurable face; her old habit of indomitable courage and uncompromising rectitude asserted itself. Regrets or not, she was not the woman ever to have yielded to a course at variance with her convictions; or, having yielded, to possess her soul in peace. Her vigorous constitution bore her up even against the fatigues of mind and body under which she labored, and, capable housewife that she was, her busy mind bustled about its usual preoccupations. That new family who wanted to eat at her house, fair-spoken, prosperous people, she felt sure she could suit them, and their money was good. They—

A hurried groping foot in the hall, a knock at the door.

"Who is it?" she called, already half-clad.

"Hester. Let me in."

She opened the door, and her sister burst in and caught both her hands in a desperate grip. Through her elaborate veil, Alice noted signs of a sleepless night. The bright eyes were dull and dark-shadowed; the round face pale and drawn.

"Alice! You can't leave me like this! You'll spoil the rest of my life."

"I? How's that?"

"He knew you were coming yesterday—he thought, to stay. He came up in the elevator with you."

"*He?* Your new one?"

"Yes. He heard you ask for 'Miss' Andrews. He wondered at that; wondered at your appearance, though recognizing the resemblance between us."

"*Resemblance?*"

"It's unmistakable. Then, amazed, and knowing we were to meet for the first time in years—I oughtn't to have told him so much—he felt he mustn't intrude. So he waited. My God! he waited! And in less than ten minutes *you* dashed out, looking like a fury, and rushed away. Our first meeting in years, remember, and he knew that. Why was I such a fool as to let you come here?"

"I won't be here long to bother you."

"I mean I should have gone to you. But I didn't expect—"

"I'd look like this? How did you know I was in this house?"

"He followed you—felt he must. You looked desperate. Then he came back, and—well, he wanted to understand, of course. One can't wonder."

"You've not told him about Vincent?"

"You can't tell things like that to a man who's idolized you. Cornered, I'd the wit to manufacture a quarrel, but you'll have to come back at once, or it won't hold water. Alice!" She grasped her sister. "You've got to come back, and stay! If you'd acted like a sane woman yesterday—why, he's been in tor-

ture! You can see—the difference in our circumstances, the expense of my education—and *he* comes of people whose women-folk have always been irreproachable—didn't need to be anything else! The cruelty of it!" She crossed to the merciless, clouded mirror and lifted her veil. "You can see what this night's done to me." And, indeed, she looked as one stricken with a deadly illness.

Still Alice, mechanically dressing, did not answer.

"Alice, you don't know what it means to me. And I thought nothing could touch me! I had my health, my friends, my profession. Why should I sicken for any man's love? But now it seems as if I couldn't go on without him. *Alice!*"

Alice adjusted her skirt-belt.

"You must explain what you mean. You expect me to pretend there's no secret in your life—nothing you're not free to tell everybody? Why, you ought to know I never could do it—play a part like that! Everything I did and said would point the finger at us. I couldn't hold my head up in a house of yours. Don't you know it?"

"Oh, Alice!"

"How could I outface an honest man and pretend to him my sister—why, I'd be a stone round your neck. Can't you see that?" She pinned on her collar, primly. "My speech, too, compared to yours; my looks, my ways, constantly reminding him—perhaps you've told him we're nearly the same age?"

Hester groaned.

"I did, oh, I did! Why was I such a fool? Still, you might have been ill."

"And you did not nurse me?" Alice returned, with unexpected logic.

"We were estranged."

"For what reason—so long and so terribly?"

"Oh! Oh!"

"My hands, my clothes—"

"I can get you clothes."

"He saw me."

They were both silent a long minute. Then Hester spoke, calmly, as one utterly

betrayed by fate, and resigned to the betrayal.

"Yes. And he saw how you looked when you rushed out yesterday, from our long-deferred reunion."

"Why don't you tell him the truth? He might forgive you. More likely to, now that he's seen me. *That* will show him—"

"The extenuating circumstances? The alternatives I faced?"

"It'll show him what you'd have come to, if that's what you mean. What you'd have left now to offer him."

"No use. He's led a sheltered existence; he doesn't know life. Another man would understand, but I wanted *him*."

Alice was putting on her rusty hat now, with its dangling feather.

"Lots of us've wanted things, I guess," she said, without bitterness. "Still, you might try, if you're as badly off as you think."

Hester rose and pulled down her veil with finality. Her face had taken on the decision, her movements the very determination that characterized her older sister. One saw that, though fired in a different furnace, they had been cast in the same mold.

"You don't understand," Hester went on. "There's another side to it. Even if I dared make a clean breast of it, there's not a word I could say that wouldn't implicate Vincent; *he* knows him. And I should never do that, even if it was of any use, and I know it isn't. So you see where I stand. I'll have to keep quiet and let him think whatever he may." She caught her breath sharply. "All my life I've had to 'keep quiet.' Sometimes it comes over me in the night—" she stopped abruptly.

Alice picked up her battered bag.

"It don't pay to give too much attention to how you feel nights," she declared sagely. "Next day things look evened up somehow."

"Oh, *you*, of course!" Hester broke in. "You've nothing to conceal. *Your* life's an open book."

"You mean you repent?" demanded Alice, with her ready, orthodox vocabulary.

Hester jerked her head up impatiently.

"I don't know if it's repentance. Something—it follows you—looks at you out of mirrors—and children's eyes. Your best days, your biggest hours carry reminders—you can't imagine." She was silent a moment, embarrassed by her unexpected need of sympathy.

Calm again, she regarded her sister with almost resentful curiosity.

"At least *you've* made no surrender."

"I've been an honest woman," Alice asserted proudly. Then, with sudden softening, she voiced one of the greatest and most pitiful of truths: "But perhaps I've never been tempted as sore as some."

The two sisters looked at each other; they were nearer mutual understanding than at any time in their lives. Alice put out a timid hand.

"Will you take breakfast with me? Though I'm afraid *you*—"

"*Breakfast!*"

"I know. But you have to eat."

They moved toward the door constrainedly.

"You'll go back to-day? I want to pay your expenses."

"No," Alice declined. "The trip's done me good. I'll be glad to get back to my kitchen. It's a real nice kitchen, and a fine stove."

They went down the stairs. At the front door, Hester turned.

"Well, good-by."

"Good-by," replied Alice awkwardly.

"I am, in a way, sorry, Hetty, though I never thought to say that."

Hester smiled a wan little smile, like a child imploring commendation, then, not offering hand or cheek, went out and closed the door behind her.



A POOR STARVED SOUL

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

DON'T read to me of mystery and love;
Them things don't int'rest me—why, lands above,
I haven't had a bite to eat this day!
Go put them novel vollums all away.

Get out a cook book, if you would me please,
And read a lot of tasty re-ci-pes.
Read how to broil a good old sirloin steak,
How parsleyed, browned potatoes you can make.

Read how to make mince, lemon, apple pies—
It brings the tears unto my mouth and eyes!
Half-pound of butter—eggs, cream, mushrooms, cheese—
Beat to a frazzle—'twould the high gods please!

In reading, love, you're clever, that is sure;
But starving men can't live on lit'rature;
So if you love me, darling, shut that book—
Shut up your pretty mouth—Gee-whiz, girl, **COOK!**

The Jungle Trail

by Johnston McCulley

Author of "Two Bad Men," "Captain Fly-By-Night," "Wild Norene," etc., etc.

PROBABLY most of you remember "Captain Fly-By-Night" (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, May 27 to June 24, 1916), that thrilling story of California in the early days when Spanish rule held sway. In this present story Mr. McCulley takes us even further back into the dim, romantic, and adventurous past; back to the days of Vasco Nunez de Balboa, the hardy discoverer of the Pacific Ocean, and his gallant little band of tattered but unconquerable heroes; to Panama in 1513 at the very beginning of Spanish rule. Although shorter in length, it is in every way a worthy successor to the previous story; as rich in romance, adventure, and tense, gripping interest, and even richer in vivid color and charming characterization.—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE PLAZA AT ANTIGUA.

NOW the siesta hour was at an end and the shadows lengthened on eastern sides of the buildings, and in these shadows sat sundry *caballeros*, some in purple and silks and others out-at-elbows, but all brave-hearted gentlemen, ready for a jest or a joust, a guzzle of wine, or the flashing look of admiration from the dark eyes of some *señorita* newcome from Spain.

'Twas pleasant weather for this little town of Santa Maria de Antigua del Darien, on the west coast of the Gulf of Uraba, a blue arm of the ever-sparkling Caribbean. 'Twas a pleasant time also, with the new governor and his following, loose of purse and free with supplies, and not exacting of labor to such an extent as

the governor newly gone to Seville, his legs trembling in his boots because he knew King Ferdinand would propound queries for which he had no satisfactory answers.

Wherefore dice now rattled and men roared with laughter at each luckless cast, and the bottoms of many flagons of wine were seen quickly after those flagons had been filled. Here was a momentary joy in Antigua, frowned upon by certain *caballeros* who for years had followed Vasco Nunez de Balboa, and who now thought of their illustrious chief on the banks of the Rio Sabanas, where it flowed into the Great South Sea he had found, trying to build him some ships from rotten timbers that had been hauled through the jungle wilderness, to the cost of some thousands of native slaves.

These were the ones in rags, their uni-

forms in tatters, their metal body-casings tarnished—but their swords ever bright and easily slipped from scabbards. As they diced, they watched the gentlemen who recently had come with the governor and now flaunted their gorgeous raiment, ready to act if they saw a curling lip.

On the day when the ships arrived there had been divers combats because these gentlemen preferred to sneer at the tatters, forgetting for the time the blood flowing in the bodies the tatters clothed. And recently, because he had lost three good friends in this manner, the new governor had issued an edict anent brawling, promising all manner of evil consequences to any *caballero* who used his blade save for the profit of said governor and the glory of Spain.

Hence, a truce to a certain extent; yet the gentlemen of gorgeous raiment did not need force combat to demonstrate what they fondly believed to be their superiority. They paced the plaza with their noses in the air, expressing scorn for these others who had spent some years in the wilderness, and spoke among themselves in tones easily overheard of how a time away from civilization had caused some men to forget birth and breeding.

Yet always did they cease at the line of safety, for there were certain hot-headed ones who might forget the governor's edict in their anger; and the wilderness, moreover, had taught these ragged men courage and persistence and skill with a blade.

Now, one Señor Pasqual Garabito strode by arm-in-arm with a friend, depressing the hilt of his rapier with the one hand, while with the other he flicked a dainty handkerchief as he made gestures both graceful and elegant.

"'Tis the truth you speak," he said to his companion, but in a voice all near could hear. "'Tis no less than a shame to our governor that such ragamuffins be termed Spanish gentlemen. Ha! By the saints, it would be well if all them were sent with their ragged leader of a De Balboa to some far quarter from whence they'd ne'er return to plague us!"

One of the dicers arose from his place next the wall and stepped before the fastidious Garabito.

"Were that done, *caballero*," he replied, "no doubt the ragged De Balboa, as you term him, would discover yet another sea for the glory of Spain. I have yet to hear of any fair deed that will link the name of Pasqual Garabito with some famous page of history."

"Some of them, doubtless, are misfits in their own families," Garabito said, bending toward his friend and so ignoring the ragged dicer. "I take it many a proud father in Seville thanks the saints daily that an unworthy son remains across the seas."

"*Caballeros*, I call upon you to witness the truth of the words I spoke but yesterday," cried the other. "Did I not say that each ship from Spain fetched a worse cargo than the one before?"

"Well spoken, Rodrigo Ruiz; it is indeed true!" another dicer called.

"Of a truth, though," said this same Rodrigo Ruiz, "we fail to keep abreast the times. Here in the wilderness how can a man know the latest manner of twirling a handkerchief? 'Tis, I understand, to be done so at this day—"

He tore a tatter from his ragged garment and twirled it merrily in imitation of Pasqual Garabito's handkerchief, while the dicers roared with raucous laughter and the face of Garabito turned almost purple because of his fury. Yet he would not admit the presence of Rodrigo Ruiz on the earth.

"Could I prevail upon our worthy governor to renounce his edict," he explained to his friend, "it would be a great pleasure to teach some of these ragged ones good manners."

"A man must have knowledge before he may dispense it," observed Ruiz, to no one in particular. "Could I prevail upon our governor to remove said edict, it would be a great pleasure to rip some new garments with the point of my blade. Yet the governor will not; he must protect his friends."

"Careful, Rodrigo," another dicer warned in a low voice. "Nothing would please certain gentlemen more than to make a cry of high treason."

"I fear me for my good friend Bartolmeo Botello," Ruiz went on, his back now turned to Garabito. "He has issued certain orders, I understand, and may be forced to see them carried out, edict or no edict."

Now the face of Pasqual Garabito turned purple again, and this time he did not reply as if speaking to his friend, but grasped his companion by the arm and turned to one side, toward the shore of the gulf.

"Let us hasten, good friend, before I forget myself in my anger and disobey the governor's new regulation," he said. "This thing is not to be endured for long without action."

Ruiz roared with his companions, and as Garabito and his friend departed, he sat down again in the shadow of the wall and picked up the dice.

"What is that," one asked, "concerning Bartolmeo Botello?"

"You do not know?" Ruiz queried in surprise. "Hah! 'Twas but yesterday, and you should have seen it."

"Yesterday, *caballero*, I was in the midst of the wilderness seeking a native thief."

"I had forgotten. It was a royal happening. Know, then, that Bartolmeo Botello, my good friend and friend to Vasco Nunez de Balboa, arrived from the coast of the Great South Sea some ten days ago with certain reports."

"We all know that, *señor*."

"Allow me sufficient breath to tell this tale in my own manner. He arrived ten days ago, as I have said, a month after the last ships came from Spain; and on his first day here this Bartolmeo—may the saints prosper his suit!—meets the sparkling eyes of Señorita Inez Malpartida—"

"Whom may the saints preserve!" an admirer interrupted.

"Did I ever see infatuation at first glance, I saw it then," Ruiz continued.

"My friend Bartolmeo, being of a blood, immediately sought the *señorita's* father, and by some manner of means obtained an introduction to the lady. I doubt not that within two suns he had held speech with her outside the range of her duenna's ears. Ah, that Bartolmeo!"

"'Tis a fair romance, but what has it to do with this Pasqual Garabito?" the other asked.

"Softly, friend; allow me breath. This same Pasqual you have named long has been eager to claim favor of the lady, standing even in the good graces of her father. But once she had set eyes on Botello, she would have none of Garabito. Because of this Garabito urges his suit with fervor, to the distaste of the fair Inez and Bartolmeo Botello. You follow, *señor*?"

"Sí, and for too great a distance. Come to the point of the tale, good Ruiz, has it a point!"

"It has a myriad points. My friend Bartolmeo Botello, being a *caballero* true, would be courteous to a rival, of a certainty, and take no undue advantage. But it transpired that he had heard three days ago of a certain dusky native maid who had listened to the smooth speech of this Pasqual Garabito. It enraged my good friend that a man who would mistreat a native maid would, at the same time, pay court to a *señorita* of family and breeding. Wherefore he issued him his order."

"The order, man, before I slay you!"

"'Twas yesterday at this hour that Bartolmeo Botello met this Pasqual Garabito face to face in the shadow of the church yonder. In tones that could be heard all over the plaza, he informed this Pasqual Garabito that he knew of his little indiscretions, and that such a man should not presume on his birth and name to mingle with honorable folk. Pasqual Garabito, said my good friend, was at liberty to take the air of the plaza during the night or in the early morning hours, but should not presume to allow himself to be seen by honest folk in afternoon or evening—"

"Hah! Forbade him the plaza?"

"You have guessed it! Forbade him the plaza after the siesta hour, and promised dire consequences did this Pasqual Garabito dare disobey."

"And he has disobeyed!"

"He has. Had he not, he would have been termed craven, since all Antigua heard Botello's words."

"And to follow—"

"To follow there comes a row, else I mistake my good friend," Ruiz admitted. "And a row means the disfavor of the governor, and possibly punishment no Spanish gentleman should be forced to undergo. And were my good friend Botello in the midst of a dark plot, his chances for happiness could not be more ill. For there is yet another angle to the affair."

"This is news!" half a dozen cried.

"There is another fair maid of Spain who came by the recent ship. I refer to Señorita Carlotta Bonilla. It does not become me to speak of a young lady save in terms of courtesy and respect; but I must allow I like not the look in the Señorita Bonilla's face. Too much character shines forth from her dark eyes—character of the wrong sort."

"True," another said. "I would not be her enemy."

"This same Carlotta Bonilla has set eyes upon my friend Botello. 'Tis not discourtesy to tell it, since the *señorita* herself openly shows the state of her affections. Yet Botello, being infatuated with Señorita Inez, cannot observe the good qualities of Señorita Carlotta. The affair is now plain to you, comrades?"

"Not as yet," one answered.

"Why Carlotta loves Bartolmeo Botello, who loves Inez, who is sought by Pasqual Garabito. Put it not past the Señorita Carlotta to join forces with this Pasqual for the purpose of keeping Bartolmeo and Inez from each other's arms. Gladly would Garabito see Botello cold in death, and gladly would this Señorita Carlotta also, did he spurn her love, which most certainly he'll do! One must be in

Seville and at court to perceive romance, eh? Hah! I think it not!"

"One woman can cause trouble enough for any man. May the saints preserve the *caballero* who has two on his trail!" a *dicer* wailed. "Let us on with the game, and await the meeting of Botello with this fine Pasqual Garabito!"

Now a soft breeze came up from the gulf to stir the foliage and make more endurable the heat of the afternoon, and now the great doors of the governor's domicile were thrown open by native slaves, and more *caballeros*, gorgeously dressed, fared forth into the plaza, his excellency among them.

They fawned at his feet, these *caballeros*, for already they had discovered that here, far removed from Seville, the word of the governor carried much weight, and also they hoped to profit by their friendship with him, since there was yet gold to be torn from some of the Indian tribes.

Ladies came into the bright sunshine of the plaza, too, some on the arms of their husbands or fathers, the *señoritas* with their grim duennas trailing after them as a bad dream haunts a man.

The Señorita Inez Malpartida was the first of these—a dainty bit of femininity, with tiny feet twinkling beneath silken skirts and tiny hands grasping the folds of her mantilla, and black eyes that sparkled and dimples that played about a perfect chin, and black hair in a mass, a high comb glittering in the back of it. She smiled upon the *caballeros*, upon the servile natives, at the trees and the buildings and the gulf—smiled upon life in the concrete with the optimism of twenty years.

Her progress across the plaza toward the church was in the nature of a procession by royalty, for men ranged themselves on either sides in rows, and bowed until they almost touched the ground, rising quickly in the hope of getting a look direct from her flashing eyes.

"There is character for you," Ruiz whispered to a comrade. "Soft as silk she is, and dainty; but for the man she

loved she would endure hardships. You can read it in her eyes."

Those eyes were roaming over the plaza now, in a manner, for Señorita Inez did not dare betray too much anxiety, else her father, to whose arm she clung, might notice, or her duenna observe and give rebuke at a later hour. When she failed to see the broad shoulders of Bartolmeo Botello, her pretty lips formed in a pout for an instant, but soon she was smiling again.

The governor stopped before the church to chat with a fray, and the *caballeros* grouped around him and others in the procession drew up. Then the governor went back to his house with a few close friends, for he had letters to write to Spain; and the ladies held court in turn, while *caballeros* crowded forward.

Thus it happened that Inez Malpartida and Carlotta Bonilla came face to face under the eyes of their fathers, and were forced to observe the conventionalities of good breeding, though it pained them to keep back the angry words and prevent eyes flashing hatred. Though no speech had passed between them on the subject nearest their hearts, yet, woman-wise, both understood, and they would have avoided each other.

"A beautiful day, Señorita Malpartida," Carlotta observed, just the suspicion of a sneer upon her lips.

"Rarely beautiful, I thank you, *señorita*," Inez replied, bending her head graciously for an instant.

"Have you seen my new bauble of gold? Señor Garabito asked permission of my father to present it me as a souvenir of this land of wilderness."

Carlotta extended a shapely arm, upon which a bracelet dangled.

"'Tis rarely pretty," Inez said, neither too much admiration nor any disparagement in her voice.

"Señor Garabito, as you know, is a wealthy *caballero* to whom such a bauble is as nothing," Carlotta went on. "He purchases them by the score as gifts for his friends in Spain. You are fortunate, *señorita*, to have such a man for adorer."

"I care not to hear praises of Señor Garabito," Inez said. "And some men are courageous enough to go into the wilderness and gather such baubles for themselves. I believe I'd prize one obtained in that way vastly more. Any with money may purchase."

Now the fathers of the two *señoritas* had stepped aside to discuss certain matters of local politics, and the girls were alone, for their duennas were some distance away on the steps of the church, content to remain sitting there in the shade as long as no *caballero* approached their charges. Thus, masks could be dropped for a moment and words spoken that might have been held back had any other been close enough to overhear.

"What you say is true," Carlotta spoke softly, yet with a hard expression in her face. "I have commissioned a *caballero* to gather me such a bauble with his own hands. He has promised to take it from the very person of a native cacique, even the head cacique of the great wilderness."

"Indeed?" Inez purred.

"As a mark of devotion he will do it. Mayhap it will be necessary for me to hide it from my duenna's prying eyes; yet a girl always can protect a love-token. I hope to have it soon. I believe you have met the *caballero*. He is one of Vasco Nunez's men, Señor Bartolmeo Botello."

"I have met him," Inez admitted, smiling faintly.

"When he protested his devotion, at a time my duenna was asleep in her chair, I asked him for a token. Then it was he promised to get me the bauble, though he suffer wounds in the getting of it. Is it not rare to be loved by such a courageous man?"

"It will take as great courage, *señorita*, for you to face your father confessor after that statement," Inez suggested.

"You doubt it, then?"

"So much that I term it a falsehood deliberately given," Inez replied.

Black eyes flashed into black eyes. Carlotta Bonilla bit her pretty lips an instant, then held her head high, and would

have started away to rejoin her father, but the low voice of Inez Malpartida reached her ears again.

"Since you have shown me your bauble, allow me to show you mine," she purred. "You may observe it beneath my sleeve. It came from the breast of an Indian cacique, *señorita*, even the Great Cacique of the wilderness, and is set with gorgeous pearls."

"Indeed?"

"Señor Bartolmeo Botello gave it me. Mayhap it is the one he intended giving you, and changed his mind upon more mature reflection."

Señorita Carlotta Bonilla did turn away now and hurried to her father's side, begging him to take her straightaway to their house, walking so swiftly beside him (while he asked whether she had a sudden illness) that her duenna struggled to keep them in sight.

And Señorita Inez Malpartida, her heart singing a little song, smiled eloquently and turned to her own father, to cling to his arm and acknowledge the greetings of such *caballeros* as came forward, who were many.

CHAPTER II.

"ANOTHER TATTER."

SEÑORITA INEZ MALPARTIDA'S eyes continually roamed the plaza, and after a time her face flushed prettily, and she began talking swiftly about nothing much at all to cover her confusion. For now she observed the broad shoulders of Bartolmeo Botello as they were thrust through the crowd. Once she met his eyes, and then there were men between them again, and she turned to hold conversation with those nearest, knowing well Botello would approach after a time and greet her as if it were merely a pleasant duty, trying hard to hide the love in his eyes and hoping for a word with her alone, yet knowing he would not get it.

And then she saw Señor Garabito ap-

proaching from the opposite direction, for he had been walking along the shore with his friend, and a dark look came into her face. She knew this Garabito had been in the good graces of her father, and if he approached now, her father would see that she held conversation with him, while Bartolmeo Botello would be forced to wait in the distance. That would mean that Botello would have time for nothing more than the smallest greeting, for already the moment approached when her father would return her to the house.

But, to her wonder, her father turned and witnessed the approach of Garabito also, and calling Inez's duenna to her duty, stepped a few paces away to meet the man.

"A greeting to you, Señor Malpartida," Garabito called. "I am coming to pay my respects—"

"A moment," said Malpartida, in a stern voice. "It has come to my ears that certain things have been said concerning your relations with a native maid."

"Primarily, *señor*, the words were spoken by an out-at-elbows follower of the ragged De Balboa who likes me not. In the second instance, cannot a *caballero* amuse himself now and then with a likely looking bronze wench?"

"This is not Seville, *señor*, where intrigues are smiled at and kept under cover. This is the wilderness where but a few of us reside, and where a man may make no ulterior move without it becoming known. You have done me the honor to seek permission to pay your court to my daughter, *señor*, and I have looked upon your suit with some favor. But now that your name has been upon every tongue—"

"On the tongue of a ragged scapegrace!" Garabito interrupted, hotly.

"Yet men have heard his words and have failed to hear your denial of their truth, *señor*."

"Would you have me utter falsehood?" asked Garabito.

"I would have you so conduct yourself

that there would be no need of uttering falsehood."

"What are your wishes in the matter, Señor Malpartida?" Garabito asked, something of anger in his tone.

"This ragged scapegrace, as he is in your words, is a *caballero* of good birth, *señor*, even though he is not well clothed. And he has said—"

"Pardon, *señor*! Are you so blind that you do not see this Señor Botello looks with favor upon your fair daughter and so seeks to malign me?"

"He mentioned no lady's name, *señor*, as I regret you have done. He said, I understand, that you were to refrain from approaching respectable folk."

"And you subscribe to that sentiment, *señor*?"

"Only in so far as my own family is concerned, *caballero*. Allow me to suggest that you drop this Indian maid—give her gold and send her away—"

"Gold? She has more than I have!"

"Anything to get her away. Conduct yourself for a time as a pattern of virtue. When this matter has been forgotten it will be time for you to consider my daughter again."

"And, in the mean time, this ragged Señor Botello will pay his court, eh?"

"*Señor*!" Old Malpartida's voice trembled with anger as he spoke the word, and for an instant he touched the hilt of his rapier, which he wore as a matter of style rather than for service; for it had been some years since Señor Malpartida had drawn blade in offense or to repel attack.

"Your pardon!" Garabito was quick to say. "I am angered beyond proper speech, goaded into forgetting my breeding by this follower of De Balboa who has seen fit to attack me with his sneers. Did not our governor forbid, I'd run blade through the lying braggart!"

Several *caballeros* heard that statement, for Garabito had raised his voice. Rodrigo Ruiz heard it, and he half drew his blade from its scabbard to defend the reputation of his friend, but a comrade

grasped him by the arm and whispered two things—that the governor's edict was still in force, and that Bartolmeo Botello desired to handle his own quarrels.

Moreover, Botello himself heard it, even as he stepped before Señorita Inez and bowed his best and wished her an excellent day; his face did not change color and his hand did not touch the hilt of his weapon; only by a quick narrowing of the eyes did he show that he had observed the words and the speaker.

So, when old Malpartida turned his back on Señor Garabito and faced his daughter again, it was a smiling and courteous Botello who spoke to him, bowed low, and stepped back. And Malpartida, his daughter clinging to his arm and wishing she dared look back, and with the duenna tripping along behind, walked across the plaza toward the governor's house, his head held high, like the grandee he was in reality.

Botello turned aside with Ruiz, not once looking in Garabito's direction, for there remained some ladies in the plaza, and it was not the proper time to settle differences or pick a quarrel. Near one end of the church wall they stood to watch men flinging the dice, Botello laughing as loud as any at the mishaps of the unlucky ones.

"Did you not hear?" Ruiz asked, under his breath.

"I heard, my friend," Botello answered.

"With what result?"

"We shall see that presently."

"It is a pretty pass, Bartolmeo. Here he has dared defy you, and you cannot call him to account for it without defying the governor," Ruiz said.

"Perchance he thought of that when he dared show himself in the plaza."

"Moreover, he is one of his excellency's closest friends. To quarrel with him may go hard with you."

"Yet there must be some justice, even in such a governor as this we have. This is the year fifteen hundred and fifteen, my friend, an enlightened age."

"I pick no quarrel with the age, Bartolmeo. But there be men living in it—"

"Who should cease to live—I agree with you!"

"You'd not dare—"

"The pretty *caballero* has gone too far, I vow. Lying braggart, eh? By the saints—"

"But, if you run him through—"

"It remains to be seen what may happen, good Rodrigo. Let us not concern ourselves with it until after all the ladies have left the plaza."

Rodrigo Ruiz glanced around, and then plucked quickly at his friend's tattered sleeve.

"The cowardly knave has taken advantage of that, also," he said. "First, he believes himself safe because of his excellency's edict, and now he knows you will start no quarrel while there are ladies near. So he swaggers across the plaza toward the governor's house, timing himself to arrive as the last of the ladies are leaving the plaza. He can say he defied you and suffered no harm, not even a word!"

"Hah!" Botello roared, and whirled in turn. Ruiz, he saw, had spoken truth. Garabito was swaggering across the plaza, affecting nonchalance, and he would reach the doors of the governor's house as the last of the *señores* and *señoritas* disappeared.

Now Botello sprang forward and walked with great strides to intercept his foe, and men ceased throwing the dice to watch, and from all quarters *caballeros* sauntered forward, anticipating a sensation and a break in the monotony of Antigua.

"A moment, Señor Garabito!" Botello called.

Garabito looked over his shoulder, slackened his stride, stopped with his hand on the arm of his friend, for such a loud summons could not be ignored unless a charge of cowardice stood.

"Well, *señor*?" he asked, his lip curling in a sneer, and still twirling the silk handkerchief.

"I apprehend you, *señor*," Botello said, in a smooth voice, "to change my orders somewhat. Yesterday I told you to remain away from the plaza at any hour when decent folk were abroad. Now I must request that you remain in it, at least until the ladyfolk have entered their houses."

"Indeed, *señor*? And wherefore?"

"That it will not be necessary for me to call you to account in the presence of gentle nerves that cannot endure a quarrel. Also to prove to these *caballeros* and myself that you are not purposely quitting the plaza too quickly to avoid any consequences that may be coming to you."

"You question my courage, *señor*?" Garabito thundered.

"I do not admit, *señor*, that you have any to question."

"This is not to be endured!"

"Yet, perforce, you endure it!"

"'Tis beneath my dignity as a *caballero* and a friend of His Majesty, Ferdinand—whom God preserve—to exchange words with such as you. In Seville—"

"'Tis not Seville, *señor*, but Antigua, that is cursed with your presence at this time. Were it not that I feel called upon to protect honest folk, it would be beneath my dignity to address you."

"Dignity—in rags?" Garabito scoffed.

"*Sí, señor!* Dignity in rags! There you may mark the true *caballero*, when his dignity is to be observed through his rags—not that I seek to praise myself, but to damn you more! I count it dignity, *señor*, to have followed the intrepid De Balboa across the jungle to the Great South Sea, which, I believe, you never have set your eyes upon. My tatters were gained in the service of Spain, *señor*, and that same king whom you but now wished God to preserve. What hard spots are on my hands came from wielding blade, perhaps, and not from twirling a handkerchief!"

"You are modest concerning yourself!" Garabito observed.

"There was a method in it, *señor*.

Self praise is repugnant to me, but I could think of no other subject quickly. My oratory, you will observe, has served to hold you here until the last of the ladies are gone. If you look about, you will see that the plaza is free of femininity now. My object has been served."

Garabito snarled as a rapid glance around the plaza proved the truth of Botello's words.

"Now—to business, *señor!*" Botello went on. "Yesterday I told you not to show your face on the plaza at this hour. You have seen fit to disobey my orders."

"Where get you authority to issue such orders, *señor?* Are you governor, by any chance?"

"The saints forbid! I have useful work to do."

"Is this treason?"

"Let us not change the subject," Botello persisted. "I say you disobeyed my orders."

There was silence then for a moment, while Garabito sputtered in his sudden burst of rage, for he could restrain himself no longer before this man.

"Were it not for his excellency's edict, I'd run you through for the fool you are!" he exclaimed.

"His excellency's edict serves to protect his excellency's friends, I observe. I never yet have been run through, *señor*; it would be a new experience."

"Boaster!"

"Merely another score to settle—that! Why did you disobey my orders?"

"I failed to see your authority to issue them," Garabito said. "And since I have disobeyed what you please to term your orders, what is your pleasure in the matter?"

"For disobeying, a tweak of the nose is enough to show how I regard you, *señor!*"

Even as he spoke, Botello reached forward quickly and grasped Pasqual Garabito's prominent nose between his strong fingers. He tweaked. Garabito's head was jerked forward and tears sprang into his eyes. He shrieked his rage as Bo-

tello released him and he fell backward, and again his hand went to the hilt of his rapier. Botello stood before him, arms folded across his breast, waiting and ready.

"For that I'll slay you as I would a mad dog!" Garabito roared. "Were I not a loyal man and follower of the laws, I'd do it at the present moment. I shall beseech the governor this night to remove his edict for a day, that I may cross blades with you—though I lower myself to do it."

"You'll be lowered properly if you attempt it!" Rodrigo Ruiz exclaimed, laughing loudly. "Be lowered even to the ground and stretched there while priests mumble!"

"I cannot endure such rabble!" Garabito exclaimed to his friend. "And this fellow—this Botello—to push a quarrel in furtherance of his suit for a lady—"

"Hah!" Botello roared, springing forward again. "No lady has been mentioned save by your lips. And those same lips of yours are too foul, *señor!*"

"When his excellency removes his edict!" Garabito promised; and he whirled on one heel to continue across the plaza.

"A moment, *señor!*" Botello called. "The tweak on the nose was for disregarding my orders. There is another score."

"Indeed, *señor?*"

"But, yes! Sometime since, in conversation with another man, you termed me a lying braggart; did you not?"

"Eavesdropping, eh, *señor?*"

"Your words were loud enough for half the jungle to hear. You said it—did you not?"

"If I did—"

"It would be an insult to De Balboa, my leader, to let such a statement pass without resentment, *señor*. It were time you admitted to all here that when you spoke you were beside yourself with anger and had small regard for the truth."

"You scarcely can expect such a thing, *señor!*" Garabito said, sneering again.

"Then suppose, *caballero*, that you let your friend hold that dainty handkerchief of yours, and draw blade."

Now Rodrigo Ruiz hurried forward and plucked at Botello's sleeve, whispering what it would mean to urge a quarrel; and for an instant Botello turned his head to tell his friend to go about his own business. In that instant, Garabito whipped out his rapier and lunged forward, a foul stroke, while half a score *caballeros* cried out their warnings to Botello.

Botello whirled in time to dodge the darting weapon, though it ripped through his clothing.

"Another tatter, eh?" he cried, drawing blade in turn.

He knocked Garabito's sword arm aside, and struck his foe across the cheek with the flat of his hand.

"That for a man of your stamp!" he cried. "As foul with blade as you are with speech and in mind and actions, eh? 'Tis a disgrace to our king if you draw such sword in his cause. On guard, *señor*! You fight for life now!"

Garabito knew it! And now that the issue was at hand, he entered into the combat with zeal, for Garabito was no mean swordsman. Other men sprang back to give them ample room, and because they feared interruption there was no voice, no sound save that of the ringing blades, the shuffling of feet on the hard-baked earth, and the heavy breathing of the combatants.

Thus for the space of five minutes without advantage to either, and then Botello took a step forward and began to force the fighting, his blade darting in and out like the tongue of a snake. Garabito gave ground, for he was growing weak already, and his wrist was tiring, and he was haunted by the knowing smile of Botello that expressed how this combat was to end.

"Too much high living, *señor*!" Botello taunted. "Already your wind is gone! Your wrist tires! Hah! I almost reached you then! Say your prayers,

señor, while yet there is time—but say them swiftly if you would have them done before your eyes glaze. Hah!"

His blade ripped through Garabito's sleeve, and Garabito gave ground again. The men were cheering the combat now, for it was a sight in the presence of which they could not keep silent. They did not notice that Garabito's friend had darted away.

And now he returned, and with him came the governor's lieutenant and two of the guard; and they charged across the plaza, shrieking cries to the combatants to stop in the name of his excellency and the king.

Botello's eyes narrowed and the smile left his face. He attacked furiously, for he would have an end of this affair before interruption came. Foot by foot Garabito was forced to retreat, doing his best to put up what defense he could, knowing that relief was near. Once more Botello's blade slashed at his arm, and this time caused a scratch that brought blood to the surface.

Another furious drive, and Garabito all but turned to flee. But his excellency's lieutenant was at hand now, and his drawn sword crashed against those of the combatants and attempted to hold them up.

But Botello could not be stopped that easily now. He knocked the lieutenant's blade aside, and again he lunged forward, determined to make an end of it. The two guards rushed in; Botello dodged them both and was after his adversary again.

"*Caballeros*! I command your assistance here—in the king's name!" the lieutenant called.

It was treason to refuse to obey, yet some of the *caballeros* hesitated. But Botello had no intention of bringing trouble to his friends. He stepped back as Garabito withdrew behind one of the soldiers, and allowed the lieutenant to take his sword from his hand.

"Another time, *Señor Garabito*!" he called.

"At your pleasure, *señor!*" the answer came.

But it came in breathless gasps.

CHAPTER III.

THE STOCKADE.

HIS excellency's lieutenant, knowing upon which side his maize cakes were greased, in a manner of speaking, made no effort to detain Señor Pasqual Garabito nor to take from him his disgraced sword; but allowed that fine *caballero* to flick the dust from his sleeves, right his disarranged attire, sheathe his blade, and stalk across the plaza with his back to the sneers and remarks of scorn that were hurled after him.

Bartolmeo Botello, knowing it would avail naught, entered no protest to this proceeding; moreover, he had anxieties of his own, for he found himself in perilous straits. Not only had he broken the governor's new law, but also he had broken the skin on the right arm of the governor's near friend, a transgression far more dangerous.

He could expect no mercy, therefore, when hailed before his excellency, yet he determined to enter what defense he could, trusting to the good fortune that generally followed him to extricate him from his present entanglement.

There were *caballeros* outspoken at this state of affair, but the lieutenant's glowering looks were enough to silence their tongues for the time being, since none who had followed De Balboa ranked high with the new governor, and all such were fair quarry for his thrusts.

Only when the officer would have bound Botello's hands behind his back was there loud protest, so loud that the lieutenant desisted, for it was traveling a long way toward perdition to so outrage one of good blood before a trial. Botello was a surrendered prisoner and would attempt no escape before his hearing.

He walked across the plaza slowly be-

tween the two soldiers, the lieutenant some paces in advance, and a throng of *caballeros* and natives bringing up the rear. A fray, knowing the story of the native girl, gave Botello a passing blessing with his eyes, and other men spoke their sympathy and allegiance without the use of words. Pasqual Garabito by this time had entered the residence of the governor like an honored guest, to be first at executive ears with the story.

Before his excellency's house the lieutenant hesitated, and so did the crowd, knowing that here the officer must make a decision; for one way led into the house and the other to the stockade with a small adobe hut inside it—a sort of temporary prison where Indians were housed when they had broken the laws.

The *caballeros* crowded close, and the lieutenant looked into their faces, then hammered at the door of the governor's residence with the hilt of his sword until a slave threw it open. He conducted his prisoner inside and left him just within the door, the two guards with him, while he went ahead to report.

Outside, the crowd waited silently yet with some impatience, scarcely knowing what to anticipate. Inside, Bartolmeo Botello stood against the wall with his arms folded across his breast, scorning to hold conversation with the two soldiers, who regarded him wrathfully since they were the new governor's men and had not seen much experience in the wilderness.

Then the lieutenant returned, two more guards with him.

"Conduct him to the stockade and guard him well," he ordered. "He will have his hearing within two hours, by his excellency's order. It will be plenty time enough then. His excellency dines now and cannot be disturbed."

Botello's face went white for an instant, and then he turned toward the door without a word, and it was thrown open, and he marched out in the midst of the guards.

"Fall back, *caballeros!* Fall back!" the lieutenant ordered.

"What do you with him?" demanded a voice from the throng; but the officer refused an answer.

The guards turned to the right with their prisoner, and at this the mutterings increased, for to the right was the stockade. Rodrigo Ruiz, from the midst of the crowd, made a sign, but Botello shook his head negatively, not desiring an attempt at rescue at this time.

The gate of the stockade was reached, and one of the guards stepped forward with thongs and indicated that Botello was to place his hands behind his back. "Try it, dog!" Botello exclaimed; and the guard fell back.

"Prisoner," the lieutenant asked, "will you give me your word of honor as a *caballero* that you will make no attempt to escape before being fetched before his excellency for trial?"

"You could have had that, *señor*, without putting me in the stockade," Botello replied.

"It is his excellency's orders."

"I understand, *señor*. You but do as you are told. You have my word. I am as interested in waiting for this trial as any man in all Antigua."

The heavy gates closed behind him, and Botella stretched his great arms and walked slowly around the interior of the stockade while sundry *caballeros* placed their eyes to knot-holes and observed him, and wondered much at his manner and what he would attempt. For those knowing Bartolmeo Botello anticipated that he surely would attempt something.

"Depart, good friends!" he called. "You only annoy my guards, and can be of no service to me at the present moment."

"Only say the word—" Ruiz cried.

"Careful, my friend, else you get into trouble along with me. The stockade is large enough to accommodate more men. Let us await the governor's trial of us. 'Tis to be a model of justice-rendering, I doubt not!"

He walked around the tiny adobe shack and to the other side of the stock-

ade, away from those who watched, aware that on the outside a guard trailed him; and after a time he sat on a rock at the side of the adobe and looked at the sinking sun.

Now over the jungle's head the western sky was bathed in red and orange, and Botello thought of De Balboa and his comrades on the shore of the Great South Sea, and would have wished to be with them save for the presence here in Antigua of a black-eyed *señorita* who had exchanged vows of love with him while her duenna nodded.

It had worried Botello a bit that he had not gone to her father and asked permission to pay his court, as a *caballero* should, but he knew the answer he would have received, and, in addition, love makes men and maids do strange things. For both these reasons, too, had Señorita Inez spoken behind her duenna's back, and for none other, for the Señorita Inez Malpartida was a proper young person carefully reared, yet strong enough to answer the urgent and true call of her heart when it came.

So Botello watched the orange and red in the sky and wished that he was in De Balboa's camp and Inez, his bride, with him, that being the fairest wish he could devise; for in De Balboa's camp, he knew, he would be safe from his excellency, the governor, since De Balboa had a manner of protecting his loyal men and true.

Yet here he was in his excellency's stockade, due soon for trial, with the scales of justice already balanced against him through favoritism. He knew he had broken the law and so was entitled to punishment, yet he felt that his cause had been just, and that to punish him the governor also must punish Pasqual Garabito, else show himself an unjust man.

The orange and red disappeared in a flash, even as chalk is wiped from a slate with a sponge, and the deep dusk came. A moment that remained, while the soldiers lighted a huge torch at the

gates, and lights appeared in the buildings around the plaza, and the breeze freshened; and then it was deep tropical night without moon—so deep that it seemed to smother the earth and hush the noises of the jungle and soften the dashing of the surf against the shore.

Botello heard a guard pass along the stockade in front of him, and wondered whether the governor had finished his evening meal. And then he heard a hiss, so low that it scarcely reached his ears and of such nature that any other man would have ignored it. But Botello, knowing what it meant, arose and walked slowly toward the fence of the stockade, making no noise with his feet.

"Master—here!" the hiss came again.

Botello followed the sound of it and finally reached the fence. He knew there was a knot-hole there, but he could not locate it in the dark.

"*Sí*," he whispered.

"It is Tarama, master. I have heard how the governor had you locked up. As soon as it grew dark I came. I have here a rope made from vines, which I'll throw over the fence, master. You may fasten an end of it there and draw yourself up. If the guard comes near, I'll give warning."

"Thanks, Tarama, good native! But your master has no wish to escape at this time."

"They may punish you, *señor*—you, one of the great De Balboa's men."

"You do not quite understand, Tarama. I have given my word as a *caballero* to remain here until called forth for trial. Would you have me a perjurer?"

"Not so, master."

"Thanks, then, for your intentions. Watch well, Tarama, for I may have need of your services later—mayhap immediately after they have tried me."

"I understand, master; I'll be near always."

The hissing ceased; Botello heard not the slightest sound on the other side of the high fence, yet he knew that even

by now Tarama was far from the stockade, moving like a shadow into the jungle, to reappear on the opposite side of the plaza.

Botello smiled to think of the eagerness with which this Tarama had sought to free him. It restored a part of his former belief in human nature. Tarama was a native, first had been a slave to Botello and later a companion on tramps through the wild jungle. Botello and a fray with De Balboa's party had taught him proper speech and a few things regarding religion; and now this Tarama followed his master like a hound, ready always to serve him for the pure joy of doing service—which is by far the best sort of service after all.

Now Botello walked back to the rock against the adobe, and sat down again, looking occasionally toward the gate and wondering how long it would be before the governor sent for him. Minutes passed and hunger gnawed at him, for he had eaten nothing since morning and wanted meat; and then he heard another call from the stockade fence, this time in the low sibilant tones of a woman.

"Señor Botello! Señor Botello!"

He walked swiftly to the fence again, careful to make no noise, and when he reached it he held breath for a moment to be sure the guard was not approaching. There was no sound of steps, and he spoke:

"*Si?*"

"I have risked maidenly modesty, *señor*, to approach you in this manner, slipping from the house like some light woman—hence you may well appreciate my effort."

"It is appreciated, *señorita*."

"There may be a chance of escape for you. No doubt it may be arranged."

"Softly, *señorita*—the guard—"

"Is bribed, and will not interrupt, *señor*."

"It were too much, *señorita*, for you to do that. The risk is too great. Men may use their tongues to mouth your name. Ah, it is too much!"

"Then you think of that, *señor*? You surely have some feeling for me then. You appreciate what I have risked to hold speech with you here and in this manner."

"I am not worth it, *señorita*!"

"I choose to think differently. I fear you have affronted our governor greatly by your attack on his friend. He may be inclined to make use of harsh measures. Were you freed of all blame, yet banished to De Balboa's camp, would you accept the sentence, if—if—I went with you—as bride?"

"*Señorita*!" he whispered hoarsely. "Yet that cannot be—"

"Ah, *señor*, there are more ways than one of arranging things. Perchance if the governor ordered it—"

"He would not. There is your father."

"Who will do as the governor orders, *señor*, in all things."

"I cannot see how it may be done."

"Do you wish it possible, *señor*?"

"By the saints! So much true happiness for such an unworthy man—"

"You wish it much?"

"With my whole heart, *señorita*."

"You will give me love that never will turn cold?"

"I safely can promise that, *señorita*."

"And will you strive to carve your name on page of history even as has your leader?"

"With my last strength, for your sake, loved one! But how can you accomplish such a thing? I will not have you place yourself in a position where men will think ill of you. You have risked much to speak to me in this way."

"Leave the method all to me, *señor*. Be not surprised at anything you may hear at your trial. Every move I make shall be made with care and regard for your good name."

"Ah, *señorita*!" he whispered. "Could I but see your face now, touch your hands, your lips. Could I but hear your voice free and fair without the guise of whisperings!"

"Soon, *señor*—soon! But give me your honorable word as to this affair, *señor*. I may not tarry here longer."

"Do you need my good word that I'll stand by such a bargain? I am receiving the great favor, not granting it. Ah, Inez, beloved—"

A gasp stopped him. Silence for a moment, then the whispering again, but in a new tone.

"Inez, say you? I am no Inez, *señor*! Would the fair Inez you mention risk her reputation and her good name to approach you like this?"

"I—I did not recognize your voice—"

"Am I so sure of that, *señor*? Did you not, rather, let me go on with my talk, offer myself to you like some bronze native girl, cheapen me—?"

"*Señorita*! Would I treat any woman so?"

"Inez! So it was Inez you were promising to love and cherish, with whom you were willing to live in De Balboa's camp on the shore of the Great South Sea! I have loved you, *Señor Botello*, enough to forget my breeding and lower myself by this indiscretion. But I can hate as well as love, *señor*! No man relishes Carlotta Bonilla as an enemy!"

"*Señorita*! You?"

"I can make arrangements one way as well as another, *señor*—to punish as well as to save!"

"I have done nothing, *señorita*, to merit your love. I have had no thought of you."

"This is an insult added!"

"Forget this scene, *señorita*, as I will forget it. My knowledge of your indiscretion will not be spread. Return to your father's dwelling, I beg of you, and attempt no more night affairs of this sort. Let the proper man seek you out—"

"Now you would give me rules of conduct—*duenna*!" she cried.

She hissed the last word, but Botello had no time to search for insult in it. He was cursing himself for having be-

trayed his love without ascertaining his visitor's identity first.

He had no delusions regarding Carlotta Bonilla, though he spoke her fairly. It was common knowledge that her character was not of the best, though she was of a proud family. Here in the New World her father had fallen on evil days in an attempt to repair his shattered fortunes. It was whispered that the price of his present affluence and standing with the governor was his daughter's favor. In time, his purse full, he would go back to Seville, and by virtue of that full purse see his daughter wedded to a courtier. In the mean time, his excellency saw to it that Bonilla and his daughter were not snubbed by other folk, though they were treated distantly.

That was what Carlotta had meant, perhaps, by her intimation of influence. The governor would pardon Botella's transgression and send him away, to exile in De Balboa's camp, if she asked it. He would marry Botello to his cast-off, glad to be rid of her, of them both. Perhaps already she had arranged it. That was another score to settle with the governor.

And now that she had failed to gain his consent, would she not turn against him? Would not her influence with the governor obtain for him a severe sentence?

Had he seen her now, he would not have doubted it. Like a shadow, Señorita Carlotta Bonilla crept to the jungle's edge, where an Indian girl awaited her; and they hurried behind the buildings and so around the plaza and to the rear of the governor's house, where she had been dining that evening with her father.

Through a rear door they crept, and to the room set apart for the use of Señorita Carlotta, and there she whispered a message in the ear of the Indian maid and sent her away.

She sat beside the open window then, looking out into the black night and

waiting for the native girl to do her errand. Her breasts were rising and falling rapidly as she breathed in anger, and she bit her lower lip until the blood came, and clenched her two tiny fists until the nails cut into the palms.

Minutes passed, and a shape approached outside the window, to come to a stop beneath it.

"Señor," she whispered.

"Señorita?"

"The girl sent you?"

"Sí, señorita. In what manner may I serve you?"

"There is need of little speech between us, Señor Garabito. You desire a certain woman who has eyes for another man. I have desired a certain man who has eyes only for that other woman."

"Have desired, señorita?"

"You speak correctly, señor. We'll not go into details, please. Just let me say that you can hate him no more than I do at this moment. You have influence with his excellency. See stern justice given the man in the stockade, señor, and accept my thanks. Were I able to get the governor's ear I would forget myself enough to ask it in person. No doubt his excellency would grant my request as a courtesy to his friend, my father."

It was well for Señor Garabito that she could not see the smile that flashed across his face then.

"I believe it may be arranged, señorita," he said.

"Adios, señor!"

"Adios!"

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE GOVERNOR'S HOUSE.

GARABITO slipped away through the darkness, and still he smiled, and he was smiling when he reached the front doors of the governor's house; but he changed the expression of his countenance there to express rage and hatred.

Before the doors groups of *caballeros* had gathered, and Garabito passed through their midst in a silence that was more of a rebuke than any words could have been; for all in Antigua knew by this time of the foul lunge he had made.

From the stockade came Botello in charge of the lieutenant and four guards. Garabito hurried inside the house and to the big council chamber, where the governor transacted all business of an official nature, and there he got his excellency's ear for a time, and afterward sat down to one side to wait.

Botello and the guards reached the doors. Exclamations greeted the prisoner, some expressive of hope, others directed against the man who had accused him. He waved a hand toward them to show that he had not been bound, and passed inside, and the crowd rushed forward to enter at his heels.

But there they were balked, for the lieutenant threw up a hand for silence, and as the guards started to shut the heavy doors he faced the throng.

"This is not to be a public hearing, *señores!*" he said. And then the doors were closed before him, and they heard the heavy bars drop into place.

Not a public hearing! They knew what that meant. Bartolmeo Botello was to have a sample of his excellency's despotism, without a chance to offer witnesses in his own behalf, when half a hundred men were ready to swear that Garabito had drawn blade first and made a foul stroke.

In the plaza they grouped before the door of the governor's house and spoke in low tones, sure that the guards were not near enough to overhear and so charge treason afterward. Things were far from right in Antigua, said they, when Ferdinand's representative forgot justice and remembered only his friends.

Botello had heard the lieutenant's words and they conveyed the proper meaning to him. But he only held his head higher and his shoulders straighter,

and walked ahead along the corridor, to turn off presently into the council room.

It was a monster, that room, some hundred feet long by fifty wide, a big apartment in a big house that sprawled over the ground like a great spider, with its many wings and large patio. Slaves had erected it under the whips of cruel overseers, for the present governor had deemed the old executive mansion not fine enough.

At one end of the room was a raised platform, in the center of which stood a big chair carved from solid rock by slaves, and now covered with silk robes. Here sat his excellency, a squat man of little dignity, scowling in an effort to borrow for the moment the dignity he knew he lacked.

Garabito sat on one side; half a score elderly gentlemen stood around, among them Señor Bonilla and Señor Malpartida—the latter also having dined that evening at the governor's house with his daughter.

It was a stage setting for the hearing of a man who had plotted against the life of royalty itself, and Botello knew he could expect no justice or mercy here, but only could offer what defense came to his mind and have it counted as naïveté.

"Bartolmeo Botello, stand forth!" the clerk intoned; and Botello advanced to the platform and saluted the governor gravely.

His excellency looked down at the culprit, assuming a stern expression.

"You are Bartolmeo Botello?" he asked.

"Sí!" came the answer. "Bartolmeo Botello, your excellency, *caballero* of Spain and loyal subject of King Ferdinand—whom may God preserve."

"You are loud in your loyalty now, eh? Know then, Señor Botello, that I am his majesty's accredited representative here in Antigua and in all Darien, and when I speak it is as if his majesty spoke through my lips."

"I never have denied it, *señor.*"

"Some time since I issued an order that there was to be no more brawling or dueling. You knew of this?"

"Sí, señor."

"Yet to-day you violated that order."

"I have witnesses, your excellency, in my behalf."

"Witnesses are not necessary just now, señor. Answer my question. Did you violate that order?"

"I am here for justice, your excellency," Botello evaded. "I stand on my rights."

"Has a man rights remaining to him when he opposes constituted authority?"

"There are such things as extenuating circumstances, your excellency."

"For instance—"

"I quarreled with one Pasqual Garabito. When my head was turned, he drew blade and made a foul lunge at me. Could I do less than defend myself after that?"

"I scarcely can credit Pasqual Garabito with doing anything so base," the governor said.

"Yet there are ample witnesses, if your excellency chooses to call for them."

"Nor could I credit your witnesses, I fear me. They are mostly De Balboa's men, are they not?"

"They are, señor—brave gentlemen who have been tried and found true."

"I care not to hear eulogies of De Balboa's ruffians!"

"Señor!" Botello cried, nor cared that it was the governor he addressed in this fashion. "These ruffians, as you term them, are gentlemen of Spain, and if they are out at elbows at this time it is because their sovereign has not seen fit to reward them when they merit reward."

"How is this? You speak treason?"

"I speak no treason! The reason for his majesty's neglect is no fault of his majesty's. It is rather because his majesty's representatives have not seen fit to report truthfully regarding matters here in Antigua."

"You charge that I have been untruthful, señor?" the governor demanded.

"I am not here to make charges, but to defend myself against them, señor. If a boot pinches the foot of a man, then he should not wear it."

"By the saints! This impudence passes endurance! You have no defense to make regarding this charge, then?"

"When your excellency calls my witnesses."

"It is unnecessary, señor. I have heard already the truth of the matter. Did you not order Pasqual Garabito to remain away from the plaza during certain hours?"

"I did, señor."

"By what authority do you issue orders here in Antigua?"

"By the authority of a Spanish gentleman who does not wish to see a scape-grace mingle with respectable folk, señor."

Garabito snarled at that, and would have left his chair to make reply, but the governor signed for him to remain quiet.

"Señor Botello, you are free with your accusations of a gentleman of my good acquaintance," he said. "I will not insult him by asking that he defend himself against these accusations."

"He has no defense, your excellency! There is a certain native girl who may be called—"

"Silence!" the governor cried. "I will hear no more. I have said brawls must cease and order be preserved. Am I to have my life made miserable by De Balboa's swaggering fellows?"

"Send me back to De Balboa, your excellency! I can ask nothing better than that. The air on the shore of the Great South Sea is untainted compared to that I find here!"

"Again—silence! I have determined to make an example of you, caballero. I find it necessary. When gentlemen of Spain forget their blood and breeding and turn ruffians, they must be brought to account. My sentence—"

He stopped; an angry expression flashed into his face; he looked the length of the great room, and all turned swiftly

to see Señorita Inez Malpartida walking toward them.

Her head was held high and her step was proud, but neither smiles nor dimples showed in her face. She appeared a young person with a purpose, and all wondered what it was except Botello, who guessed and wished there was a chance to dissuade her. But he had no chance here and now.

"Your pardon, *señorita*," the governor said, trying to smile, and before her father could find words to address her, "but this is a private meeting having to do with the proper government of Darien."

She had reached the foot of the platform by now, yet there was no confusion in her face when she heard the governor's words. Inez Malpartida had not unwittingly stumbled into a private meeting.

Now her father started toward her to conduct her from the room, and ready to apologize for her intrusion, but she waved him aside.

"Your excellency, I have come to beg a favor," she said. "You know my father and my family, my blood, and how I have been reared; you can appreciate, then, the true meaning of all I do now. Often there comes a time in the life of a woman when what she holds dearest is at stake, and then she may put breeding aside and fight for her life's happiness."

"I beg of you, *señorita*—" the governor began.

"A moment, your excellency—and you, my father! I have been listening at the farthest doorway, and am not ashamed to say it. Earlier this evening I accidentally overheard some conversation, your excellency, and I know the cruel and unjust thing you would do, and believe that you would not after mature reflection. You already have arranged to put upon this man who stands accused indignities no *caballero* could endure and live. He has done well, instead of ill—"

"*Señorita*!" the governor cried angrily; and then—"What interest can you have in this Señor Botello?"

"Such interest as a woman may have who loves him dearly, your excellency."

"Girl!" old Malpartida cried now, despite the governor's frown. "Have you no shame? Do you disgrace your noble name and lineage? Love this man? He has not even asked to pay his court—"

"Because permission would have been denied him, my father. When a man and woman love truly they think naught of others. We have spoken, our hands have touched—it is enough! My heart and soul are his if he asks them. I know you think ill of me for acting thus, but I have done no evil, thought no evil. If I break accepted rules of conduct, what matters it when love is at stake?"

"In truth, *señorita*—" the governor began again.

She interrupted him once more and rushed on, and Botello, who would have spoken and tried to save her in some measure, found himself unable to do so.

"This Pasqual Garabito would have courted me, having my father's permission," she said. "Señor Botello became aware of wrongs Pasqual Garabito had done. I heard it to-day from a duenna who did not know I listened. To protect me from associating with such a man even for an instant, Señor Botello ordered Pasqual Garabito to remain away from the plaza. He should be rewarded for that, not condemned, else your excellency condones such things as this Pasqual Garabito has done."

"A false statement—" Garabito began.

"It is no false statement, *señor*—the look in your face proclaims it truth! And this afternoon, your excellency, when Señor Botello called him to account, Señor Garabito attacked him foully. There are half a hundred witnesses to it, *señor*. You would not call them, wherefore I am here speaking in place of them. Could Señor Botello do less than defend himself when foully attacked? I knew also that Señor Botello would not speak entirely in his defense, not wishing to voice my name before you in this place, and so I made bold to speak for him."

"And have put yourself on a common level!" old Malpartida cried. "By the saints! What crime have I committed that such a daughter should be mine?"

"Am I less a good woman, my father, because I speak the truth?" she asked.

"To defend a man openly—"

"A *caballero* of Spain, of good blood, my father, with whom I have exchanged vows of love. And now, your excellency, I ask you to set Señor Botello free. We will be wedded and will cross through the jungle wilderness to the shore of the Great South Sea. There we can live our lives, and you'll not have to endure our presence. I beg it of you, your excellency—it is not much for you to grant, but to us it will be as everything. Would you, by hesitating, humiliate me more than I have humiliated myself already?"

Now the governor waved the trembling old Malpartida aside and looked down at the girl, and then at Botello, and finally at Garabito, scowling on his chair.

"This is almost past belief," his excellency said. "Did I not know your father and family, *señorita*, surely would I believe ill of you. Knowing them, however, I am like to think that you are not yourself for the moment. Perhaps a touch of the jungle fever—"

"Thank the good God!" Malpartida exclaimed.

"We shall look at the affair in that manner," his excellency continued. "And let the few of us in this room forget what has happened, and immediately. Regarding this matter, I believe I can find an instant solution. I believe it is your wish, Señor Garabito, to take as wife this fair *señorita*?"

"It has long been my wish, excellency."

"Even after her avowal here of love for another man?"

"As your excellency has said—a touch of fever—"

"And you, Señor Malpartida, my old friend, would gladly see her the wife of Señor Garabito, eh, after all this?"

"And thank him for taking her!" Malpartida exclaimed.

"Then what is more simple? We shall wed Señor Garabito and Señorita Malpartida as soon as it is possible, and in loving her husband she will forget this present malady that afflicts her. Let us understand the matter settled."

"You—you—" Inez gasped, recoiling a moment, then running to the foot of the platform again. "Rather than be wife to such a man—"

But Malpartida, the father, had his way now, for he seized her by an arm and forced her to walk aside.

"Silence, girl!" he cried. "His excellency has seen fit to save your good name, and Señor Garabito is *caballero* enough to claim you as his bride when perhaps none other would—"

"Another would! And I have done no wrong!"

"You are beside yourself! Be silent!"

And now her courage began failing and she seemed on the verge of tears. His excellency did not relish this scene, and so made haste to end matters. He looked down at Botello even more angrily.

He saw a man whose face failed to betray what emotion he felt. It was like a mask, but behind the mask a mental conflict raged. Botello had made his decision now. No woman should be sacrificed to such a man as Pasqual Garabito if he could prevent it, least of all the woman he loved and who loved him.

"Bartolmeo Botello," the governor said, "it is not necessary to call witnesses, as I said before this interruption. I adjudge you guilty of violating my order regarding brawling. We must make an example, in order that others of De Balboa's throng will learn that law has come to Darien. You shall be confined in the stockade until morning, when you shall be taken to the plaza and there publicly whipped. After that, you are to be exiled from Antigua, and may rejoin your comrades on the Great South Sea if you wish, so that you remain away from this place."

An instant of deep silence, while Botello seemed to grow inches taller.

"You would dare?" he cried then. "You would have a *caballero* whipped in public? And who will be brave enough to lay on the lash, excellency?"

"Enough! I have sentenced! Señor Malpartida, take your fair daughter home and guard her well until to-morrow, when we may make plans concerning her marriage."

Malpartida started with Inez toward the corridor, hurrying her along so that she could make no further plea. Garabito arose and stepped close to his enemy, and once he sneered, and Botello would have sprung upon him even in the governor's presence had not the soldiers seized him.

"Away!" he cried, and thrust them from him. "You do not bind my hands! I have endured enough—"

"Take him away! Take him away!" the governor thundered.

The guards made haste to obey, but they tried not to bind his hands now. Botello himself walked ahead into the corridor, and down it after Malpartida and Inez. Ahead of them, other guards threw open the doors. *Caballeros* thronged the plaza awaiting the verdict. Their torches cast a lurid glare over the wide entrance to the governor's house.

"One moment, Señor Botello!" the lieutenant called, as the door was reached.

"Back! You do not bind me! With my bare hands—"

"It is orders—"

"My parole is ended! The trial is over!"

They were in the doorway. For an instant Inez turned, and her father whirled to prevent any leave-taking. The lieutenant pushed one of the soldiers aside and stepped close to his prisoner, believing that this view of the *señorita's* sweet face might soften the heart of Botello so that he would submit to bonds without display of violence.

A dusky shape flitted along the front of the building; Tarama slipped a rapier into his master's hand, and was gone like a shadow!

A sudden brawl seemed to break out in the crowd; Rodrigo Ruiz struck another *caballero* so that he was hurled against the lieutenant and old Señor Malpartida, almost upsetting them.

"Adios, Bartolmeo!" Ruiz called.

And in that moment Bartolmeo Botello clasped a willing Inez in his arms, then swept his rapier menacingly in semicircle before him, then darted around the corner of the building with soft arms encircling his neck, and the shrieks of the pursuing guards ringing in his ears.

Jungle darkness swallowed the fugitives.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE HUT OF FRAY FELIPE.

TWAS but a short distance from the corner of the governor's house to the jungle's edge, and Bartolmeo Botello took it in half a dozen great leaps with Inez Malpartida clasped in his arms.

Here was black night where not even the faint light of the stars penetrated, and tangled undergrowth that made progress difficult, and curling roots ever ready to trip a foot.

Yet the matter of escape at the present moment was a mere trifle could Botello and his lady gain half a decent start of their foes, for they could progress some distance before the soldiers procured torches and sounded an alarm and began searching the jungle for a trail. The real danger would come later, when the search had been organized properly.

With the soft arms of Inez still clasped around his neck and her whispered entreaties to make good escape in his ears, Botello moved slowly, once he was under cover of the darkness, so as to make little noise.

Far to the right there was a sudden crashing in the brush, a series of grunts, and the cries of the governor's soldiers as they charged in that direction.

"That is Tarama, the good native, decoying them in an opposite way," Bo-

tello whispered. "I had anticipated such a move, for Tarama is quick to think and act. Now we have less to fear."

But he moved slowly for all that, fearing to stumble on some soldier who had strayed from his fellows, and knowing the slightest noise would attract guards their way. Inez Malpartida was on her feet now and walking beside him, while with one arm he pushed branches from before her and with the other held her close.

"The journey will be long and perilous, loved one," he breathed. "This is but the start of it. Day after day, night after night, we must be on our guard. They will pursue, knowing we are making for the camp of De Balboa. We will be unable to follow even the uncertain jungle trail, for fear of discovery. And there are natives who are hostile when they find one or two men of Spain abroad in the great wilderness. Mayhap it were wrong to take you with me."

"Where love is, there can be no fear," she whispered in answer. "And would you have me remain behind, when my love is yours and they would wed me to a man unworthy?"

"Not so, *señorita*. That is why you walk beside me now."

"With you for guide, we'll win through!"

"Yet it is a perilous journey for a tender lady," he said. "Many strong men have quailed before it. There may be much suffering before we reach the end."

"Then must we suffer together, *caballero*. Death, even self-inflicted, would be better for me than marriage to such a man as Pasqual Garabito."

"Once started, we may not turn back, *señorita*. Here is one *caballero* who never will have lash laid across his naked back by order of any man whatsoever. And you must escape a hateful marriage. Wherefore, we must turn our faces toward the Great South Sea and win through, though perils by the score confront us. Tarama, good native, always will be near. He will be guide and guard

for us, for the wilderness is his hearthstone."

Now they had reached the bank of a tiny but turbulent stream, and Botello picked his lady up in his arms again and waded through the water, and on the other side he put her on her feet, and they continued through the black jungle.

Far behind them were choruses of cries as soldiers of his excellency beat the jungle, and once they saw a great light in the distance and guessed that a huge fire had been built in the plaza to illuminate the edge of the wilderness and aid the guards in their work of searching.

The brush before them cracked, and Botello stopped and drew his rapier, putting Inez quickly behind him.

"Master!" came a hiss.

"I am here, good Tarama."

"I have thrown them off and circled, master; yet they will be on the trail before long, mayhap. There are natives loyal to the governor who know the wilderness as well as I and can pick up a trail other men would not see."

"Go ahead, Tarama, to the hut of Fray Felipe, and tell him we come, and wherefore."

"Sí, master!"

Tarama was gone even as he answered; they waited a moment in silence, listening, then followed him.

"For the last time, *señorita*, you believe there can be nothing for you except this perilous journey?" Botello asked.

"Unless my being in your company will hinder you, *señor*, and so delay your escape."

"Your presence will give me twice the usual cunning," he said. "A few more steps, and you may not turn back, *señorita*. Think well, I beg of you. I would have no regrets."

"You have said that you love me, *señor*."

"With all my heart!"

"Then there can be no regrets—unless at some time you cease to love."

"Never fear for that!"

"Onward, then!" she commanded in

a whisper. "We must not fail to win through."

"One stop we must make," Botello said. "Yet that will take us but a short time, unless my old friend, Fray Felipe, proves to be unreasonable."

"I understand, *señor*."

"And are willing?"

"Can you ask it, *señor*? Did I not love you enough to wed, would I have risked maidenly modesty before his excellency by making plea for you?"

"It were too much, *señorita*! I am unworthy of it!"

"Say not again that you are unworthy. That casts poor reflection on my personal judgment."

"Your pardon. *Dios*! Was there ever man so pursued by good fortune?"

"And also by bad soldiers, *señor*," she reminded him.

He clasped her closer, and chuckled, and hurried forward now at better speed. Here and there was a cleared space, and they hurried boldly across, making every effort to gain time. They circled away from the jungle trail made by Vasco Nunez's men, and presently in the distance saw a tiny pin-point of light twinkling through the jungle.

"Fray Felipe is in his home, thank the saints!" Botello said. "I had been half afraid he might be in the wilderness on some mission to the natives. Now if Tarama has explained matters, mayhap more time will be saved to us."

They came to the edge of another clearing now, and ran across it hand in hand like two happy children, which they were in their hearts despite the pursuit. As they reached the hut, Tarama glided from a clump of brush and hurried toward them, and led them to the door, upon which he beat with his bare fist. It was opened immediately, and they slipped inside.

It was not more than ten feet square, that hut made of logs and vines and clay. In one corner was a bunk, in another a chair, in a third a table. In the last corner of all were things having to

do with religion. Before the bunk stood Fray Felipe, who raised his hand as they entered; and Tarama closed the door behind them and glided behind the bole of a palm outside to watch for enemies.

A man of fifty was Fray Felipe, and of ordinary stature. Cities and towns were not to his liking—even such a hamlet as Antigua. So here, at the edge of the wilderness, he had built his hut, and here he lived for the greater part of the time. His work was his own, having to do with the natives, and he walked abroad through the wilderness without fear of harm, since all natives were his friends.

Now he stood straight before them with his arms folded across his breast, his head bent forward slightly, and his gleaming eyes shining from beneath shaggy brows.

"You know?" Botello asked.

"Tarama has told me, son."

"Well, fray?"

"It is wrong to break a law, my son—that we all know. But there may be times when it were worse to obey the law. Tarama has told me you acted in defense of your life."

"The man made a foul stroke."

"I doubt it not, knowing Señor Garabito as I do. Nor do I blame you, my son, for ordering him to keep away from decent folk, knowing facts about the subject. Yet it had been a demonstration of fortitude had you accepted the punishment ordered you."

"Fray! You would have a *caballero* of Spain whipped across his back like a native thief?"

"The priest spoke a moment ago," Fray Felipe said then, his face softened by a smile. "Now let Felipe, the man, speak. You are right, *señor*. No *caballero*, especially an honorable man as yourself, should be whipped and disgraced in such a manner, especially by order of such an unjust man as the present governor of Darien. I blame you not!"

"Then—" Botello cried eagerly.

"A moment, my son. You perceive it is the priest speaks to you again now? Even as priest, I counsel you to make good your escape and join your comrades at the Great South Sea. Out at elbows they are, and half-starved at times, yet they are gentlemen true who always have been God-fearing and courageous and loyal. I hope to rejoin them myself, soon, for I find this spot by far too near the tainted air of Antigua."

"I thank you, fray."

"But this lady—high born and gentle—?"

"A true woman, fray!"

"I doubt it not. It were unseemly for her to be with you so, however."

"Our love is strong, fray," Botello replied. "At my farce of a trial she risked reputation by stepping forward and making plea for me. For that she would have been punished."

"Punished? This *señorita*?"

"By the governor's order she was to have been wedded to this same Pasqual Garabito. Could I leave the woman I love, and who loves me, to such a fate, fray?"

"I cannot counsel that any woman should be wife to such a man."

"Then what else to do, but flee together? That brings us to the subject nearest our hearts, fray. The pursuit is close behind. Some one may think of this hut and make an investigation here. We would be wed, and have your blessing, and then be on our way to the camp of Vasco Nunez de Balboa."

Now Fray Felipe bowed his head on his breast and paced back and forth, two short steps in either direction, thinking deeply. It was irregular, this that Señor Botello wished, and held somewhat of danger in it, since his excellency, the governor, would seek to punish any man who thwarted his plans. Yet 'twas not of the danger the fray thought most, but of the irregularity.

"There is scant time, fray," Botella reminded him.

"I like it not, my son."

"We may not turn back now, fray. To do that means disgraceful punishment for me, which does not matter so much, but it means, also, marriage to an unworthy man for the *señorita*. And surely you would not have us begin our long and perilous journey without being joined in wedlock?"

"My son!"

"There you have the situation, fray."

Now Fray Felipe stepped forward a pace, his head held high again, and took the hands of Inez between his own.

"You wish this, my daughter?"

"More than I have wished for anything in all my life, good fray. I love Señor Botello truly, and know him for an honorable man, and will be a good wife to him."

"The dangers you will have to face—"

"Will be as nothing if I am by his side!"

"*Si!* You will make a rare wife," the fray said. "Then I'll do as you desire, and give you my blessing, and pray that all will be well with you."

Botello gave a glad cry and stepped forward. But now the door was thrown open quickly, and Tarama rushed in and slammed it shut behind him.

"Master! Master, they are at hand!" he whispered hoarsely. "On every side they crept forward, catching me off my guard. They have surrounded the hut!"

The native dropped on his knees before Botello, half sobbing, seeming to beg for forgiveness because he had failed in his duty. Botello felt no censure for him, since his task had been difficult, for in the blackness of the jungle it had been an easy matter for foes to approach near before being seen, especially since native guides were with them.

Inez Malpartida gave a little cry of disappointment and fear. Botello half drew his rapier from its scabbard. But Fray Felipe sprang quickly to the table and snuffed the light on it; and then they heard him fumble at the door, and a heavy bar drop into place.

"Son! Daughter!" he whispered. "To me—here! In the dark of night you must be wed, for it appears the only way now, yet may your hearts and souls be illuminated by your love. Tarama, crouch you here behind me, and be silent!"

Now they could hear the voices of men outside the hut, gradually growing louder, and light came in between the logs. Some soldier battered at the door with the haft of his pike, yet the heavy bar held securely.

"Within there, fray!" a stentorian voice called.

More battering at the door, while Tarama crouched against the wall, more in fear for his master than for himself, and Botello scarcely could take hand from the hilt of his rapier, so certain was he that all things ended here.

"The door will hold until we have accomplished our purpose," Fray Felipe whispered, as if he had read their thoughts. "Forget your weapon, my son, and have thought of nothing save your lady and what true marriage means. Be of good courage, daughter!"

And then he began the service there in the dark, whispering the words and directing their whispered responses, while Tarama knelt behind the fray, realizing that this was a moment of great seriousness for his beloved master and friend.

Whereupon, getting no response from inside the hut, those soldiers outside set up a clamor to wake jungle life, pounding at the door and against the heavy log walls, and threatening the torch.

"Open, fray, in the name of his excellency!" roared an officer. "We know you are within, having seen the native enter and your light go out! Open, lest we tear down your hut and bury you beneath its logs!"

But Fray Felipe, in a low whisper, went on through the ceremony, never faltering, not making even the least haste, pronouncing each word slowly and with due regard for its meaning; and

Botello and Inez gave their responses in quivering whispers, for Inez feared her happiness would be lost now as soon as found, and Botello was almost beside himself with dread of what might happen when the soldiers ultimately battered down the door.

Inez would be his wife, and so Garabito would be balked of getting her, but that he would be separated from his bride he did not doubt, and perhaps even punished in such manner that he would be ashamed to hold up his head among *caballeros*.

"For the last time, fray—open!"

But Fray Felipe was done now, and he whispered a last prayer, and blessed this new husband and wife; and in the darkness Señor Botella clasped Inez in his arms and kissed her lingeringly upon her lips, little doubting it would be the last kiss for some time to come, if not forever.

"Smash in the door!" the officer commanded now; and the soldiers began hammering at it earnestly with their weapons, while others attacked the walls again.

"Stand back now, fray—and you, my beloved!" Botello whispered. "It is time to draw blade and have at these noisy ones. There is small chance we may win through, yet it is well worth the trying. Tarama, to my side, and do not hesitate to use your knife if you have love for me!"

But even as he started to draw the rapier from his scabbard, Fray Felipe clasped him by the arm and drew him close beside Inez, whispering so that Tarama also could hear.

"Be not despondent so soon, my son," he said. "There is a way out of the trap. Follow closely."

He went to the rear wall of the hut, and there he toiled for an instant until a section of a log was pulled away.

"By crawling through there you enter the hollow bole of a giant tree," he said. "I discovered it while erecting my poor hut, and thought it might have a use one

day. Beneath the great roots of the tree is a tunnel through the earth, washed there by the heavy rains as the water swirled around the roots in the soft ground. Crawl through, and you emerge on the bank of a stream. You may have to dig with poniard, for the tunnel never has been used its entire length, and it has been some moons since I have explored it. Go quickly, and bless you—bless you all three!”

“All three? And you?” Botello asked.

“Fear not for me. I go to deal with these rogues. Quickly, that I may replace the log before they batter down the door. Mayhap I will join you some day in De Balboa’s camp.”

He stooped and kissed Inez on the forehead, and thrust Botello and Tarama from him.

“I like this not—deserting you,” Botello whispered.

“Go, my son, while yet there is time. Your first duty is to your fair wife.”

So Tarama entered the blackness of the giant tree’s bole first, and Inez after him, and Botello crawled in last, his poniard gripped in his hand, and Fray Felipe’s last words whispered in his ear:

“Should the passage be closed, remain in it until I fetch you word that all is safe.”

CHAPTER VI.

BOTH PRIEST AND MAN.

FRAY FELIPE replaced the section of log in the wall so that it fitted perfectly; and then he, who had been playing the man the last few minutes, became the priest again, and turned slowly toward the table.

“Batter it down, men!” he heard the officer shrieking outside. “Tear the hut to pieces!”

Fray Felipe made a light, and when it showed through the cracks in the sides of the hut there were exclamations outside, and presently the battering ceased.

“Open, fray!” came the command again.

Fray Felipe crossed the tiny room and removed the bar from the door and hurled it open. The light from many torches struck against him, and men with naked blades in their hands thrust him aside and plunged into the hut until it would hold no more, the governor’s lieutenant and Pasqual Garabito leading them.

“How is this?” Fray Felipe demanded in a loud and stern voice. “You violate my poor dwelling at night, Señor Lieutenant, with weapons held ready as if for a foe? You care naught if you disturb a man at prayers?”

“We seek fugitives desired by his excellency,” the lieutenant answered.

“And you expect to find such folk beneath my humble roof? There is but the one apartment to my dwelling, *señor*, and it is not so large but a clear-sighted man may penetrate the furthest corner of it with his eyes. Look your fill, and then tell me whether you can find fugitives here.”

“Stand back! There is scant room!” the officer cried to his men; and his soldiers fell back, until only the lieutenant and Garabito and two guards were inside the hut.

Fray Felipe stood back against the wall looking at this scene, the smoke from the torches almost stifling him.

“Well! They seem not to be here!” the lieutenant exclaimed after he had glanced around the room.

“Are you a fool, *señor*?” Garabito cried. “Did we not see the native enter the hut before the light went out? Where, then, is the native we saw?”

“Where is the native?” the officer demanded of Fray Felipe, facing him now.

“There is no native here, *señor*,” the fray replied.

“Any man with eyes can see that! Where did he go? What have you done with him?”

“Do you find any hiding-place in my poor hut?”

Garabito sprang forward angrily to within half a pace of the fray and glared into his eyes.

"Answer, fray, and do not evade!" he cried. "This is a serious business."

"I do not recognize any authority here to question except that of the officer," Felipe replied. "When he questions, I answer, and for none other."

"Well, then, have you seen our fugitives?" the lieutenant asked hotly.

"Their names, officer?"

"Bartolmeo Botello, and the Señorita Inez Malpartida."

"Indeed? And why are they fugitive, *señor*?"

Garabito rushed forward again.

"Can you not see, lieutenant, that the fray but plays for time to let them escape?" he cried. "Have an immediate answer out of him, by the saints!"

"Answer me, fray!" the officer ordered. "You have seen them?"

"*Sí, señor!*"

"Hah! Now we get at it!"

"Often have I seen them, *señor*. Señor Botello is an old friend of mine; and, as for the *señorita*, I have observed her in the plaza and at his excellency's residence—a fair and sweet young lady of whom—"

"No—no! Silence! Do not play longer with us! Have you seen them here—to-night?"

"Hah! That is your meaning, is it? Have I seen them here, and this very night?"

"Answer, dog!" Garabito shouted.

Fray Felipe's eyes suddenly blazed, and he took a step forward, almost at the point of turning from priest to man in a twinkling, and Garabito retreated across the room.

"I like not your words and manners, *señor!*" the fray said.

"Have done with this nonsense! And you, Señor Garabito, keep out of this!" the lieutenant ordered. "By the saints! It were duty enough to hunt down such people without having meddlers at my heels!"

"A meddler—I?" Garabito cried, stalking forward again.

Now Fray Felipe smiled as at two small boys quarreling, and raised one hand.

"It is not seemly to quarrel in a fray's poor hut, *señores*," he said. "If quarrel you must, repair to the plaza of Antigua, where there is ample room and a surgeon is near."

"The fray speaks truth! We quarrel, and so delay matters!" Garabito shouted. "At him again, lieutenant! Make him give us a proper answer!"

The lieutenant walked across the room again and stopped before the fray, his fists on his hips, to put the question direct.

But there came another interruption, for old Señor Malpartida rushed in at the door breathlessly, hurling common soldiers to right and left.

"Where is my daughter? You have found her?" he shouted.

"We are trying—"

"Trying? *Dios!* Can you do nothing but talk?"

"Softly, *señor*. I am about to put a question to this fray."

Señor Malpartida sputtered his wrath and stepped back, and now the lieutenant faced Fray Felipe again, this time with hot determination in his manner.

"Answer me straight!" he ordered.

"Have you seen the two I mentioned here to-night?"

"The two you mentioned here to-night, *señor*? *Sí!* Often, in the plaza—"

"No, no, no! Silence, fray! You take a wrong meaning of my words. Have they been here to-night?"

"They have," Fray Felipe answered.

"Hah! How long since?"

"Since what, *señor*?"

"Since they departed! May the saints blast you—"

"*Señor!* The saints are not to be mentioned in such tones. Surely your religious training—"

Garabito groaned and turned away, and old Señor Malpartida sputtered again.

"You've thrown him off the track once more!" Garabito screeched. "Let me at him!"

"Fray," said the lieutenant now, ignoring the others, "this is a very serious business. Evade no longer, but give me the direct answer. How long since they departed?"

"Not so very long," Fray Felipe answered.

"Tell me what you know of this matter."

"Hah! Now we get at it, Señor Lieutenant. They came to me through the jungle some time since, Señor Botello and the lady, Señorita Inez Malpartida, a comely and well-mannered—"

"Come to the point, fray!"

"Señor Botello's native guide had come before, telling me the story of the *señor's* arrest and trial. Wherefore, I allowed the *señor* and his lady to enter, and after a short time here they departed again with the native."

"Why came they here? To get food and drink to carry with them on a journey?"

"They asked for neither food nor drink, officer; for, the native being in their company, they could not lack for those things in the wilderness."

"They said where they were going?"

"I believe the *señor* intimated it was his intention to go to De Balboa's camp on the shore of the Great South Sea."

"I knew it—I feared it!" Señor Malpartida cried. "I am disgraced! My daughter alone with that man!"

"You are not disgraced, *señor*," the stern voice of Fray Felipe rang out. "She has a right to be with Señor Botello."

"A right? A right, say you? How, in the name of all the saints, can you make that statement, fray?"

"She has the right of every wife to be with her husband."

"Her husband!"

Malpartida and Garabito and the lieutenant cried it in a breath.

"But yes, *señores*! Because they wished it, and because they said they would make the journey at any rate, I married them here in my hut but a few minutes ago."

"You—married them!" Malpartida gasped. "You—"

"Had I not the right?" Fray Felipe demanded. "I knew of no reason—"

"You must have known there was something irregular."

"*Si*—irregular, *señor*. But would you want me to let them take a long journey alone without being wedded?"

"You'll answer for this to the governor, fray!" Garabito declared furiously.

"That may be true—but not to you, *señor*. I fail to see where you enter this affair."

"I was betrothed to Señorita Inez."

"But not by her wish, *señor*. And you are a man unworthy—"

"Fray!"

"I repeat it, *señor*. The *caballero* who has besmirched his name by mistreating a native maid—"

"A falsehood! One of this Botello's falsehoods!"

"I had it not from Señor Botello, but from the maid herself, who has not sense enough to make up a lie. Your falsehoods avail you naught with me, *señor*."

Now Señor Malpartida thrust Garabito aside and stepped up beside the lieutenant.

"We are wasting time," he complained. "Let us after them—let us take them into custody, that I may see my daughter incarcerated for the remainder of her life in some holy house, and this Señor Botello whipped like the cur he is!"

"Señor Malpartida, your new son-in-law is a clean, courageous, and dignified gentleman," Fray Felipe stated. "You should be proud to acknowledge him."

"Enough of this!" the lieutenant cried. "You married them, eh? Then it must have been done in the dark. We saw your light go out. We saw that native

of Botello's enter here, and he has not departed."

"Then he must be here yet. Find him," the fray suggested.

The lieutenant went swiftly around the room again, thrusting his sword at the logs, and on the outside soldiers at his command walked around the hut, but could find no trace of the fugitives, nor could the native guides find a trail they had made leaving the place. Puzzled men reported so to their officer, and a puzzled lieutenant once more faced the fray.

"This is all you have to tell me?" he asked.

"It is all, *señor*. You know where to find me if his excellency wishes to interview me about this business."

"We are wasting time—wasting time!" old Malpartida shrieked. "Leave the fool fray to his hut! Back to Antigua and make up a force to pursue them! Get natives and track them down! Are we fools, to linger here longer?"

He rushed frantically through the door, tumbling the soldiers aside; and the lieutenant, thinking Malpartida spoke sense, ordered his men to collect and prepare to hasten back to the plaza. Señor Pasqual Garabito went forward, and now when he stood before Fray Felipe his countenance was white from anger.

"This has been your doing, fray!" he accused. "You are a near friend of this out-at-elbows Botello. You shall be made to suffer for performing this marriage and for casting insults upon me when there were other men present to hear. You—unworthy the holy robe that you wear!"

As he finished speaking he touched the robe—grasped it and jerked it as if to tear it away from Fray Felipe's shoulders. And then the fray became the man again.

His eyes blazed, he stood erect suddenly and straightened his shoulders, his two arms shot forward and his hands grasped the arms of Señor Garabito. He shook the *cabellero* as a terrier shakes a rat.

"Honorable *caballero*—you?" he cried.

"Wrecker of girls' lives, gambler, wine-guzzler, court dandy, worthless shape of a man! The natives open their simple hearts to me, *señor*, and I, who have heard whisperings, say this—treason is neither creditable to a man nor a safe way to prolong his life!"

Garabito's face went ashen at the fray's words, and he grew limp in his adversary's arms as if all fight suddenly had been taken out of him, if it had not been before.

"Out—out of my poor house, which shelters only honest men!" the fray cried. "Think twice hereafter before you term me unworthy!"

He whirled Garabito around, conducted him swiftly to the door, and hurled the *caballero* sprawling far from the hut in the midst of a group of startled soldiers.

The door was slammed shut again; once more the heavy bar dropped into its place; Fray Felipe went to his knees in that fourth corner of the room, and asked pardon because for a time he had forgotten the cloth he wore and had succumbed to an unholy passion. The man had become the priest again!

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE GREAT WILDERNESS.

NOW the dense jungle was filled with its usual early morning noises as its denizens went about the serious business of obtaining breakfast and at the same time seeing to it that they did not themselves furnish a breakfast for stronger beasts; and now the note of the monkey-chatter changed in an instant, and little bodies flew through the trees as the tiny animals hurried away. Birds of gay plumage shrieked their warnings as they flashed their gorgeous wings and took flight; and danger cries arose on every side.

The din increased as the birds circled above the jungle; and the monkeys demanded of one another which had given the first warning, and the reason for it.

And then, at the crest of a hill, the brush was parted and the head of Tarama showed for an instant—rather only the two eyes of him—and from safe distances the monkeys shrieked their taunts and demanded in monkey language why he had invaded their particular stretch of country.

A moment of watching and listening, and then Tarama stepped into the open and bent back to part the brush, and Bartolmeo Botello came into view, holding his bride in his arms.

"Here is the little cave, master," Tarama said in a low voice; and he led the way toward it.

It was scarcely a cave, little more than a hole in the side of the rocky mountain, yet so placed that a man could defend it for a long time against heavy odds had he the valor. Before it Botello put Inez down upon her tiny feet, touched her lips with his, and tried hard to smile at her. But it was only the poor semblance of a smile that he gave, and she made no effort to respond to it.

"Water," Botello whispered aside; and Tarama took the gourd from his belt and slipped into the jungle in search.

Now Inez was sitting on a rock at the cave's mouth, and as Botello turned toward her she looked up and gave him a weary smile with so much of fatigue in it that he went down on his knees beside her and clasped her in his arms and held her close, her face against his breast.

"It grieves me," he said, and would trust himself to say no more. And her answer came to him in a faint voice from which all the tone he loved had gone.

"Be—of good courage—Bartolmeo mine. We'll win—through."

Five days and nights they had fought their way through the jungle, eluding the pursuit, subsisting on what food Tarama found in its wild state, afraid to kindle a fire, alert for hostile natives and snakes and jungle beasts, fighting thick vines that barred the way and curling roots that looped beneath dead vegetation ready to trip a foot.

This was not the Inez who had been so brave in the governor's house at Antigua. Gone was her finery; now she was dressed in the cast-off clothing of an Indian girl, which Tarama had stolen for her the second night.

Her throat and arms were bare, stung by insects, burned by the sun, touched here and there by stinging poison vines. Thick leaves had been plastered about her feet with mud and bound there with creepers—and such things served as shoes.

Botello feared, too, that the jungle fever of which his excellency had made a jest would appear in reality now. And they had covered less than half the distance to the camp of De Balboa on the shore of the Great South Sea.

Yet she smiled as well as she could, and her eyes sparkled when they looked into Botello's, and always her heart sang young love's song. Her condition, she knew, pained Botello more than it did her. And it would be a matter of triumph to win through despite these obstacles and hardships—such a triumph as love delights in and one to cement her closer to her husband.

"Here we must rest, beloved," Botello said now. "A night, a day and another night, and then we urge forward again. Your feet must heal, beloved, and you must have rest and food and water. Yet it grieves me—"

Inez raised a hand and put it over his lips.

"Say it not!" she implored. "I would not have things otherwise, my Bartolmeo. Love can conquer even the jungle trail."

Tarama returned with the water, and she drank; and then Botello made her a bed just inside the cave, and soon she was asleep. As she slept, Botello and Tarama held counsel. Tarama would slip away, it was decided, for here Botello and his bride would be safe for a time without the native; Tarama would use what skill he possessed in discovering the whereabouts of the pursuit and conditions in the country ahead. That night and the

following day he would remain in the jungle, and during the second night he would return.

There followed muttered words of caution and advice, a hand-clasp as between man and man, and Tarama was gone.

The night passed, the day, the second night. That last night Botello sat before the mouth of the cave and looked down the side of the mountain into the depths of the black jungle, while Inez slept inside. To Botello some hint of premonition had come, and as the hours passed it grew upon him.

And when the first streak of dawn scattered the jungle blackness and Tarama had not come, he arose with a heavy sigh and turned back into the cave, but tried to smile bravely when he found Inez awake and looking up at him.

Now Botello began the playing of a game, even the hardest game of all, which is for a man to keep from the woman he loves all hint of the dread he feels.

"The good native has but been delayed," he would say often. "What is another night and a day in this spot, beloved? It means more rest for you, regular food. When once we set our faces toward the Great South Sea again we'll make better speed because of these few days of resting. Also, it may throw our enemies off the track."

He slipped down the side of the mountain and picked gorgeous blossoms for her, and found the sorts of food he knew to be harmless, and spoke in the manner of a lover until the roses were blooming in Inez's cheeks and the smiles and dimples played about her face again.

"See what the rest is doing for you, loved one," he said. "Every man in De Balboa's camp will envy me my bride."

And then the jungle darkness came again, and once more Botello sat at the door of the cave, and it seemed that the jungle darkness entered his soul. After a time he slept; but he was awake an hour before the dawn, searching the myriad night sounds of the jungle for one that

would speak of the approach of a human being.

They ate a morning meal, and then Botello was forced to confess that he felt some fear.

"Death lurks in every corner of the jungle," he said softly. "Even a native cannot escape always. An ancient enemy, a hostile band, the sting of a deadly serpent—"

"You think Tarama will not return?" she asked.

"I would stake my life on Tarama's faithfulness," he replied. "If he does not return, it is because he is unable, else something of great moment is keeping him away."

"And we must remain here?"

"We must go forward at another dawning," he said. "We are not half through our journey, beloved. Yet it would have been easier had we Tarama with us."

The dawn came again, and they left the cave and descended the side of the mountain, to begin their fight against the jungle. Here was difficult work, for Botello must help his lady continually, slash vines and creepers from their path, leaving behind a trail that any man might read, but one that he found necessary.

Throughout the day they fought their way westward, and that night he made a shelter, and while Inez slept he watched.

Another dawn, and again they went forward and presently reached the bank of a turbulent stream; and here Botello decided to follow the water's edge—he would leave a trail, but he would make better speed.

And now he saw signs that told him human beings were about. He could tell it by the way the monkeys acted; and once he found the remains of a camp-fire and some discarded arrows.

He redoubled his caution now, stopping now and then for minutes at a time to listen to the sounds of the jungle. He was forced to go slower, too, for the journey was telling on Inez again.

And then, at midday, creeping around

a ledge of rock, they came face to face with a native. Botello held his naked blade in his hand, for he had been cutting vines with it, and at sight of the native he stopped and thrust Inez behind him. The next instant he was smiling and holding up his left hand in the peace sign, for the native was one he had met before, a man friendly to De Balboa and his followers.

But there came no answer to the sign. Instantly the native crouched, and an arrow sped past Botello's head. He called out then, thinking the man had been taken by surprise and had not recognized him; but, to his wonder, the native fitted arrow to bow again.

Botello moved without hesitation now, for he realized that the man was hostile purposely. Again he dodged an arrow, and then he was upon the native, and his rapier darted forward and back, and at his feet twisted and twitched that which had been a man. Looking around, he saw that Inez had turned away, unable to endure the sight of violence and death, and now he went back and led her into the jungle and away from the rushing creek so that she would not have to look upon the corpse.

They did not speak of the matter as they circled through the dense undergrowth, but it gave Botello ample food for thought. He knew that he had been recognized, yet attacked for all that. And he wondered what significance there might be in the fact that the friendly Indian had turned against him.

Now he found other traces of human beings, and as the day neared an end he went deeper into the jungle until he found a place of comparative security, and there he planned a retreat for the night. They had raw food and berries, for they dared build no fire.

And this night, as the exhausted Inez slept, Botello sat beside her looking into the blackness, listening intently, feeling that there were enemies near.

To dodge a determined pursuit was enough; were the natives suddenly turned

hostile, he found himself in a serious predicament, for he had been depending upon friendly Indians to help him through. Perhaps the hostility of the one he had encountered accounted for Tarama's absence, too, he thought, since all natives knew Tarama for a man who had attached himself to the Spaniards.

About the time of false dawn the brush cracked before him, and in an instant Botello was upon his feet, his rapier held ready, scarcely daring to breathe, for he knew the noise was made by a human. He saw fronds of the ground palms waving, saw a giant creeper swung aside. The undergrowth swayed toward him, and with his back against the bole of a tree Botello waited, feeling that an instant later he would be fighting for his life and that of his bride.

In the dim light he saw a ghostly shape; he heard a man's breath expelled; he heard the quick, alarmed whisper of Inez behind him, and knew she had been awakened and was alert. The brush swayed again and snapped back, striking the face of the man who approached—and then Botello's ears caught a whispered Spanish oath.

Now the blood raced madly through Botello's veins. So it was not a native, then, with whom he had to deal, but a white man—perhaps one of those pursuing him. If they were this close to his trail there seemed to be little hope left.

In that instant Botello saw a picture of himself undergoing ignoble punishment, of Inez being carried away from him forever. He gripped the hilt of his rapier and made ready, determined to fight his best while fight remained in him. Perchance this was some soldier who had strayed from his fellows, and could Botello but slay him before he gave an alarm there might be a chance of escape.

Then the other stepped into the tiny clearing and caught sight of Botello's form, and in the faint light they engaged immediately, the newcomer apparently startled to find a man here and crossing blade with him.

They fought furiously, and not a word did either speak, which mystified Botello some, for he had expected the other to call for help and bring up his comrades. He gave ground a little to gain better footing, and Inez cried out, thinking he was being outfought.

Her cry reminded him of many things, chief of which was that Inez might find herself in sorry straits were he vanquished now and his conqueror proved to be a renegade instead of honorable *caballero*, and he assaulted again with redoubled fury.

"Back, Inez!" he hissed at her, fearing she would approach too close in that faint light and receive a wound.

He sprang forward. And then, to his wonderment, his adversary darted to one side and lowered the point of his blade.

"Botello! You?" he screeched; and he seemed not to care if all the jungle heard. "Put up your blade, man! Would you puncture the tough hide of your best friend?"

"Ruiz! Ruiz!" Botello exclaimed in answer. "Another instant, and I would have slain you!"

"Mayhap—mayhap!" Ruiz cried. "We'll settle that matter some other time, my friend, when there are not common enemies to be fought and we need practise with the blade."

And then they were in each other's arms, laughing together, and even Inez found herself caught up from the ground and given a bearlike hug by her husband's friend.

"I took you for a soldier," Ruiz explained, "and would give no cry, fearing I'd bring your companions down upon me."

"I thought the same," Botello said, laughing still. "But why should you fear his excellency's soldiers, good Rodrigo?"

"Hah! Why should I? By the saints, there is ample reason! I was not many hours behind you in quitting Antigua. His excellency deemed me too good a friend of yours to be allowed liberty. I

made certain remarks, if I remember rightly, concerning his treatment of you. That gained for me a warning from his excellency's lieutenant."

"And you did not heed it, eh?"

"Sí. I spoke no more treason. But there was another matter. After you escaped the hut—and that has caused some mystery in Antigua, my friend—Señor Garabito and the others returned immediately to the plaza, where pursuit was organized and certain soldiers sent forth. This fine Señor Garabito did get in my path while I was walking with swift stride. I merely hurled him aside, and the imbecile saw fit to draw blade—"

"You slew him, Rodrigo?"

"I always was tender in the heart. I but raked his ribs, scarcely starting the ruby flood. Yet he gave a cry that could have been heard half-way to Seville on a calm night, and immediately there was a certain turmoil and bellowings from his excellency—who happened to be in the plaza—to seize upon my sacred person. Wherefore, I sought the depths of the jungle."

"Hah—!"

"A moment, good Bartolmeo—give me breath! Despite my predicament, I remained in the vicinity of the plaza with eyes open and ears uncorked. Came the dawn, and with it Fray Felipe. It had been supposed the good fray had sought the depths of the jungle himself to escape the governor's wrath for having married you; yet here he was voluntarily seeking audience with his excellency—and he made talk until it was granted him.

"While yet he was in the governor's house Garabito rushed violently around organizing a second pursuit, saying he would accompany it himself, seemingly in haste to be gone after you. That is the last I saw, deeming it time to start on my own journey."

"I would have no trouble come to the good fray for having aided me," Botello said.

"Trust the fray, good Bartolmeo! He can care for himself in wilderness or

palace. Forget the fray, and give thanks that I have overtaken you."

"Your arrival is excellent fortune. Tarama is gone—left us to spy out the land and did not return. And I have met a native once friendly, who drew bow against me and forced me to slay him. I was beginning to fear, my friend—for some of the natives may be hostile when they find one man and one woman alone, and the pursuit must be near, and the journey is tedious for the lady."

"Tedious!" Ruiz exclaimed. "It is a polite word you use. Say, rather, that the journey is Hades for the tender lady—as no doubt it is. But here are two of us now, my good Bartolmeo, and often have we combined blades against foes, and always with success. 'Tis a combination hard to overcome. As for the pursuit—mayhap it is far ahead of us by now. We have but to use a certain amount of caution and urge forward. And, for the love of the saints, let us be more than merry about it!"

He whispered that last sentence out of one corner of his mouth, and Botello caught its significance. Here was a diversion, a reason for allaying Inez's fears in part, and he welcomed it.

It was growing light in the jungle now, and they built a tiny fire and broiled a parrot, and though they spoke always in low tones, yet their conversation was lively and punctuated with hearty laughter.

While Inez bound fresh leaves upon her feet, Botello and Ruiz walked aside a short distance, as if to get water to carry with them, and once more Ruiz spoke in a whisper.

"I, also, met a native, good Bartolmeo, who in the past had been friendly to me. I was forced to slay him. There are evil whisperings in the jungle, my friend, that I cannot understand. We must make all haste to the Great South Sea. We face a difficult time if we have to fight off a pursuit and the natives, too. I had thought that Tarama of yours would prove loyal."

"I would have staked my life on it!" Botello replied. "I cannot think he deserted purposely. Either he has been slain, else by some other means prevented from returning to us. And I am exceedingly glad that you stand beside me now, my friend!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SYMBOL OF THE GREAT CACIQUE.

THAT day there were no encounters, nor did they catch sight of human being, and the night they passed in safety, one of the men always on watch. And when the dawn came again they started on through the jungle, only now they were high in the hills and starting down the long slope that ended on the shore of the Great South Sea.

Again they saw trails made by natives, and crept through the dense undergrowth as noiselessly as they could, stopping frequently to listen for minutes at a time. And so they reached the crest of a hill and looked down upon a tiny green valley, through which wound a wide trail like some great serpent.

To their ears now came the sounds of shouting from natives' throats. Hiding in the undergrowth, they watched, scarcely daring to breathe or to think what the sounds might portend. And then they saw.

Around a bend in the valley came a group of natives, some half a hundred, and in their midst strode Señor Pasqual Garabito. His arms were not bound behind him, the natives did not crowd close to his side, there was no indication that he was being held captive. It looked, rather, that he was being conducted in all honor to a native camp.

A gasp from Inez caused them to glance at the bend again, and then, despite the danger in it, both Botello and Ruiz cried out exclamations that might have been heard at least fifty yards away.

Conducted as had been Garabito, with

every evidence of honor, came Señor Bonilla and his fair daughter, Carlotta.

"By the saints!" Ruiz exclaimed. "What have we here? Garabito's presence needs no explanation, but why do Señor Bonilla and the haughty Carlotta endure the perils of the jungle trail? And why are they not attacked? A single native attacks a white man and a woman, yet two score of them fear to handle one woman and two men?"

"Perhaps it is discretion on the part of the natives, my good friend," Botello replied. "No doubt his excellency's soldiers are in the immediate neighborhood. It would be native wile to greet these with acclaim and slay them later as they slept."

"This thing needs some investigation," Ruiz said. "Do you remain here in hiding and protect the *señora* while I go forward and use my eyes."

He slipped away before Botello could reply, and for some time the latter and his bride watched the valley below. The two men, the woman, and the native escort passed from view around another bend, the cries of the Indians died away in the distance—and Ruiz returned.

"It is as you said," he announced. "His excellency's soldiers are in the neighborhood."

"Then we risk capture?"

"Not so, my friend. Those of his excellency's soldiers I set eyes upon will capture nothing in this world. They are dead."

"Dead?" Botello and Inez cried in a breath.

"Five of them—I know the fellows and recognized them as having been in the first squad sent in pursuit of you. They are scarce a quarter of a mile away, beside a well-marked trail. From the back of each sticks an arrow. They have been dead at least two days."

"Natives slay white men in force?" Botello asked, scarcely giving the news credit. "What is the meaning of that, good Ruiz?"

"The meaning is a mystery, I take

it," Ruiz replied, conveying to Botello in a glance the fact that he did not wish to speak fully in the presence of Inez.

"And Garabito—Bonilla?"

Ruiz shrugged his shoulders, indicating that he possessed no knowledge regarding what was to become of them, and cared little.

"But the *señorita*?" Inez asked in a low tone.

"Hah! There is your mystery!" Ruiz said. "Why does the dainty *Señorita* Carlotta endure the perils and hardships of the jungle trail? She has no love for a new-gotten husband to urge her on, no escape from his excellency's wrath to make. It must be a dire extremity to bring her here."

"Yet we cannot stand idly by and see them slain," Botello said, almost in a whisper. "Must we face danger at this juncture in an attempt to rescue those who have been our enemies?"

"What would you do?" Ruiz asked.

"Were we alone, good Rodrigo, I'd suggest we slip upon the encampment and ascertain the truth of things. Mayhap a rescue in the dead of night—did they survive that long—"

Ruiz shook his head and glanced toward Inez. But he did not take into consideration some of the excellent qualities that Botello's bride possessed.

"Am I to allow my presence in your company to send three persons to death?" she demanded. "Señor Garabito is not a proper man, yet he is of white blood. And Señor Bonilla is old."

"And the *señorita*, though in her character are empty places that should be filled, is, after all, a *señorita* and entitled to escape these savages," Botello put in.

"Then we attempt a rescue?" Ruiz asked.

"Perchance a rescue is not needed. Those natives appeared overfriendly to the three," Botello answered. "But we must make sure. At least we can approach the native encampment and investigate. By using all the caution we possess, we may get close enough to seek

solutions of those things which now mystify us."

Yet they made slow progress when once they had started, for it was necessary to make a detour and so evade the trails that led to the native village. They kept as near the crest of the hill as possible, and after a time reached a point directly above the encampment.

Botello knew that village. It was permanent, yet small; and now there were thrice the usual number of natives about it, and new huts had been erected. There seemed a scarcity of women and children, but warriors strutted across the open spaces, or engaged in feats of strength, or howled to one another from the fringe of the jungle.

"This looks like trouble," Ruiz observed; and even as he spoke trouble descended upon them.

There came a shout from their rear, a chorus of shrieks, the rushing of half a score of arrows over their heads. Botello and Ruiz whirled to find twenty warriors bearing down upon them through the undergrowth, and to either side were more, and in front was only the precipice where a man could not descend.

It was a time for action rather than words. With one arm Botello swept his bride to one side and down between two huge boulders, where the arrows could not strike her. Then he and Ruiz stood side by side before her, their backs to the rocks, and prepared to withstand the assault.

No more arrows flew; a chieftain shouted orders they could not understand, and the warriors, dropping their weapons, rushed in.

"They mean to take us alive," Ruiz gasped. "Here is another mystery, my friend."

And then he ceased his talk for a time and swept his rapier before him, even as Botello was doing, and drew it back red to send it forward again. Like the tongues of snakes the two blades darted here and there, always thrusting home. Shrieks of pain and fear came from sav-

age throats, and again the chieftain bel-
lowed his orders, and again his mer-
rushed.

There was no way to approach save from the front, and no way of doing that except by running risk of getting a blade between ribs. Some of them fenced with spears, trying to ward off the rapiers, but making no attempt to thrust.

"Hah!" Ruiz shrieked. "Attack human beings, will you, dogs? Hah! By the saints, I perspire—it is hot work! Have you lost count, my friend? I have, by the saints! Where did all these curs grow to maturity? Is the New World so large? Hah!"

"Ware the left!" Botello shrieked.

"Thanks for your caution, good friend—I have run the scoundrel through. By his decorations, he is a big man of his tribe! Hah—infidel dogs!"

They retreated; again they rushed. Now Botello and Ruiz found their foes pouring in upon them so fast that rapiers could not be withdrawn from bodies in time to meet the next comers. In a smother of naked natives they went down, their blades hurled aside, their poniards biting deep into flesh and bone. On the ground they struggled, voiceless now, stabbing and slashing, trying to prevent the natives binding them.

But such a state of affairs could not endure for long. Against the side of Botello's head a club crashed, and the darkness came to him just as he heard Ruiz give a choking gasp and Inez cry out in despair.

He regained consciousness to find that his arms had been bound behind him with tough vines and strips of skin. Half a score of paces away, Ruiz was sitting on the ground, also bound. Inez was standing between them, her hands fastened before her, and the natives were seemingly giving her scant attention.

"We live, good friend," Ruiz called. "Had you not put up such a tough combat, you'd have escaped that knock on the side of your skull. This is indeed a mysterious happening, when natives get

white men down and fail to run them through. We must have been saved for some greater honor."

Botello read the meaning between his friend's words, and his face blanched. He remembered how the savages had tortured certain of De Balboa's followers who had been caught in the jungle alone. Tarama had explained to him that the natives had a wholesome fear of the Spaniards, yet took vengeance when they found one or two who could be overcome. And now did Botello determine to slay his bride with his own hands, if given the opportunity, before he would allow her to be prisoner of these savages, held for torture or to grace some cacique's hut.

There was scant time now for thinking of these things, for he felt himself lifted bodily and placed upon his feet, and saw that Ruiz was being treated in similar fashion. Tall natives grasped their arms and urged them forward, Inez between them. They did not touch her as long as she went where they directed, and even allowed her to walk close by Botello's side.

"This may be the end, beloved," he whispered. "It were cruel to lead you from Antigua to the jungle to meet a tragic fate."

"The end of hope is not yet," she said.

"You do not understand—"

"I know all you would say, my Bartolmeo. If it proves necessary, Inez, your wife, will know what to do, and will not be afraid."

They were descending the side of the hill now, a difficult task with hands tied, and the warriors assisted all three.

"Such solicitude overwhelms me," Ruiz said. "They are passing kind."

He lurched against one of the natives and sent him spinning down the slope, but there came no reprisal. A half-wit could have told that these savages were acting under orders not to slay.

Then they reached a broad trail that wound down the valley, and now faster time could be made. Soon they were

within sight of the encampment, and a runner went ahead to give notice of their coming. From the distance came shouts and shrieks as he delivered his message. What women and children remained in the village crowded forward to leer at these white captives, and especially at the white woman. This was a day of wonders for them—two white women had they seen, and never before had they set eyes upon one.

In the center of the village was the big hut of the cacique, a building of vines and mud and logs more than fifty feet square. Their captors stopped them before the door, and one went inside. Presently he returned, and indicated that the prisoners were to be taken within.

Ruiz went first, and then Inez, and Botello was last, two giantlike warriors gripping him by the arms. The interior was stifling with smoke and dust; and, coming from the bright sunshine, a man scarcely could see. Botello blinked his eyes rapidly to accustom them to the dim light. He heard Ruiz give an exclamation, and looked up, over Inez's shoulder.

On a raised dais sat the cacique frowning down upon the prisoners. Beside him sat Pasqual Garabito, an honored guest. On the other side was Señor Bonilla, and behind him his daughter. And these were the three Botello and Ruiz had feared they would have to rescue.

"This is the woman?" the cacique was asking.

"Sí," Garabito responded.

"But there are two men, *señor*. Which is your enemy?"

"The taller," Garabito replied. "Say, rather, that he is your enemy, noble one. 'Tis as I said—if he escapes all plans fail. Already he has done much to oppose us. The other man is his close companion, and it would serve your purpose best to slay both of them at once."

Inez gave a little cry at that, and Botello took a step nearer her, and the frowning cacique looked down at her terrified face.

"And the woman?" the cacique asked.

"I shall deal with the woman," Garabito said meaningly.

Now Botello and Ruiz both snarled their rage, and Inez recoiled a little, so that the native guards stepped closer to prevent any attempt at violence.

"What is the meaning of this, Señor Garabito?" Botello demanded. "You league yourself with natives, eh? To gain your ends you seek aid from any and all, instead of fighting your own battles as a man should? You consort with savages and make war on women—"

"Silence him!" Garabito cried, and the warriors moved closer. "As for you, Señor Botello," he went on, "here ends your opposition to me. I am master here."

"You? Master here?" Ruiz cried.

"I have said it, *señor*."

"The native maid you wronged must have been the daughter of a cacique. Have you wedded her and been adopted into a tribe?"

"Silence!" Garabito snarled. "That remark will gain a minute more of torture for you, *señor*. I know how to attend to my enemies. I have said I am master here. Señor Botello's quarrel with me, and his subsequent flight, precipitated matters some. Had it not been for that and the meddling of that fool of an old fray, Felipe, you'd not have died for half a moon yet—and then you'd have gone to the world beyond together with all other whites in Darien, save for Señor Bonilla, his daughter, and myself. You have disrupted my plans somewhat, but you die the sooner because of it."

"Is this treason?" Ruiz thundered.

"Hah!" Garabito laughed. "No conspiracy is called treason unless it fails, *señor*, and this will not fail."

"You—his excellency's friend—"

"Friend? Only to serve my own purposes, *señor*. Think you for any other reason I'd be friend to such an ignorant toad? His excellency and his followers soon will pay the price for misrule. 'Tis a pretty scheme, wherein those who have oppressed the natives die, both in Antigua and in

De Balboa's camp. We save a few sailors who are in league with us. We get a cargo of gold and precious stones for delivering these good natives from the yoke of the Spaniards; we take the one ship now in the harbor at Antigua and sail away—"

"Hah! And when you get to Seville?"

"Merely a little tale of a native uprising, and we were the only ones to escape. Such a tale as will make us heroes—you perceive, *señor*? Is it not a pretty plot?"

"Such a one as I'd expect from you!" cried Botello. "And you—cacique! Are you an imbecile that you let this man fool you so? You have met the Spaniards before, eh? Think you that you can win? Can you not see that this man uses you to further his own designs? Hah! I marvel at your stupidity."

"The *señor* fails to understand," replied the cacique slowly, for he was not quick with the white man's speech. "This plan is so broad it cannot fail. We no longer fear De Balboa on the one side, or the governor on the other. Our good friend, the *señor* here, has shown us how to accomplish our ends."

"And your good friend, the *señor* there, never has been into the jungle before, as I happen to know."

"He has dealt with us through natives that could be trusted."

"And does the Head Cacique of the Great Wilderness approve of your plans?" Botello demanded. "He is a friend of the intrepid De Balboa. Dare you make attack on the Spaniards without the Great Cacique's sanction? Will he not punish you and your tribesmen with death?"

The cacique showed some nervousness at that, and Garabito opened mouth to reply, but the native chieftain got out his words first.

"Our friend, the *señor* here, has obtained the sanction of the Great Cacique," he said.

"He brought you a token, I suppose? The Great Cacique comes with his men to aid you?" Botello persisted.

"The token even now is on its way by a trusted messenger, the *señor* informs me. We do not need the aid of the Great Cacique's men in this undertaking. If we have need of more warriors, then he will furnish them."

"You are taking this Señor Garabito on faith, cacique. Mayhap he has made fools of your messengers and but leads you into a trap."

"Let this nonsense end!" Garabito thundered. "Cacique, have these two men slain and the woman taken to my hut. Señor Botello, it is fitting you die a lingering death for the troubles you have caused us. Your determination to claim a lady as bride aroused Fray Felipe, who knew some things of this conspiracy. Straightway toward his excellency hurried the fray, wherefore I was forced to hasten into the jungle with Señor Bonilla and his daughter, else even now the three of us would be hanging by our necks. You should pay for our discomforts."

"I warn you, cacique!" Botello cried, ignoring Garabito. "Harm us not until you are certain of the truth. If you displease the Great Cacique—"

The chieftain bellowed an order, and the big and dirty hand of a warrior stifled Botello's words in his throat. Another order, and Botello and Ruiz were forcibly conducted into the open air, Inez being led after them. Just outside the door they were halted, and out of the hut streamed the natives, the cacique walking between Garabito and Bonilla, and the Señorita Carlotta keeping a little in the background as one who dreads what is to come.

Now the cacique looked at his prisoners again, and Garabito stepped close and whispered in his ear.

"Let it be as the *señor* wishes," the cacique said then. "The two men shall be sent to the stake, and the woman forced to watch. After that, take the woman to the hut of the Señor Garabito."

The warriors who grasped Botello and Ruiz by their arms now forced them backward and started to lead them away.

But Inez broke from those who held her, and went down on her knees to the cacique, holding up her hands in supplication, beside herself with fear for her husband and dread of her own future.

"Cacique! Cacique!" she cried. "Beware what you do! Beware how you obey the orders of the man who stands beside you!"

The cacique looked down at her—at her tear-stained face, her extended arms. Something on one of those thorn-scratched arms caught and reflected the light of the sun. The cacique took a quick step forward and looked closer, and grasped her by a wrist. Botello snarled as the savage touched his bride, and tried to get forward, but his captors held him back. Yet there was no need for his alarm.

"Look—look!" the cacique was crying to a lesser chieftain who stood behind him.

He held Inez's arm in a viselike grip; the fingers of his other hand grasped at the bracelet Botello had given her before their marriage, the love token Inez had used in her rebuke of Carlotta Bonilla that day in the plaza at Antigua.

"Look!" he cried again. "It is a token—it is the symbol of the Great Cacique!"

And, in that instant, Botello remembered that indeed it was, and had been given him on a day a year or more before by the Great Cacique himself as a mark of favor. He had not thought at the time that there was special significance in the gift, nor was he sure of it now, yet his heart sang because the cacique believed it to be so.

"I warned you, cacique!" he cried now; and he stood straight and looked the chieftain in the eyes. "Lead us on to death, if you think it well—your own punishment will be the greater!"

The bewildered cacique looked at the bracelet again, the bauble of gold that bore in scratchings a mystic symbol. He lifted Inez to her feet, and with his own hands removed her bonds. He cried an

order, and women came running, and were told to get fresh clothing for the *señora*, and food—anything she desired.

"What do you?" Garabito thundered.

"As to the men, I am not sure," the cacique replied. "But, as to this woman, she bears the symbol of the Great Cacique, and hence must be under his protection. In this village she receives naught but respect and honor. You have no word to say now regarding her, *señor*; she has been treated too cruelly already."

"It is a trick!" Garabito stormed.

"I am not sure," the cacique replied. "At least we honor her until we have word from the Great Cacique that it is a trick. I am not mistrusting you, *Señor Garabito*, and neither am I allowing a woman who wears the Great Cacique's sign to be molested, or slaying men who may possess his friendship."

"You would release these Spaniards?" Garabito cried.

"No; nor slay them now, *señor*. We shall hold them as prisoners until we are certain of all things."

Now hope was born anew in Botello's heart, and in the hearts of Ruiz and Inez. For dead men are but dead men—but prisoners always have the chance of escape.

CHAPTER IX.

CARLOTTA SPEAKS.

THEIR prison hut was a poor one, especially for two men and a woman who might be friends of the Great Cacique, but Inez had insisted that she be placed with the other two, and the chieftain was anxious to do as she desired; this was the only vacant hut that would serve, and Inez had accepted it, the cacique making long apologies because it was not better.

It was no more than ten feet square; its walls were constructed of mud and rocks and vines, and had been baked long in the tropic sun, hence were almost as granite; there were no windows, but

there was an aperture in the top to allow the escape of foul air and smoke, and there was a low, narrow door. The dirt floor was filthy, but the cacique had skins and palm fronds scattered upon it. And, if the hut was poor, the service was not, for the chieftain made up in food and supplies what he lacked in residence.

In the hut they sat as the quick tropical night descended, Inez and Botello side by side, and Ruiz across from them, and ate the food the cacique had furnished. Before the door two native guards were on watch.

"It could have been far more serious," Botello said, "yet it is bad enough as it is. We live, but are close prisoners. The chieftain, no doubt, already has sent runners to the Great Cacique, and in a short time he will learn we have no right to superior protection. Then will our end come in short order."

"Wherefore," said Ruiz, "it behooves us to make escape at the earliest possible moment and continue our journey to the camp of De Balboa."

"Our duty lies in more directions than one," Botello reminded him. "We must escape to save life—*sí!* We must escape, also, to give the warning of this uprising, else renegades triumph and good Spaniards die. This hut stands in the center of a large clearing. Thirty feet from the door is a roaring fire. Before that door are two sturdy native guards. We cannot burrow through the walls, and there are no windows. We have neither rapier nor poniard. The fine *Señor Garabito*, also, watches to see we do not escape, and also for a chance to poison us, had he the courage and the means. It may be called a predicament."

"We live," Ruiz reminded him. "Violence will avail us naught here and now, especially since we have no weapons with which to practise it. But wit and strategy remain, thank the saints!"

Botello drew Inez closer to him and touched with his lips the bauble of gold that had gained them respite.

"And we have love, also, and incen-

tive, therefore, to make good our escape," he said softly.

"Having seen true wedded love these last two days, I have decided to get me a wife if ever I escape this entanglement," Ruiz said, laughing. "Were there a younger *Señorita Malpartida* as beautiful and good as this one you have won, my friend—"

He laughed at the blushes that suffused Inez's face, and got up to walk to the open doorway and look out at the guards. A torch burned in one corner of the hut, and they made no effort to extinguish it, for darkness would avail them nothing now, and might cause their guards to be suspicious, and, moreover, the light from the big fire streamed into the room.

They might have whispered certain plans, then, and taken counsel, but there came an interruption. Two figures approached across the clearing, and one of the guards went forward to meet them. There was a parley, and the guard returned with the other two. One—a native warrior—remained standing a few feet away; the other approached and stood in the doorway.

Botello got to his feet and helped Inez up also, for he did not know what the arrival of this stranger might portend. A long robe of woven grass was thrown aside, and the firelight played over the features of *Señorita Carlotta Bonilla*.

For a moment none spoke; and then Ruiz took a step forward as if to inquire her business, but stopped when he heard Botello's voice.

"So you have come to gloat, *señorita*?" he asked. "I would be charitable to a lady, yet you make it difficult."

"No doubt, *señor*," replied a tremulous voice, "I merit your ill thoughts. I merit, no doubt, the ill thoughts of every honest and loyal man and woman. Hear me, I beg of you, before you speak further."

"We are listening, *señorita*," Botello said. Inez drew closer to his side, not speaking at all, and Ruiz leaned against the opposite wall. But, when she spoke,

it was in a low tone that the native guards could not overhear, and so Ruiz approached nearer.

"I have come to help as I may," she said. "Wait, *señor*—do not turn away. What I have done may not be forgiven by loyal persons, yet perchance there will be forgiveness elsewhere in time. I am glad that by a subterfuge you have been spared for the present. I doubt whether you can make escape. But, if you should, there are certain things you should know."

She stopped, but none of them spoke, merely stood looking at her and waiting for her to continue.

"You are making it difficult," she said, "but I merit that, too, I suppose. Messengers have gone to the Great Cacique, and when they return with denial of your protection the chieftain's first intent will be carried out. Whether *Señor Garabito* really has the sanction of the Great Cacique on his enterprise, I do not know. Perchance he has—and perchance not. But this local chieftain will not wait for that, fearing all his plans will go amiss."

"What then?" Ruiz demanded.

"Because *Garabito* has told him those at *Antigua* know of the conspiracy, the chieftain has decided to visit *De Balboa's* camp first. The natives will catch *De Balboa's* scattered men off guard and slay them all. Then they may turn toward *Antigua* and fight the governor's forces, knowing that *De Balboa* cannot attack them in the rear. They will avoid being between two fires."

"Hah!" Botello cried. "*De Balboa* and his brave men—my comrades—honorable *caballeros* to be slaughtered because of a renegade!"

"Listen, *señor*, and do not interrupt, for I have scant time here. The cacique allowed me to come, since I told him it would be proper to show such a courtesy to a *señora* who wore the Great Cacique's symbol. He will be suspicious if I linger long."

"Proceed, *señorita*."

"The plans are made. The natives

start for De Balboa's camp at dawn. Unless the men on the shore of the Great South Sea are warned, nothing can save them. Were they warned, they could prepare and make good defense."

"What of us?" Ruiz asked.

"At dawn you are to be taken deep into the jungle, to a secluded place, and there kept under close guard until the chieftain returns from the raid on De Balboa. By that time messengers will have returned from the Great Cacique, and disposition will be made of you there. I can tell you this, yet I cannot aid you to escape."

"You would, were it possible?" Botello asked.

"*Sí, señor!*" she responded. "I regret many things I have done. I do not regret what love I had for you, but that it made me do unmaidenly things. I regret what animosity I had for the woman you have taken to wife. Most of all, I regret that I turned traitor with others."

"Why these regrets now, *señorita*?" Botello asked, scarcely believing in her sincerity.

"In Antigua, my thoughts were wrong," she said. "My mode of living was wrong. I have been my father's daughter, and he always is in the midst of intrigue. I looked forward to riches and place. I did not think, *señor*, of how they would be gained, of how men would die. Out here in the wilderness things appear differently, somehow. I realize here, *señor*, with what sort of persons I am allied. Can you not understand? Am I the first woman whose real soul did not awaken to better things until after she had been lost forever?"

"*Señorita*, I am sorrowful that it is so," Botello said. "If now you are speaking truth—"

Inez stopped him, for she went forward now, and put out her hand. Womanlike, she could read woman better than a man.

"I believe you, *señorita*," she said. "We are in dire extremity here, yet I would not change places with you. May

the future hold something of good for you and yours."

"And you forgive me my words and acts?" *Señorita* Carlotta asked of Botello.

"Against me and mine, *señorita*. I cannot forgive you that you turned your back upon your king. That is the unpardonable sin."

"You are a soldier—hence I understand," she replied softly. "Yet it is good to be forgiven some things. Escape, if you can. My good wishes go with you. Escape, and warn De Balboa and his men."

"And you—" Inez asked.

"I remain with my father to the end; I am as guilty as he is, *señora*. I know now that failure is coming. The good saints would not let such an enterprise succeed. The pride born in my blood has recalled me to honesty too late, perchance, but it will at least teach me to be brave when all is lost. There will be no escape. Carlotta Bonilla did not know how to live—she will know how to die!"

"*Señorita*, I beg of you—" Ruiz began.

But she had wrapped the robe around her and hurried from the hut. They saw her join the native and walk back across the clearing, her head bent on her breast.

CHAPTER X.

IN PARADISE.

NOW it was black midnight without moon. The torch glowed feebly; the fire in the clearing had been rekindled and its light flooded the hut. Botello and Ruiz spoke in whispers, while Inez, sitting between them, listened.

"Escape we must!" Ruiz said. "Warn De Balboa we must! Were we free now, we'd have but a few hours start of them."

"But how—" Botello asked.

"Here is where wit and strategy come in, good friend. I have studied natives somewhat. They are curious individuals. Do you stand at one side of the door, good Bartolmeo, and be ready to do your part at the proper time."

Botello stood at one side of the door. Ruiz went to the doorway and looked out. One of the native guards was asleep; the other paced back and forth ten feet away.

Down upon his knees in the dirt of the doorway went Ruiz, and his hand fumbled at his belt. The guard stopped pacing to watch. Ruiz removed his hand, chuckled—and two dice fell at his feet.

Now he bent forward, paying no attention to the guard, and cast the dice. He chuckled again, picked them up, cast again. The guard walked closer, and Botello kept to the shadows. The light of the fire showed the guard that here was an insane Spaniard playing with something the like of which the native never had seen before. Perchance it was bad medicine the Spaniard was making. Perhaps kneeling in the dirt and hurling little white cubes and chuckling was a religious rite, an invocation to the Spaniard's gods to assist him and deliver him from the heathen.

The guard stepped nearer and voiced guttural phrases, but Ruiz did not even look up at him. He cast the dice again, stretched forward and regarded them gravely. Then he chuckled once more, this time in an excited manner, and for the first time looked up at the guard, and then pointed down at the dice.

The guard bent over to see. And Botello sprang!

Long before Botello had guessed Ruiz's plan. And when he sprang his hands clasped the native's throat and pressed with all their strength, and his knee went into the small of the savage's back and remained there. A wrench, and the guard was inside the hut; another moment of choking, and he was unconscious. Botello took his spear and stone knife.

"Quickly, my friend!" Ruiz whispered.

He grasped Inez by the hand. With Ruiz in the lead they sprang from the hut into the bright light of the clearing. There was quick action now. As Botello dashed with Inez to the edge of the jun-

gle, Ruiz caught the spear from his hand. He ran to the sleeping guard and thrust the weapon home, taking his spear.

It was less than a hundred feet to the blackness of the jungle's edge, yet it seemed leagues to the fugitives. Every second they expected an uproar behind them, swift pursuit. Breathlessly they ran over the rough ground, stumbling over roots and creepers, ready for quick work if they encountered a native sentinel. On and on—and then the refuge of the blackness was reached!

There was no time now to move forward with caution and keep far from the trails. Botello and Ruiz shielded Inez between them as they fought the undergrowth, and presently they came to the main jungle trail and hurried along it. The trail was narrow, overgrown in places—it was a continual struggle to keep in it and make progress. In time they reached the crest of a slope and paused for a moment to look back. In the distance was the reflection of the fire, and it seemed they could hear savage shouts.

Nor was there any sparing of Inez now. De Balboa was to be saved, and none could be spared in the saving. When the dawn came they had gone some distance, yet not so much that they felt satisfaction. There always was danger of meeting hostile natives. And the band behind them, they knew, would make such speed through country familiar to them that they would gain rapidly.

So on they went through the morning, not stopping to rest or eat, drinking water from their gourds when they must, the perspiration streaming from them, hands and faces scratched by thorns and rough brush, feet sore and weary. At times Botello carried Inez in his arms, and at times he let Ruiz carry her. At the top of every hill they looked behind as far as possible, searching for signs that would tell them a large body of men was passing through the jungle.

"Perchance they have not sent runners out after us," Ruiz said. "They may think we went toward Antigua."

"Garabito would know better than that," replied Botello.

"Then they would not believe we would keep to the trail. They'd think we penetrated the jungle to hide."

"Yet, once on the trail, they will make all speed possible. They must strike De Balboa, the cacique knows, before the enthusiasm of his savages dies."

Now they struck a stretch of bad country where the trail scarcely could be followed. Through it they toiled, carrying Inez half the time, and by mid-afternoon they reached the crest of another slope. There they paused to rest and to look backward again.

"*Dios!*" Ruiz cried.

A mile behind them the jungle grass waved as if driven by a hurricane, and there was not a breath of wind. The sun flashed from the tips of spears. The grass ripples ran forward toward the slope—here and there natives appeared, leading the tribe, spying out the land.

"They must have traveled like the wind," Ruiz said.

"And so must we!"

Even as he spoke, Botello picked Inez up again and ran down the slope. Before them was a narrow valley almost free of tropical growth, and beyond that was another hill where the dense jungle began again. To reach the side of the hill was their endeavor, and there to bear away to one side and seek a hiding-place. It seemed impossible for them to maintain the lead of the savages and reach De Balboa in time to warn him. At least they had tried—it was honorable to think only of saving themselves now.

The bare valley was half a mile wide, and they rushed across it as speedily as possible, breathing in gasps, their hearts pounding at their ribs. Before they reached the jungle's edge they heard a chorus of cries behind them, and, looking backward, saw that they had been observed. There seemed but a small chance of escape now, yet there was some hope left. Once in that dense undergrowth, they could turn either to right

or left, and there were a multitude of places where three could hide.

They reached the protecting growth, and there they paused a moment to glance behind. They saw the tribesmen gathering in the valley, saw them stop and collect in groups, and then begin to maneuver.

"What means that?" Botello exclaimed.

The answer came from the other direction—came from half a thousand savage throats—and down the side of the hill through the brush came painted warriors, rank upon rank.

"We are trapped!" Ruiz cried. "I know those tall fellows, good Bartolmeo. They are the Great Cacique's men! They are here to form junction with these others and aid in exterminating De Balboa. We are done, comrade—we are between the two forces! We can but die like men!"

Again they stood with backs against a rock and Inez crouching at their feet behind them. Nearer and nearer the Great Cacique's men approached, and those in the valley held their positions. The juncture of the two forces was to be made there in the open, they supposed. Spears in hand they stood, ready to sell their lives as dearly as the god of battle willed. They had exchanged glances regarding Inez, and that was enough—she would not be left to grace the hut of a cacique.

The Great Cacique's first line of warriors was within fifty yards now. Botello glanced around again, but there seemed no way to escape to a hiding-place.

The brush to one side cracked—they whirled with spears uplifted. The head of a native appeared. A gasp sounded.

"Master! Master!" a voice called.

The native fell at Botello's feet; it was Tarama.

"To see you again—and the *señora*—and your friend!" he cried. "You did not think ill of me, master? I did what I thought was best—as you had instructed me to do."

"Tamara! What mean you?" Botello demanded, with all trust in the native, though Ruiz held spear ready. "Quick! You have scant time to tell your story. Perchance you can die with us as becomes a brave man!"

"Die, master? You are safe—do you not understand?"

"Speak—speak!"

"When I left you I was taken captive, master. I heard then of a conspiracy. It was two days before I could escape, and then I knew you would have continued your journey. And what had you told me often, master? You had said a good soldier thinks always of the great majority, had you not? That the army, the king's cause, came before relatives or friends, or even life! So I carried the warning, master—"

"The warning—" Botello cried.

"First to the Great Cacique, who is friendly with De Balboa. He knew naught of the conspiracy, and sent his warriors to punish these other tribesmen and stop it. And then I hurried on to the camp on the Great South Sea. Hence the Great Cacique's warriors have come in time to save you."

"Hah! And if they had not—"

"Yet would you have been saved, master mine! For—look to the right, master! What see you there? Has Tamara done well?"

And then the cry of Botello rang out so that it could be heard by the savages in the valley below, and the cry of Ruiz echoed his, and Inez clapped her hands for sudden gladness, thinking of no other immediate way to express it.

For, to the right, the sun tried hard to glisten from the tarnished breastplates of good men of Spain, *caballeros* in tatters and rags, but with blades clean and sharp; and at their head strode one like a king, who threw wide his arms in greeting and smiled beneath his great mustache at sight of Bartolmeo Botello.

"Hah, comrade! Thrice welcome! And what is it I hear told of how you stole a bride?"

Then the great De Balboa held a laughing, sobbing, begrimed, and weary *caballero* in his strong arms.

A sunset of red and gold!

Bartolmeo Botello stood beneath a giant palm, Inez clasped in his arms. Below them were the scattered huts of De Balboa's men and his ship-yard on the shore of the Rio Sabanas, where it flowed into the Great South Sea the leader had found. In the distance that sea gleamed in the dying sun.

"It was my wish to be here at this time, beloved," Botello said in a low voice. "I was spared the killing of him, yet once he was an honorable *caballero*, and I could not watch him swing on the gallows even for treason."

He stooped and touched her lips with his, glad to see that the smiles and dimples already were coming back into the face he loved so well. Three days had they been in De Balboa's camp, and already she was beloved of all.

And when he raised his head again he saw a man toiling up the slope toward him. Botello bent forward and shaded his eyes against the dying sun.

"'Tis Felipe!" he cried. "'Tis Fray Felipe, beloved! Now is my cup of happiness full!"

The fray raised his hands in blessing.

"I am glad, my son, that you have been spared, together with your bride and your friend," he said. "Honorable men generally win through, I find. I have but come from listening to the pleadings of a dishonorable one for mercy. In the wilderness I found the bodies of Señor Bonilla and his daughter—suicides. Such is the end of treason! The governor sent me out to stay this uprising, since I have some small influence with the natives. I have worked hard, first with the tribes near to Antigua, and so was delayed reaching the Great South Sea. I was overjoyed when they told me you were here, and made haste to greet you. For I bear messages—"

"Messages?" Botello asked.

"Two, *señor*. One is from his excellency, who bids me tell you he will welcome you royally to Antigua. His one regret, he says, is that you did not slay Señor Garabito when you had your little duel. The other is from an old man, Señor Malpartida. 'Tell my daughter and my new son that my arms are open and awaiting them,' he said. 'I wait the day of their return.'"

Fray Felipe was making his way slowly back down the hill. The dusk was deepening. On the bank of the river a fire had been lighted.

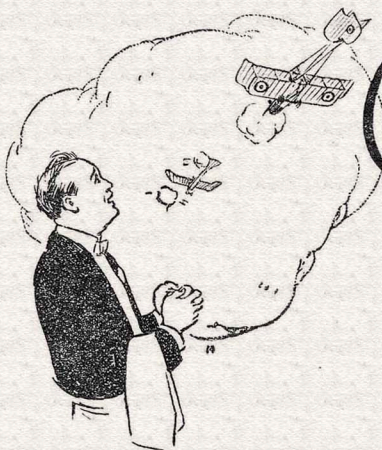
"It seems we have been in peril for an age, beloved," Botello said.

He looked down upon the mean huts, at the neighboring swamp, at the dense jungle. Dank and dirty it looked after Seville—even after Antigua. But he knew brave and loyal hearts were there, though the buildings were but huts with floors of earth, and food was not of the best, and there was small comfort for either man or tender woman. Dirty and dank it looked, and yet—

"Now we are in paradise!" he affirmed and clasped his bride to him again.

Which shows that everything depends upon the view-point, after all.

(The end.)



Courage

by

Olin L. Lyman

I HAVE always worshiped courage. I possess it myself. I am a waiter.

It takes courage to become a waiter. I can see you raising superficial eyebrows. And in that very fact lies one of the compensations of my vocation. For, having waited consistently enough to climb into the more polite circles, I know offhand the definition of "superficial," whereas you may have to look in the dictionary for it.

Pardon this digression, inspired by a passing thought of many men I help daily into their coats who know less than I.

The knowledge of this fact I am obliged, by the ethics of my profession, to studiously conceal from them. Herein lies proof that it takes courage to remain a waiter after becoming one. My tongue is locked: I can only look my superiority to such patrons.

Such men probably regard us as hardly human. I mean the men who snap "Here!" to me, and growl "Check!" at the close of their gorging. But if their brains had attained to the dignity of thinking, they could not but emulate me in the acquirement of culture. This, if it meets no better purpose, may at least serve as a cloak for ignorance. For, mark

me, I treat these fellows as if they *were* human.

I have always worshiped courage, even as a boy. In my teens, in the little up-State village, I haunted the public library. I devoured the "Lives" of Napoleon, of Wellington, and of Andrew Jackson. I read and reread Carlyle on "Heroes and Hero Worship," and wept over the pulsing pages of Stephen Crane's deathless "Red Badge of Courage."

With contemporaneous events I was also in sympathy. I thrilled in reading of Theodore Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill. To my reverent and idealistic eyes, the eyes of youth in the dawn, a Rough Rider hat was a sort of first cousin to the Flag. When the news came of Dewey's victory at Manila, I remember that I went behind the house and stood on my head for two consecutive minutes. And in the act I felt a solemn exaltation, a welling patriotism born of the conviction that, somehow, I was doing it for my country.

Nor was my vision restricted to the examples of physical courage. I read, too, of those wonderful struggles through which genius has ever passed to win recognition, and I did mental obeisance to this moral courage. Reveling in the accounts of these men, I fully recognized the force of the poet's lines:

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight;
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward through the night.

And thinking on these things, my soul, invoking courage as an armor, stretched on tiptoe like a wistful dancer, that much closer to the stars.

So, imagining, dreaming, studying, I grew toward manhood in the little town. Just after I had graduated from the high school my parents died, and my future maintenance was for my own solving. In this crisis the Lorelei of cities seemed to call me to fortune and to fame.

I arrived in New York with a bag and a worn trunk. The trunk contained some

modest water-colors done by my own hand, which sketches I had thought to sell. The trunk still contains them.

I shall never forget the chill which froze the marrow at the words of the first dealer to whom I offered the efforts. There was no second.

Said he: "Young man, you might possibly paint a fence, but it's a cinch you would never be paid for the job."

It took courage not to believe him, yet this I contrived. I retained faith in myself. I still believe in those sketches. Whether anybody would agree with me—I am indifferent to that. Nobody has ever seen them since that momentous day. And because I am busy with other matters, there is no need of disturbing them.

I carried the sketches back to my room and went out to think. This was a necessary function. I had my clothes, of country make, and five dollars; only these and nothing more.

Suddenly I saw a sign in a restaurant window, "Waiter Wanted."

Right then and there I proved for my life's span my title to the highest courage. Within me there began a struggle which wielded me strength to put aside the dreams of my youth. In that hour I became a man.

I walked around the block several times revolving the situation, fusing my forces to decide my problem. Could I put away my beautiful dreams that lured me to the peaks of life? The way thereto was one of struggle; this I knew. Not only did the books I had read accentuate this fact, but the unfeeling words of the art-dealer who refused to see my genius, these further emphasized the grisly truth. Many a man, who was later recognized as a power, had early almost starved to death in a garret.

But my plight, if I followed the beckoning finger of the higher ambition, might be even worse. It was evident, from the caustic words of the dealer, that it would be long before my incipient mastership was discovered. And in the

interim I would be likely to *quite* starve to death.

Had I any right to consider what amounted to a form of self-destruction? Rather, was it not my duty to take my place, if need be, in an humbler niche in the Scheme, bravely putting aside my dreams, and honestly and consistently climbing in the lesser realm of effort?

I knew that I could satisfactorily perform the duties which fall to a waiter. I had always helped my mother with the dishes, and I had helped her wait on table when there was company. I had trained a naturally retentive memory through learning many poems, also "Spartacus to the Gladiators," for mental profit and for public recitation. So I knew that I could take a whole tableful of orders without a slip in communicating them to the *chef*.

So, resolutely thrusting away the dreams of selfish gain, my spirit was girt with courage for the subsequent service of humanity. I lifted my chin, and entering the restaurant, applied for that waiting job.

It had been taken while I was circling the block, making my momentous decision.

But my will is adamant when roused. I had resolved to become a waiter. I walked till I found, on the East Side, another restaurant window bearing the sign of "Waiter Wanted." I obtained the job.

Immediately I began a liberal education in terms which, in politer circles since, I have all but forgotten. Yet in my memory they retain a certain dim picturesqueness, all pointing to the constant metropolitan trend of saving syllables. "Watch step!" and "Le' 'm out!" howls the guard in the subway. "Combination!" yelps the man in the white jacket behind the lunch counter, in which four syllables he has saved four words; namely, "ham and egg sandwich!"

You will see, therefore, that I began waiting at the bottom. I studied my art as, had I elected to climb toward the stars, I would have studied painting or music or sculpture. And this is why I

have been for a dozen years now at one of the best-known restaurants in Manhattan, where patrons, thank God, have never heard of the anti-tipping movement; this fact, by the way, allowing me to exercise less concern over the high cost of living than is felt by some of the patrons.

Through attention to business and to thrift, I have a pleasant home in Yonkers. To would-be humorists who inquire tritely, "What are Yonkers?" I respond that they are a real home town. There, my wife and children live in comfort that New Yorkers would esteem luxury. My boy and girl are in high school. They will go later to Yale and Vassar, respectively.

I have also a bank-account of quite respectable proportions. I have for years served several wealthy financiers. They have never yet given me anything but straight tips.

I have spoken of my courage. You now know that I possess it. Yet in my studies—through all these years of waiting I have pursued them—I have noted with infinite regret one fact. Books I have studied, and those far more vivid documents, men, and I have sorrowed to find that always, with the reddest of heroism, there is inevitably mixed something of the orange of fear.

I frankly confess that I possess it myself, I who had strength to put away my dreams and forge to affluence in a menial position. And with me, very subtly and sneeringly and mockingly, it lies coiled within my heart. And sometimes in the night it questions me, asking:

"Would you dare to resign your post to-morrow, and walk as a free man into the restaurant next day to be served by others, while you debated with yourself what new start you would make in the world?"

And I have to confess that so dear have the fleshpots won by waiting grown to me that I could not summon the courage to do this.

Therefore, knowing so well mine own

weakness, I have not scorn but pity for that of others, recognizing the great human family for the divine mixture it is of substance and bluff in equal portions. I have in fancy beheld the soul of man as a double entity in which the Siamese twins of bravery and fear are always wrestling, and only that mystery which we call circumstance can reveal the winner.

So my eyes have been alert for that fate which should reveal the man of gallant seeming as a coward, and the march of the years had made me much of a cynic until—

And here, after much of speaking of myself—for which you must forgive me, since the practise of my profession is conducive to the development of egoism—I must get to my story, one that will remain deathless in my memory. For it digs to the very roots of values and holds them bared for the world to see.

All my life, though knowing through observation that the warp and woof of truth and error are as weirdly mixed as some of the cocktails which I serve to my up-to-date patrons, I had sought the perfect hero though without expecting to find him.

He had come to my mind to be as misty, as splendidly nebulous, as a superman, that dream of the future that can come only when men's destructive passions are chloroformed by right thinking and a day of one hundred per cent constructive efficiency is possible.

Yet, having in the beginning laid aside all my other dreams, I had a right to this one, especially as it held nothing of self seeking, but only wistfully sought a *rara avis* that would supply the brightest gem in the crown of humanity.

So, only last night there came to me in quest a supernal exaltation, and my spirit lifted as if on wings.

It was a little dinner given by a returned war hero to five of his New York friends. The prospect brought to me no preliminary tingling of the pulses. When the head-waiter assigned me to the Pink

Room, and told me of the identity of the diners, I smiled a slight ironic smile.

These hero dinners were all alike. Stuffy, important, old bluffers, with chests thrown out like those of physical-culture teachers, eager to exaggerate their exploits in circumstances wherein they had been lucky enough not to reveal the fear that was in them! I was so tired of them! Naturally I looked for a repetition of history.

But how different, how refreshing, how welling was the pleasure that came to me and to the others whom I served!

I permitted myself a discreet stare of amaze when I realized the *hero* in that group was the youngest, freshest-faced, most boyish of them all. Captain Hugo Lynn, son of a New York millionaire and a member of the American flying squadron of birdmen fighting for France, had been wounded in action and was home on furlough. He proposed to sail back to France in a fortnight.

Four of the guests at the table, I gathered, were his club friends. The fifth was a French lieutenant, a comrade of his on the Somme, who had been wounded at the same time Lynn had received his injuries. Lynn had persuaded him to accompany him back to America till he was fit for service again.

Hugo Lynn, who still had but little use of his left arm and hand, had a fascinating personality. Blond, with quiet blue eyes and thick brown hair, he possessed a physique which clearly revealed why he had been chosen by Camp as All-American football tackle for three years during his university career; this, combined with the perfect coordination of nerve and muscle that was later to distinguish his work in the air as on the gridiron.

His face—you have all seen it in the newspapers, but such cuts tell nothing. I, who have seen it at close range, can sum it for you in a sentence. His was a face that men and women and little children could trust. And it was set against hero worship.

Now, from the first of the little dinner

I, who have seen so many of them progress from bluepoints and cocktails to cheese and crackers and *liqueurs*, noted a peculiar difference from previous functions of the same character. I learned early from the conversation that his friends had wished to give *him* the dinner before his return, and to invite many others in order that they might laud him. Upon this plan he had vigorously set his foot, and had, instead, tendered the dinner himself, only inviting "the nearest and dearest," and had taken this plan expressly to avoid the hero truckling which his soul abhorred.

So, when Lieutenant François d'Arcy, his brother in arms, forgot his vigorous instructions prior to the event and, warmed by champagne, started an enthusiastic description of the air battle which had brought to Lynn international fame, he was squelched with savage emphasis by his host. And when the others sought from time to time to bring this stirring episode into the conversation, the captain's manner became like that of a cave-man.

"Don't talk shop!" he roared once, his right hand clenched in his masses of hair and his blue eyes glaring as once they glared into those of opposing linemen on football fields. "So help me, if you fellows don't shut up on that stuff, there's going to be a free-for-all! Let's talk about the Epworth League, Bryan—anything but that!"

And he guided the conversation into new channels. No, that is not the proper word. He grabbed it by the neck, dragged it about a block, and then kept it there by main force. His laugh rang like a boy; he talked of politics, of finance, of golf; he was so unlike the usual hero, smugly accepting homage, that I moved about my duties in deepening amaze and hungrily listening to the conversation.

But at last a summons came for him to the telephone-booth. He excused himself.

"The governor was going to call me

from Buffalo, gentlemen," he said. "I will return shortly."

The moment he had left Lieutenant François d'Arcy triumphantly pounced upon the company. There was a look of triumph in his black eyes.

"Our friend, he has—what you call—gagged me, *messieurs!*" he exclaimed. "But here, that he is gone—thank the good God—I will give you the grand recital. All France, she knows that he is the hero *Américain magnifique!*"

Lieutenant François should have been an actor. In a moment he was out of that dining-room, and we were with him. We stood with him and the French on the battle-ground of the Somme, gazing up at a gray sky. And we saw the drama of the sky of which we had previously merely read.

We beheld the two black beetles of death winging from the German lines. We heard the purr of Lynn's machine; we saw the long run on the ground, the flight into the air. High above, we saw the three winging, stabbing, piercing, heard the reports of the machine guns.

Down came one German machine, then the other, to chaos and finality. Then, with a concerted gasp of horror, we saw Lynn's machine swoop downward as he lost control; saw it righted a quarter-mile above the earth and sweep to safety in a long, curving flight; saw Lynn alight, calm, smiling, unperturbed, with one arm hanging useless.

"Ah, *messieurs,*" cried Lieutenant d'Arcy, his eyes raised heavenward and in his voice a passionate thrill, "it was as if he had returned from a walk of peace, with a dog frolicking at his knee. While we shouted till we were hoarse and sought to carry him on our shoulders, he turned red like a boy that is spanked, and said he: 'Give *mé* a cigarette and quit your—what you call, 'kidding!' It was an exhibition of the courage supreme, adorable, absolute!"

"You *would* do it, wouldn't you?"

Hugo Lynn's voice was a knife cutting the spell that bound us all. I, in my cor-

ner, transfixed like the rest, turned almost stupidly, transferred in a flash from the far battle-field to this room in a New York restaurant. It was uncanny, this resolving of the masked, hooded, gauntleted figure of death, traversing ether like an eagle, to the stalwart form in evening dress, his blond face crimsoned and sheepish as that of a boy caught throwing paper wads in school.

Amid absolute silence he closed the door through which he had come in time to hear the last of the lieutenant's story, and resumed his seat at the table, facing my corner. In his manner was now that same strained, awkward self-consciousness that marred it whenever his gallantry was mentioned in his hearing. He glared at D'Arcy.

"We are nearly through here," he growled. "Then I can take you outside and quietly kill you!"

D'Arcy spread his hands with a resigned gesture and elevated his eyebrows.

"As you will, *mon ami*," he said. "But with my last breath I shall protest that I have told the truth. You, little one, are afraid of nothing!"

Now there was in the party a wag named Billy Land. In this moment he made history.

"Lieutenant d'Arcy is *almost* right," he qualified. "But there's one thing, as a New Yorker born and bred, that he dare not do."

Captain Lynn's quick eyes flashed dangerously. He rose to the bait as Land intended.

"What is that?" he demanded almost fiercely.

Land bent forward with a whisper audible only to those sitting around the table. But to me, standing in my corner, the words were as distinct as if they had been shouted. For I am expert in lip-reading.

Land's challenge was a deadly one:

"*I'll bet you new hats for the crowd you dare not leave this restaurant without tipping the waiter!*"

Captain Lynn stared. Then he frowned while the others watched him eagerly. After a moment he drew a long breath.

"You're on!" he assented quietly.

He had met the test, the acid test of courage. I had difficulty in retaining my professional calm. I felt a wild impulse to shout my approval, my delight at finding the perfect hero. But impulses are not for the men of my profession. I remained as I was.

For the remainder of the dinner Captain Lynn was gay. There were sparks of malice in his eyes whenever he gazed at either Billy Land or me. There was about him an air of the ultimate assurance; one could tell that anything undertaken by him, even this, would be carried out with a firm hand. I was so proud of him!

They rose to leave. I watched them go; Captain Lynn, absolutely ignoring me, was in the rear. I started to pick up the things. I was whistling a little tune popular when I was younger, "My Hero."

By Captain Lynn's plate was a gold cigarette-case. Just as I espied it there was a step at the door. The captain entered hurriedly.

"Ah!" said he, noting the case in my hand. "I *thought* I left it here!"

Crossing to me, he took it and, thrusting a crumpled something in my hand, turned away.

An instant I stood stunned, looking down at those twisted bills. My face must have been a living pain. The last of my dreams, that splendid illusion of a perfect heroism, tumbled in chaos about my ears.

Gathering myself, I leaped like an antelope. I caught him at the door, pulling him back before his waiting friends could see him. I pressed his money in his hand.

"I beg you, I implore you, to take it back!" I whispered. "You'd have to tell them—and only God and you and I know—that you are a coward!"

Opportunity

by Edgar Franklin

Author of "The Adopted Father," *The Captain Velvet Stories*, "The Ladder Jinx," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

ANTHONY FRY, proprietor of Fry's Liniment, in spite of the advice of his friend, Johnson Boller, insists upon thrusting Opportunity in the way of a poor young man they meet at a prizefight. The young man, David Prentiss, after going with Fry and Boller to the former's rooms in the exclusive Hotel Lasande, is detained there by Fry, who is determined that David will accept the offer of a career which he, Fry, is prepared to pay for. Fry, a model bachelor, is shocked to discover that "David" is a very pretty girl named Mary Dalton, daughter of Dalton, the "Liniment King." She admits she is engaged to marry Robert Vining, a young lawyer friend of Fry's!

CHAPTER IX.

CRIME?

ENTERING, the owner of Fry's Imperial Liniment had been justifiably annoyed. Twenty seconds after entering, Mary's obvious excitement had caused the annoyance to give place to not very interested wonder; but now Mary had claimed all his attention and the annoyance was all gone. Indeed, as a quantity to claim one's whole attention Mary had been a success from the very beginning.

Anthony Fry, then, scowled flitting incredulity at her; and the absurdity of being incredulous of one who panted and shook as did Mary becoming at once apparent, Anthony paled somewhat.

"I cannot—believe that such an astonishing coincidence—" he began.

"What you believe or don't believe doesn't interest me!" Mary said swiftly. "Did I hear him talking about that wretched fight last night?"

"Er—yes."

"He was there?"

"Of course."

"Well, it's the same Robert Vining!" Mary whispered. "Get him out of here!"

"But—"

"Don't argue about it! Get him out of here!" said Mary. "Do you suppose I want him to come wandering down this way and *find me*?"

"He will not do that, because—"

"How do you know whether he will or not?" Mary demanded hotly. "Why did he have to come here? It's all his fault—the whole thing's his fault! If he hadn't refused to take me to that beastly old fight and made such a time about it, I'd never have made up my mind to go, anyway!"

"So that's what happened?" Anthony muttered.

"That is what happened. Now get him out of here!" Mary directed. "And do it quickly!"

After all, the unlucky little coincidence was not nearly so serious as she seemed to think. Anthony smiled quite calmly.

"He will not stay very long," said

This story began in the *All-Story Weekly* for January 20.

he, "and when he is ready to go I will not detain him, of course. But I can't very well go in and order him out, you know."

Mary, bosom heaving still, looked straight at him with burning eyes.

"Mr. Fry," she said solemnly, "I've always lived too much out doors and boxed and shot and paddled and ridden too much to be given to hysterics. The only time I ever had hysterics was the night they thought dad had been killed—but *that* night, once I'd started, the neighbors came out on the street two blocks away to see what was the matter!"

"I don't understand?"

"You will," Mary said, controlling herself with visible difficulty. "You've made me stand enough since last night, and there are some things I cannot—some things I will not even try to stand! I tell you honestly that if Bob isn't out of this flat in two minutes I'm going into a fit of hysterics that will have the reserves piling into this sanctified hotel just as surely as the sun is shining!"

"Miss Mary—" faltered Anthony Fry.

Mary's hands clenched in the most peculiar manner.

"Hadh't you better make the best of those two minutes?" she asked breathlessly.

His quiet smile was gone now; lines appeared in Anthony's countenance as he looked at her—and then, wasting no further time in aimless comment, he turned and tottered into the corridor. Mary meant just what she said.

Robert Vining and Johnson Boller were sprawling in the deep chairs, opposite one another, smoking comfortably and giving every evidence of having settled down for a considerable session. Young Mr. Vining grinned through the smoke at his older friend.

"Sit down, Anthony," said he. "We're just going over the thing round by round, to see if either of us can remember a worse fight for the money. We're working on round two, just now."

Anthony smiled strangely and laid a dramatic hand upon his brow.

"I will not join the discussion," he said.

"Eh? What's the matter?" Robert asked, sitting up.

"Headache! One of the—er—headaches that make my life a burden!" Anthony groaned.

"I never knew you had 'em," young Mr. Vining said with a mystified smile.

"Neither did I," Johnson Boller contributed healthfully.

"Did you have it before you talked to Wilkins, there?" pursued Robert, who owned a really keen mind.

"Er—it was just coming on."

"No bad news, old chap?" Vining said, crossing his legs the other way.

Anthony shook his head and smiled again, indicating suffering that was not all simulated.

"No, just the—er—headache," he said. "Comes on suddenly, you know, and settled in the back of my head and neck. There is only one thing that can be done for it and that is a steady massage. Perhaps you'd do that for me, Johnson?"

"Sure," said Johnson Boller, whose eyes shot two questions to the second. "Sit down and we can go on talking while I rub."

"Well, I have to lie down for this," Anthony explained. "On the bed, you know, and it's—well, it is likely to take an hour or more. You wouldn't care to wait around, Bob?"

Mr. Vining gazed steadily at him. No refined intuition was necessary to tell Anthony that it was not his morning for tactful dismissals. This effort, evidently, had carried the delicate touch of a blow from a baseball bat, for Robert, flushing slightly, spoke with unpleasant crispness:

"No, I couldn't wait, I'm sure. And while I don't understand it, of course, I'm sure I'm sorry to have intruded. Good-by."

"You—haven't intruded," Anthony cried. "Only—"

"Well, don't bother explaining," said young Mr. Vining. "I beg your pardon for breaking in and—good morning."

Wherewith he stalked out to the corridor, removed his hat from the rack without the assistance of Wilkins and, opening the door himself, closed it after him with a careful lack of force that was more expressive than any slam.

"Gone off mad!" Johnson Boller said.

"I can't help it!" Anthony said miserably.

"Nice chap, too! Too bad to offend him that way," Mr. Boller pursued meditatively. "Friends are few and far between in this sad old world, Anthony, and a queer dick like you—rich or poor—has trouble hanging on to the few he makes. Oh, I don't mean to be nasty, you know; I'm just telling you. Well, come and have your head rubbed."

Anthony collapsed into his chair.

"There's nothing wrong with my head," he said. "That was the first lie I could think of, Johnson, to get him out of here. He had to go!"

"Why?"

"She said so," Anthony informed him, with a ghostly little smile. "She's engaged to him!"

"To Bob Vining?"

"Yes!"

Johnson Boller whistled softly and, elevating his eyebrows, thrust his hands into his trouser pockets and looked at Anthony with new commiseration.

"Too bad, that!" said he. "Too bad for you that it should have been a chap of the Vining type."

"What does that mean?"

"Well, sooner or later, he may find out just what you've done to that girl," Boller went on contemplatively. "It's just about as she says, too. If he was a fool, you could fool him, one way or another. Or if he was a little snide, Anthony, you could talk him off or bribe him off—but it'll never be like that with Bob. He'll never take any account of the circumstances; he'll just snatch out the gun and let fly!"

"Rot!" Anthony said thinly.

Johnson Boller's face grew grave and more grave. He sighed and looked over Anthony's head for a little and then, reaching a decision, he looked at him suddenly.

"Old chap," he said kindly.

"Well?"

"I don't want to worry you, but perhaps it is better for you to know—now. And I wish you wouldn't mention it, because Bob told me once, two years ago, and showed it to me in a sort of burst of confidence."

"Showed you what?"

"Down at the base of his thumb, Bob Vining's got *the murderer's cross*!" Johnson Boller said huskily.

"Nonsense!" Anthony said sharply.

"It's a fact! The little mark is there, clear as if it had been drawn in with a knife!" said Mr. Boller. "And for another fact—I don't know whether you know this or not, but virtually every murderer who has been executed in the last twenty years in this State, has shown that cross in some form and—"

He stayed the pleasant flow abruptly. From the direction of David's doorway a rustle was coming, very softly and cautiously, yet quite distinctly. It paused in the corridor while Mary drew aside a corner of the curtain and looked in—and then Mary was with them and asking:

"Is he gone?"

"Yes," Anthony sighed.

"Was he excited while he was here?"

"Not at all, apparently."

"Then he doesn't know yet that I've disappeared," Mary said calmly, returning to her place at the cleared fable. "Isn't he a darling?"

"He is—a very charming fellow," Anthony muttered, thinking of the murderer's cross.

"Did your man take my coffee away?" Mary pursued.

Silently, Anthony rang for his servitor. Silently, Wilkins brought back pot and cup and the little plate of toast; and

Mary, a very pleasing little figure indeed, sipped and munched and asked:

"Well, have you determined how I'm to leave?"

Anthony merely stared moodily at her at first. Johnson Boller, though, found his sense of humor overcoming him again. He gazed at Anthony, hair rumpled, eyes fogged with anxiety such as he rarely knew, and presently Johnson Boller was vibrating again. One merry little wheeze escaped and earned a glare from Anthony; another followed it—and after that Johnson Boller sat back and haw-hawed frankly until Anthony spoke.

"So far, I have been thinking of the ways in which you cannot leave," he admitted tartly. "If you'd consent to try my clothes and—"

"Umum," said Mary, shaking her head. "No, no!"

"Then, frankly, I don't know what to suggest," said the master of the apartment. "You're not invisible. You cannot walk through the office without being seen, Miss Mary—and once you have done that be sure that your face will be registered in the memory of the employees. You have no idea of moving from New York, I take it?"

"Hardly."

"Then since you will be about town for years, may I point out that each man who sees you will remember, also for years, that you left one of these apartments and—"

He paused, partly in distress and partly because it seemed to him that Wilkins was whispering to somebody. He sat up then, because Wilkins *was* talking and there was another voice he could not at first place. He had heard it before, many times, and it was very calm, very clear, very determined; and now Wilkins's tone came distinctly and resignedly.

"Well, of course, if he's expecting you, sir—"

The door closed. Steps approached the living-room. And with Mary sitting

at the table, coffee-cup in hand, furnishing just the homelike touch a bachelor apartment must normally lack, Hobart Hitchin was with them!

One glance settled the fact that the amateur detective had attained a high state of nervous tension. Behind his spectacles, the keen eyes flashed about like a pair of illuminated steel points; his face seemed tired, but the rest of him was as alive as a steel spring, and his right hand held a fat brief-case.

Had he been more intimately acquainted with Hobart Hitchin, Anthony Fry would have trembled. As it was, he felt merely keen annoyance—and then utter consternation, because Hitchin had stopped with a jerk and was looking straight at Mary.

"I—er—didn't know," he said.

Poor little Mary, be she whom she might, was in a decidedly ticklish position, however perfectly her outward calm were preserved. Everything that was chivalrous in Anthony surged up and told him to protect her; and coming out of the nowhere at the very last second, merciful inspiration reached his brain and he stared so fixedly, so warningly at Johnson Boller that that gentleman's chronic quiver ceased.

"Only—ah—Mrs. Boller!" Anthony said quietly. "My dear Mrs. Boller—Mr. Hitchin, one of our neighbors here."

Johnson Boller himself started out of his chair, gripping his arms; and then, the general sense penetrating his cranium, dropped back with a puff. His mouth opened, as if to protest; his eye caught the eye of Anthony Fry. With a gasp and a flush, Mr. Johnson Boller subsided for the time, and Anthony was saying suavely:

"Mr. and Mrs. Boller were with me overnight, you know—decorators have captured their place and they were good enough to take the edge off my loneliness for a little."

"I never knew you minded it; I've heard you say you liked it," Hobart Hitchin smiled as he took Mary's hand

and favored her with his drill-point stare. "But when you are alone again I'm quite sure that you'll know how lonely you are! My dear Mrs. Boller, I am honored!"

Mary, after one startled and one thankful glance at Anthony, dimpled charmingly. Mr. Hitchin dropped her hand and ceased his inspection, and immediately he turned more tensely solemn than upon his entrance.

"Ah—Fry," said he. "I suppose we can have a few minutes chat?"

"An hour if you like," Anthony smiled, quite happily, too, because he was rather proud of his quick-wittedness.

Hobart Hitchin gazed straight at Mary.

"And Mr. Boller will remain with us?"

"What's the mystery?" Johnson Boller asked.

"There is not, I fear, much mystery," Hitchin said, looking straight at Anthony. "But there is a little matter I'd like to discuss with—er—you two gentlemen."

Mary rose hastily.

"I'd better go?" she smiled.

"If it would not inconvenience you, dear lady," Hitchin said unsmilingly and with a stiff bow.

Chin squared, he stood in silence until she had vanished down the corridor. He crossed the room and listened intently, dramatically; he held up the curtains and looked for the sliding doors which had been taken out five years before.

"No way of shutting up this room, Fry?" he asked crisply.

"No need of shutting it up, either," said Anthony. "There is no one to listen. What seems to be the trouble, Hitchin?"

Hitchin wheeled suddenly and turned his remarkable eyes upon Anthony.

"You don't know, eh?" he shot at him.

"I'm sure I do not."

"And whether he does or not, what do you think you're doing?" Johnson

Boller asked impatiently. "Acting a moving picture or—"

"Mr. Boller, may I trouble you to keep out of this for a little?" the crime student asked amazingly. "Later on I may wish to ask you a question or two, and if you will answer them it will serve me and—Mr. Fry. Just now, suppose we draw up around the table here, so that it will not be necessary to shout?"

Anthony was there already, scowling. Johnson Boller, with a grunt, shuffled over and took a chair; because this Hitchin creature, on the face of him, was the morning's latest full-blown freak, and Johnson Boller did not wish to miss anything.

Also, if the chance came, he meant to inform Hitchin that Mary was not Mrs. Boller at all, if it could be contrived without casting too much of a slur on Mary—although that could wait until they learned the cause of Hitchin's pale cheek and his keen, excited eye.

Hitchin, however, had relaxed in the most curious fashion; he was smiling whimsically at Anthony now and, although his eye was across the room, one felt that it could turn, with one one-thousandth of a second's warning, and peer through Anthony's soul.

"Fry," he said thoughtfully, "I have been interested in crime for a good many years. I have, as it were, dabbled in it partly for the love of the thing and partly because, on one occasion or another, it has been possible for me to extend help that would not otherwise have been extended."

"That's a mysterious statement," Anthony said.

"Crime—some of it—is mysterious," smiled Mr. Hitchin. "Motives are usually more mysterious. Mistaken motives—motives formed under misapprehension—are most mysterious of all. But the consequences of crime," said Mr. Hitchin, whirling suddenly on Anthony, "are inevitable, inescapable as the rising of the sun."

Johnson Boller shook his head. The

man had always been queer; now, overnight, he, too, had gone crazy! Anthony, who was largely nerves this morning, asked: "What the devil are you talking about, anyway? I'm not trying to be unpleasant, Hitchin, but I'm not myself this morning and this rambling discourse about crime is rather trying."

"You are not yourself this morning?" Hitchin repeated slowly, with a smile.

"No."

"Why are you not yourself this morning, Fry?"

"What? Because I lost some sleep last night, I suppose."

"Ah!" Hitchin cried softly. "And why did you lose some sleep last night?"

Anthony's patience snapped.

"See here, Hitchin!" he cried. "I like to be polite and hospitable as possible, but why I should sit here and answer your foolish questions I cannot see."

Hobart Hitchin laughed, a low, rippling, sinister laugh that chilled the hearer without giving a clue to the reason for the chill.

"Shall I show you why it were better for you to answer, Fry?" he purred.

"No!"

"Oh, but I'd better," insisted the crime student. "Fry, let us go back a few hours. You returned home last night about midnight, I think—fifteen or twenty minutes before the hour?"

"Yes."

"There was with you a young man named David Prentiss?"

"Of course."

"Then here is the reason for my questions!" cried Hobart Hitchin, and his whole personality seemed aflame. "Anthony Fry, *where is David Prentiss?*"

CHAPTER X.

THE WEB.

JUST the manner of the man startled Anthony and caused him to hitch back in his chair and stare. Johnson Boller was not so affected.

"Say, what's the matter with you, Hitchin?" he asked. "Are you a plain nut?"

Hitchin snapped his fingers at him angrily and continued his stare at Anthony Fry.

"Well?" he said tensely.

"Well, upon my soul, Hitchin!" Anthony stammered. "I believe Boller's right!"

"Oh, no, you don't," Hobart Hitchin said quietly. "You know a great deal better and Boller knows a great deal better, but he has a good deal more self-control than you have. Fry, where is David Prentiss?"

"Gone home, of course!" Anthony snapped.

"When did he go?"

"What? Last night!"

"And can you give me an idea of the hour?"

"Oh—half past twelve, perhaps."

"At half past twelve last night, David Prentiss left this apartment. He went down in the elevator?"

"I suppose so."

"And—just be patient, Fry," Hitchin smiled disarmingly. "Did the young man wear from this apartment the clothes he wore into this apartment?"

It was perfectly apparent to Anthony that the wretched fool had taken what he fancied to be a scent of some sort; it was equally clear that, in his present state of mind, Anthony would answer perhaps three more questions and then, losing himself completely, would smash the flower-vase over Hobart Hitchin's shining bald head solely as a salve for his nerves!

Doubtless the long coat and the down-pulled cap had started him off—they were sufficiently mysterious-looking to impress a less sensitive imagination than Hitchin's. But whatever troubled the crime specialist, David Prentiss would have to be lied out of here in detail, lied home and lied to bed.

"Hitchin," said Anthony, "Heaven alone knows what concern of yours it

can be, but the Prentiss boy—the son of an old friend of mine who has seen better days—came back here with me last night for some things, cast-offs, I had promised his unfortunate father. We met him on the street on the way home.”

“Just around the corner,” supplied Johnson Boller, who was growing steadily more anxious to speak his mind to Anthony about the Mrs. Boller matter.

“And having come up-stairs with us and having selected the things he thought his father would like best,” Anthony went on, “they were wrapped in a bundle of ordinary brown paper, tied up with ordinary, non-mysterious, crime-proof string and carried out by David, who, I have no doubt at all, reached home within half an hour, gave the clothes to his father, said his prayers and went to bed without further ado. If there is anything else you’d like to know, ask!”

Hobart Hitchin had not blinked. Now he smiled strangely and shrugged his shoulders.

“At least,” said he, “you have perfected the story, haven’t you?”

“I—”

“And now,” Mr. Hitchin broke in incisively, “let us consider the facts! We will take them, one by one, and I beg that you will listen. Item one: I sat in the lobby down-stairs until seventeen minutes of one o’clock this morning, Fry. No David Prentiss passed me, going out! Nobody left this hotel with a bundle or a bag!”

“You didn’t see him,” Anthony said.

“Because he was not there! Listen, please, and do not interrupt, Fry. I like you, or I should not be here. I wish to help you, if such a thing be possible, or I should have gone at once to the police,” said the remarkable Mr. Hitchin. “You, like many a man before you, forget perfectly plain details. In this case, you have forgotten that my apartment is directly beneath yours—that the elevators here have latticed gates, so that

one can see from any floor whoever may be passing in one of the cars—that sound travels perfectly in this building when the street is quiet, as at night. So to get to item two. About two o’clock this morning there was the sound of a heavy fall in this very room!”

Johnson Boller was grasping the trend more rapidly than was Anthony, and he was growing less comfortable.

“I fell!” he said.

“Did you really?” asked the demon detective. “Yet—you’re in that room, I take it? Yet you got out of bed immediately after and walked in here; I heard your step. Don’t flush, Boller! It takes practice to carry out a thing of this kind and whatever the motive may have been, you gentlemen are not old hands. And so to item three: it must have been about four when a policeman came to this door. *Why?*”

“There was supposed to be a burglar here. It was a false alarm,” Anthony said, less collectedly.

Hitchin lighted the pipe he had filled and smiled.

“That is the tale they tell in the office,” he said. “I confess that that detail puzzles me and as yet I haven’t had time to get inside information from my good friend our police captain. However, we can well call this detail immaterial and pass to item four.”

He gazed into the blue cloud of smoke and smiled again.

“The woman in the case!” he said in a deep, bass voice.

“There was no woman!” Anthony exploded. “And—”

“The French woman, Fry!” Hitchin corrected.

“Well, she—”

“Don’t explain her,” said Hobart Hitchin. “Let us see just what happened when she was about. She came after daylight. She passed through the office down-stairs so suddenly that nobody was able to stop her, and she knew where to come. She was in the elevator and naming her floor to the man—who

supposed her to have been passed by the office—perhaps two seconds after she entered the house itself. She came directly to this apartment, Fry, and almost immediately she burst into hysterical weeping!”

His eyes were boring again and Hobart Hitchin also pointed the stem of his pipe accusingly at Anthony.

“Fry,” he said, “what did that girl *see*, evidently at the end of the corridor, which produced that outburst of grief?”

“Nothing!” Anthony said thickly.

“There was nothing to cause her acute grief?”

“No, and—”

“Wait! She wept all the way down in the elevator; I saw her myself! She wept so violently when she reached the street that an officer approached her—and she fled from him and disappeared.”

It was high time to say something and to say it well. Dignity had always served Anthony, and while it was an effort he eyed Hobart Hitchin coldly.

“Hitchin,” said he, “it would be quite possible, believe me, to soothe your feverish mind by telling you the perfectly simple errand on which that girl came, but I’m damned if I’ll do it! Some things are too ridiculous, and you’re one of them. If there are any further questions you wish to ask about my personal affairs, will you please leave them unasked? And if there are other things over which you wish to rave, don’t let me detain you here.”

He fastened his best majestic gaze on Hobart Hitchin, yet Hitchin only laughed his low, sinister laugh.

“You’re a curious customer, Fry,” he said, leaning back comfortably. “I had hoped before this that your nerve would have broken and—however, listen to this little theory of mine. The boy knew something, I can’t say what, about *you*, something which had to be suppressed at any cost. You brought him here, I can’t say on what pretext, but the boy fancied that all was well. Perhaps you promised him money; I’m inclined to be-

lieve that, for the girl came, evidently by appointment, ready to travel. Doesn’t take much deduction to guess that they were going to be married with the money you gave him, does it? She came and she saw what had happened, and then—”

“Well, what had happened?” Anthony almost shouted.

“That’s what I’m waiting for you to tell me, so that I can give you a helping hand,” said the crime student. “And while I’m waiting, and while you’re still plainly convinced that I know nothing at all, let me ask one question again: did the Prentiss boy leave here with the clothes he wore when he entered?”

“Yes!” Anthony said wearily.

With a sudden, startling slap, the fat brief-case was placed upon the table and its straps undone. And there was another slap and Hobart Hitchin cried:

“Then explain these, Fry! Explain *these*!”

There can be no denying that Anthony’s mouth opened and that his eyes grew rounder. Before him, spread upon the table, lay David’s trousers!

“Well, those—those—” he stammered. “Where did you get them?”

“From the dumbwaiter, where you placed them so very quietly, so very cautiously, so very early this morning!” said Hobart Hitchin, with his devilish laugh. “You even went so far as to run the thing down, so that it would be emptied at once, didn’t you? But you *didn’t* happen to look down! You didn’t see me take the whole suit from the dumbwaiter as it passed my door.”

He leaned back triumphantly and puffed his pipe and for a little there was a thick tangible silence in Anthony’s living-room.

More than once, like most of us, Johnson Boller had wondered just what he would do if accused of a murder of which he was entirely innocent. In a fond and confident way he had pictured himself sneering at the captain of police, impressing him despite himself as Johnson

Boller not only established his alibi in a few crisp sentences, but also directed the stupid detective force toward the true criminal.

At present, however, he discovered that he was downright scared. Unless one of them rose up and told about Mary and then called her in to verify the truth, it seemed that Hobart Hitchin, idiot though he might be, had established something of a case. And instead of sneering, Johnson Boller grew redder and redder, until Hitchin said:

"Ah, you know all about it, eh? I had wondered!"

"Well, cut out your wondering!" Johnson Boller said roughly. "Because—"

"I wouldn't talk now, if I were you," said Hitchin, kindly enough. "I'm devoting myself to Fry. Well, Fry?"

As yet Anthony had not found the proper line of speech.

"The boy, a stranger, comes here at midnight," Hitchin purred relentlessly. "There is a heavy fall at two. There is weeping before seven, the weeping of a strange woman. There are the boy's clothes—the rest of them are down-stairs. So, once more—*where is David Prentiss?*"

He waited, and Anthony Fry drew a long breath. All his life he had been painfully addicted to the truth; it was part of his cherished and spotless reputation. All his life he had shunned fiction, and was therefore ignorant of plot technique. So he did fairly well in smiling sourly and saying, calmly enough:

"So far as I know, David is about starting for his work, Hitchin. The thing had slipped my mind altogether, but I remember now that the boy took a suit—a blue suit—for himself and changed into it while here. That outfit was decidedly shabby. After that he left, and as to the French girl, you may theorize and be hanged, for she happens to be none of your infernal business, and she has no connection with David."

"None, eh?"

"None whatever!"

Mr. Hitchin grinned without humor

and examined the trousers in silence, thinking, and later humming to himself. He smoothed them out and then folded them carefully, finally replacing them in his brief case. After that he looked at Anthony.

"If I were you, Fry, I should tell the truth, and let me help you. You know, and I know, that the boy never left this apartment. Well?"

"Well?" snapped Anthony.

"And you know and I know that what remains of him is still here, and—"

"Are you accusing me of murder?" Anthony demanded savagely.

"I have been doing that for some time."

"Hitchin, you're the most utter ass that ever breathed! You—"

"Doubtless, but at the same time murder is murder, and murder will out, Fry!" the extraordinary crime student said steadily, as he arose. "Now hear me quietly. I shall do nothing—you understand, *nothing*—until afternoon, unless circumstances render action imperative. You know where we stand; I know where we stand. I want to help you, to come to the unfortunate end quietly if nothing else. I shall be in my apartment all morning. Think it over. Talk it over with Boller. Then, when you have decided that you need help, come and see me." He took up his case and faced Anthony squarely. "At least I can see that you obtain a privilege or two in the local prisons," he concluded. "Good-by."

"Good Lord!" breathed Anthony Fry.

"And in going," said Hobart Hitchin, "let me leave just one caution behind me, Fry. Have nothing shipped from this apartment until we have talked again!"

Then Mr. Hitchin, courageously turning his back upon the pair, moved out of the flat, leaving Johnson Boller and his oldest friend in a state of partial paralysis. Anthony recovered in perhaps three seconds.

"That—that infernal idiot!" said An-

thony. "Why, the lunatic asylums have saner people in strait-jackets!"

"Maybe they have," Johnson Boller said hoarsely, "but all the same, many a good man has sat in the electric chair on the strength of circumstantial evidence not nearly so good as he made out!"

"Well, are you afraid of sitting there?" Anthony snapped.

Johnson Boller mopped his brow.

"Maybe not," he said. "But with the thing he's pieced together he can go to the police and have 'em around here in ten minutes! That son-of-a-gun can have you and me locked up without bail, and—that 'd be nice, huh?"

"He can do nothing of the sort!"

"He can unless you show him a David Prentiss!" Mr. Boller urged. "He can unless we have the girl out and tell him the truth and have her corroborate it! Are you going to do that?"

Anthony Fry hugged his head for an instant; it was really aching now.

"No!" he said.

"It's better than being juggled, Anthony," suggested Johnson Boller. "You know, I've got some reputation as well as you, and—say, what did you mean by introducing her as my wife?"

"Was there anything else to do?"

"Why not as your sister?"

"Because Hitchin knows perfectly well that I haven't a sister, of course. Don't fume and thresh around like that, Johnson; it bothers me."

"But if my wife ever hears of it—"

"She never will," said Anthony, without great concern, "unless you have Hitchin for dinner some night and ask him to tell about it."

"And Wilkins—he heard it, too!"

"Well, I shall instruct Wilkins not to mention it, later on," Anthony sighed. "Now quiet down, will you, and let us think how—"

"Have you decided how to get me out of here?" Mary asked brightly, entering without a sound.

Anthony stayed the bitter words that were in his very throat.

"We have been accused of murdering David Prentiss!" he said.

"Really?"

"Very really indeed!"

"Isn't that funny?" Mary laughed. "Isn't it perfectly ridiculous?"

"It's a scream!" said Johnson Boller. "About the time we both get pinched it may be up to you to—"

"Tell the truth?" Mary said quickly.

"Just that!"

"I'll never do it!" the girl cried passionately. "No! Not even to save both of you! I'm not here through any fault of my own, and—and—why, a man who could suggest such a thing—"

"He's not suggesting it; he's just excited," Anthony said miserably. "Now, suppose we try, just once more, to sit down sanely and devise the way of getting you safely home, Miss Mary?"

"And soon!" said the girl, somewhat feverishly. "If I could have gotten home while it was dark Felice could have smuggled me in and—and lied about it, if necessary. But it isn't night any longer; it's nine o'clock or past nine, and—"

She said no more. Lips parted, and eyes, all in an instant, thoroughly horrified, she stood and listened; and from the door of Anthony's apartment a noisy thumping sounded once more and a voice said:

"Hurry up! Open that door!"

"Robert again!" Mary gasped.

"Is that possible?" Anthony gasped, bouncing to his feet.

It was not only possible. It was the solid fact, for Wilkins, muttering as he fumbled at the latch, was mentioning Mr. Vining's name and bidding him be patient for an instant—and Mary, with a little scream, had made another of her projectile disappearances down the corridor—and into the room came Robert Vining!

He was far from being the same collected young man. His whole person seemed to have been towed by some overwhelming excitement. His eyes belonged in the head of a madman, and his

hands waved irresponsibly as he rushed at Anthony Fry and clutched his coat and panted:

"Fry! You'll have to help me!"

"Help you—how?"

"You know more people than I—you know people everywhere, Anthony! You'll have to help by calling them up and having them call up their friends, you know. That—that may do some good. I—I don't know! I don't know what I'm talking about, Anthony! I feel as if I'd gone crazy!"

"You act very much that way," Anthony said quietly. "What's wrong?"

Robert Vining gaped at him and then laughed quite insanely.

"Wrong!" he shouted. "Wrong! *Mary's disappeared!*"

"Mary—"

"You don't know Mary—no, of course not!" young Mr. Vining rushed on. "She—she's the girl I'm going to marry, Anthony! Yes, I'm engaged, although it hasn't been announced yet. I've been engaged for a week now, and we—great Heaven! I can't think. I—why, Anthony, I was talking to her even at dinner last night and there was never a hint that she even meant to go out of the house. In fact, when we parted, she seemed rather bored at the idea of staying home and—why, not a soul knows even when she left the house! She's gone, Fry! She's just *gone!*"

A coarse nature ever, Johnson Boller winked at Anthony and turned his back!

"Mary! Why, my little Mary out alone at night—" young Robert choked. "She's just twenty, Anthony—a delicate, beautiful girl like that disappearing from the most beautiful, the happiest home in all New York! Why, from the day she was born, Dalton never spared a penny to—"

"Eh? What Dalton?" Anthony asked suddenly.

"What? Theodore Dalton, of course. He's her father—Dalton, the patent medicine man, Anthony. You must have met him? You know Theodore Dalton?"

Curiously, fortunately enough, sheer nervous tension jerked him away from Anthony Fry just then and set him to pacing the floor, a man distracted, a man unseeing, a man who recked of nothing on earth beyond his terrible and immediate grief.

And this was very well indeed, for Anthony was certainly making himself conspicuous!

Anthony took three backward steps and looked at the unconscious Robert much as if the young man had branded himself a leper. He looked at Johnson Boller, too, although his eyes were blank—and then, one hand on his head, Anthony staggered straight out of the room and into the corridor; and having gone that far he turned and staggered down to the window at the end and the window-seat, where he collapsed much as if the bones had been whisked from his long, slender legs!

Here Johnson Boller, following, found him five seconds later. Mr. Boller, who was beginning to feel downright peculiar himself with Vining thrashing about the living-room and babbling incoherent agony, shook his old friend with no gentle hand as he demanded:

"Say, you! What is it now? What in blazes got you that time, Anthony? Are you going to have a fit?"

"Johnson!" Anthony said feebly, clutching coldly at Mr. Boller's plump hand. "Oh, Johnson!"

"What?"

"Her father! She's the daughter of Theodore Dalton, Johnson! She's the daughter of the man they call the liniment king!"

"Yes?" queried Johnson Boller, not understanding the connection.

The icy hand closed tighter about his own, rousing something almost akin to sympathy in Johnson Boller's bosom and causing him to lay a soothing hand on Anthony's shoulder—for so do men cling to a raft in mid-ocean.

"Johnson," Anthony Fry said piteously. "I've kidnaped the daughter of the

only man in the world who can ruin me, and now he'll do it!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE OTHER LADY.

IT was plain enough to Johnson Boller. Anthony, poor devil, was raving at last! Since there was no one likely to ruin Anthony, the strain had developed the illusion that—or was it an illusion? Anthony had calmed these last few seconds, clinging childlike to his friend; his eyes denoted the general state of mind of a hunted doe, but there was nothing more abnormal.

"Say, kid," Johnson Boller began kindly. "You—"

"You don't understand," Anthony said hoarsely but more quietly. "I've never told you about the Dalton matter, because I've tried my best to forget the interview—but Dalton is the man who controls virtually the whole proprietary liniment market, barring only Fry's Imperial. My—my liniment," said Anthony, and there was an affectionate note in his voice which Johnson Boller had never heard before in connection with the Imperial, "is the only one he has failed to acquire."

"Yes?" said Johnson Boller, with rising interest.

Anthony smiled wanly, dizzily.

"Well, Dalton came to the office one day about five years ago, having made an appointment to meet me personally there. He wanted to buy us out, and I wouldn't hear of it—partly sentiment and partly because he didn't want to pay enough. Then he tried his usual tactics of threatening to drive Imperial off the market, and I sat down and pointed out to him just what it would cost and what it would gain him. He's a hard devil, Johnson, and he was pretty angry, yet he saw the reason in what I told him."

"Go on," said Johnson Boller.

"We parted on rather curious terms," groaned Anthony. "One might call it an armed truce, I suppose. He seemed to

be willing to let matters rest as they were, and he has done just that ever since; but he told me in so many words that if ever I tried to break into his particular markets, if ever, for any cause, I offended him in any way, he'd sail in and advertise me out of business."

"Can he do it?"

"He can do it," Anthony said, with pained conviction. "He can do it, because he's able to spend a million where I spend ten thousand, and once he starts Fry's Imperial Liniment is as dead as Julius Caesar. And when he learns about this thing—"

"He—he might never learn," Johnson Boller said, but without conviction.

Anthony laughed forlornly.

"He'll learn; I'm done for!" said he. "It's as good as done and over with now, Johnson. Almost every cent I have in the world is invested in the firm, you know, and once that goes to pieces I—why, great Heaven, Johnson! I'll have to get out and work for a living!"

Johnson Boller, for a little, said nothing at all. Coming from another man, he would have fancied the statements largely exaggeration and imagination; coming from Anthony he knew that they were mostly solid truth.

"Well, I told you in the first place that kid meant trouble," he muttered.

"You have a prophetic soul!" Anthony sighed.

"Trouble isn't the word!" Mr. Boller mused further. "If you tell the truth, according to your figuring, the old gentleman will ruin you—but that doesn't matter much, because when you've told the truth it's a dead sure thing Vining will let the daylight through you, so that you'll have no need for money anyway. And if you go on trying to keep it all dark and succeed in doing it, that Hitch-in idiot will have us both jailed for murder—and we'll have to produce a David Prentiss before we get out!"

Anthony, gazing fixedly at him, felt hope that hardly dared to be, creeping into his eyes.

"Johnson, could we get hold of a boy somewhere and bribe him?" he asked.

"To do what?"

"To go into a police court and swear that he was David Prentiss and that he came here last night and left again about half past twelve," said the model citizen, without even reflecting that it involved perjury. "If we could manage that it might be best of all to let Hitchin go ahead."

"Stick you and me in jail?" Johnson Boller asked harshly.

"Better than risk—"

"I don't see it!" the less chivalrous gentleman snapped. "There's nothing inside urging me to go to jail for anybody's sake, even overnight. And another thing, I've got a wife, Anthony! Just consider where this would put me with Beatrice—and how dead certain it would be, with Hitchin airing his views and conclusions, that he'd mention the lady you introduced as Mrs. Boller!"

"But—"

"But nothing!" Johnson Boller said, his personal trouble coming uppermost again. "That's the worst break you've made so far, Anthony! That Mrs. Boller business is likely to cause me—"

He shut his teeth on the end of the sentence. Wilkins, white and distressed, was coming down the corridor with what looked rather like kangaroo leaps. He came to David's door and stopped, turning the knob. He entered—and immediately he left the room again and sped to Anthony.

"She wishes to see you again, sir!"

Anthony jerked obediently to his feet and laid a cold hand on Johnson Boller's.

"Get up there and keep Vining busy," he said. "That's all. Hurry!"

Johnson Boller shuffled back to the living-room, where the unfortunate Robert paced up and down and wrung his hands. Anthony, waiting tremulously until he heard both their voices, hurried into Mary's room—and looked at her with a new, dreadful terror. She was no longer a merely unfortunate, unknown

young woman whose good name he had placed in considerable jeopardy: Mary, by now, had become the potential stick of dynamite that bade fair to blast him out of the Lasande, out of his regular life, out of everything but the chance to sally forth and hunt a job!

"Well? Well?" she asked swiftly.

"Yes?"

"Is he gone? Is he gone?" Mary cried.

"He will—go shortly!" Anthony said thickly. "You—you are Theodore Dalton's daughter!"

"So you've discovered that?"

"He—in a business way—" Anthony muttered vaguely.

"Yes, that was my reason for coming here," Mary said, cheerfully enough. "I've heard him speak of you—oh, no, not very flatteringly; I don't think he likes you. I've heard him say that some day he'd wreck you, when he was ready; and I was very curious indeed to see what sort of man you were and whether you were nice enough to plead for, if he ever started. I don't like dad to wreck people."

Anthony nodded.

"And that was another reason why I was afraid to tell the truth last night," said Mary. "If you were business enemies—bitter ones, I mean—and you found out that you had father's daughter here—well, that has nothing to do with getting Bobby away, has it?"

"He'll go presently."

"Presently isn't soon enough!" Mary informed her captor. "I sent for Wilkins to tell you that he must go *now*!"

"But the boy is distracted and—"

"About me?"

"Yes."

"Is he really suffering?" Mary asked.

"I think so."

The girl considered very thoughtfully indeed.

"Maybe I'd better go out there and quiet him, poor little boy!" she said staggeringly. "He'll believe me if I tell him the truth and—"

"I wouldn't do that!" Anthony exploded. "He's wildly excited now, and the truth might not appeal to him as reasonable."

Again Mary hesitated, causing his blood to congeal.

"Very well. Then get rid of him now!" she said sharply. "If he ever came down here and found me, all the explaining in the world would never help!"

"He will not," Anthony said impatiently. "Bob isn't the sort to stray about one's apartment and—"

And from the corridor came:

"She's gone, Boller! Johnson, she's gone!"

And steps came in their direction, too, and while Mary Dalton turned to flame, Anthony Fry turned to ice! He was coming and coming steadily, and the door was open fully two inches. He was abreast of them now and faithful Johnson Boller apparently was with him, for they heard—

"Well, I wouldn't go wandering around like that, old man. Come back and sit down and we'll talk it over."

"I'll sit here on the window-seat!" Robert Vining panted.

"Don't do that," Mr. Boller protested. "No, not there, Bobby! That's weak and likely to go down in a heap with you!"

The steps ceased. Through ten terrible seconds Anthony Fry and lovely Mary stood listening to the panting of the afflicted youth. Then:

"My God, Johnson!" he cried wildly. "I—I want to look over the whole world at once for her! I want to look into every room in New York! I want to look into every room in this place and then tear out and look—"

"Yes, but you couldn't do that," Johnson Boller assured him soothingly. "Now, cut out the madhouse talk, old man, and come back. Have one of Anthony's good, strong cigars and I'll dig out that brandy he keeps for his best friends. Don't go nosing around these rooms!" said Johnson Boller, and simultaneously they caught the shiver in his

voice and saw the door move as Vining's hand landed on the knob. "Just control yourself and come back."

Robert Vining laughed hideously and helplessly.

"I suppose I'm making an ass of myself!" said his weak voice. "I can't help it! On my soul, I can't help it. Give me a shot of the brandy, though, and maybe I'll steady a bit!"

Something like one hundred years passed; then the hand slid from the door and they could hear Johnson Boller leading the sufferer gently away from the shock of his whole lifetime. Mary, her eyes closed for a moment, gripped herself and spoke very softly:

"Mr. Fry, if—if you don't get that boy out of here and then find a way of sending me home—if you don't do it instantly, I'm going out there to Bob and tell him that you brought me here and kept me here all night against my will! After that, whatever happens—well, it just happens!"

Life returned to Anthony's frozen legs.

"I will go!" he managed to say, and he went.

The brandy was already within Robert Vining, yet it seemed to have made small difference in his condition. The young man's eyes were wild and rolling; they rested on Anthony for a moment as if they had seen him before but could not quite place him.

"You—you've been telephoning?" he said.

"Not yet," said Anthony, "but if you'll run along and do your share, I'll think up ways of helping you."

"My share?" Vining echoed.

Mentally, he was not more than half himself. Anthony Fry, therefore, grew very firm and very stern, pleasantly certain that Robert was paying no heed to his pallor or the uncontrollable shake that had come to his hands.

"If the girl has really disappeared," he said steadily, "your part is not to be sitting here and whining for help, Robert. Why don't you get out and hustle and

see if you can't get track of her. Have you gone to all her friends?"

"Eh? No!"

"Then go now!" said Anthony Fry. "You know her girl friends? Get after the most intimate at first—and get about it!"

Here he scowled, and Robert Vining, rising, shook himself together.

"You're right, Anthony," he said. "I'm an ass; I've lost my head completely this last hour. I—I caught it from her father, I think; the man's going about like an infuriated bull, swearing to kill everybody in the world if Mary isn't returned and—but you're right, old chap. Thank you for steadying me," Robert concluded bravely. "Where's my hat? I've been wearing it all this time, eh? Good-by, Anthony. Good-by, Johnson."

He tried to smile at them—and he fled. This time it was Johnson Boller who turned weak at his going. Mr. Boller, smiling at his old friend in a sickly, greenish way, dropped into a chair and mopped his forehead.

"Narrow squeak, Anthony!"

"Yes!" Anthony agreed, with some difficulty.

"I was never so scared as that in all my life!" Johnson Boller went on faintly. "I thought sure I'd have to watch it and—Anthony, it turned me so sick I could hardly stand on my feet!"

"What did?"

"The idea of seeing you shot down there," Mr. Boller said with a shudder. "Gad! I could picture the whole thing, Anthony! I could see him start and look at you both—I swear I could see him pull a gun from his pocket and shoot! I could see the blood spurting out of your forehead, Anthony, and hear the chicken screech, and it turned me so infernally sick—"

"Didn't think of any of my sensations, did you?" Anthony asked caustically.

"As a matter of fact—no, I didn't!" muttered Johnson Boller, with another great shiver. "What do your confounded sensations matter, anyway? This

whole affair is your fault, not mine! You deserve whatever you get—I don't! You've got nobody in the world to worry over you, but I've got a *wife*, Anthony!"

"You have mentioned it before."

"And I'm likely to mention it again!" said Mr. Boller savagely. "You know, Anthony, I'm about through with this thing! I'm a nervous man, and I can stand about so much suffering of my own, but I don't see the idea of taking on yours as well. And what is more, this thing of introducing the girl as my wife is—"

"Well? What is it?" Mary herself asked very crisply, appearing in her disconcerting and silent fashion.

Johnson Boller smiled feebly.

"It's very flattering in some ways, Miss—Miss Dalton, but for a man like me, who loves his wife, you know, and all that sort of thing—"

His voice thinned out and died before the decidedly cold light in Mary's eye. It seemed to Johnson Boller that she had a low opinion of himself; and when she looked at Anthony he noted that she had a low opinion of Anthony as well.

"Have you settled it yet!" she snapped.

"The—er—means of getting you out?"

"Is there anything more important?"

"Ah—decidedly not," Anthony said wearily. "Several times, I think, we've attempted a council of war, and we may as well try it again. There will be no interruptions this time, I think, and if we all put our minds to it—"

That was all. As on several other similar occasions, he halted because of sounds from the doorway. It seemed to Anthony, indeed, that he had heard Wilkins muttering at the telephone a moment ago, too; and now the faithful one was at the door and working over the latch.

Mary's eyes were preternaturally keen, too; Mary had acquired a way of standing erect and poising every time sounds came from that door. She did it now, remaining on tiptoe until the oddest little giggle brought Anthony and Johnson Boller to their feet also.

"That's a woman's voice!" Mary whispered.

And she looked about wildly, and, since there was no hope of escape unseen by the corridor, her eyes fell upon the open door of Johnson Boller's room. Mary, with a bound that would have done credit to a young deer, was across the room, and the door clicked behind her just as Wilkins, smiling in a perturbed and mystified way, appeared to announce:

"A lady, sir, who—"

Then the lady had passed him, moving with a speed almost equal to Mary's own—a lovely lady, indeed, with great, flashing black eyes and black hair—a lady all life and spirit, her face suffused just now with a great joy. Wilkins, perceiving that neither gentleman protested after gazing at her for one second, backed away to regions of his own, and the spell on Johnson Boller broke and his soul found vent in one great, glad cry of:

"Bee!"

"Pudgy-wudgy!" cried the lady, and flew directly into Johnson Boller's arms!

Anthony Fry steadied himself, mentally and physically, and the little smile that came to his lips was more than half sneer—because Johnson Boller and his lovely wife were hugging each other and babbling senselessly, and the best that Anthony could make of it at first was something like:

"And was it lonely? Oh, Pudgy-wudgy, was it lonely?"

Whereat Johnson Boller bumbled:

"Lonely, sugar-plum? Lonely, sweetie? Oh, Beattie-girl, if Pudgy-wudgy could tell you how lonely—"

Here they kissed again, three times, four times, five times!

"Hell!" said Anthony Fry.

"And did it come back?" the imbecile that had been Johnson Boller gurgled.

The dark, exquisite head burrowed deep on Boller's shoulder.

"Oh, Pudgy!" a muffled voice protested, almost tearfully. "I couldn't do it! I thought I could, but I couldn't, sweetest!"

"And so it came back to its Pudgy-wudgy!" Johnson Boller oozed ecstatically. "So it turned around and came back to its Pudgy!"

Mrs. Boller regarded him solemnly.

"At some awful, awful place north of Albany," she said. "I couldn't go any farther and I—I was going to wire you to come for me, Pudgy! And then I thought I'd stay at their terrible hotel and come down and surprise you, and you weren't home and they said you'd come here!"

"Yes!" Johnson Boller agreed.

"How could you leave our home, Pudgy-wudgy?" his darling asked reprovingly.

"If I had stayed there another hour without my little chicky-biddy,* I'd have shot myself!" said Pudgy-wudgy. "Ask Anthony!" And here he looked at Anthony and demanded: "Ain't we silly? Like a couple of kids!"

"You certainly are!" Anthony Fry rasped.

"You don't have to screw your face all up when you say it!" Mr. Boller informed him, disengaging himself.

Beatrice laughed charmingly.

"You'll overlook it, Mr. Fry?" said she. "We've never been separated before in all the—"

"Six months!" beamed Johnson Boller.

"—that we've been married!" finished his wife, squeezing his hand.

Followed a pause. Anthony had nothing whatever to say; after witnessing an exhibition like that he never had anything to say for an hour or more that a lady could hear. He stood, a cold, stately, disgusted figure, surging internally, thanking every star in the firmament that he had never laid himself open to a situation of that kind—and after a time the inimical radiations from him reached Beatrice, for she laughed uneasily.

"May I—may I fix my hair?" she asked. "And then we'll go home, Pudgy?"

"Yes, my love," purred Johnson Boller.

"Which is your room, pigeon-boy?" his bride asked.

So far as concerned Johnson Boller, Mary had been wafted out of this world; all aglow with witless happiness, he pointed at the door as he said:

"That one, Beettie-chicken."

Beatrice turned—and ten thousand volts shot through Anthony and caused his hair to stand on end. His laugh, coming simultaneously, was a loud, weird thing, splitting the still air.

"Your bedroom, Johnson!" he cried. "She means your *bedroom*!"

"Well—of course!" Beatrice replied.

"Well, that's down at the end of the corridor, dear madam," Anthony smiled wildly, and went so far as to stay her by laying hands on her arm. "Right down there—see? The open door. That's Johnson's room!"

Beatrice, distinctly startled, glanced at him and nodded and left. Anthony, drawing the first real breath in a full minute, glared at his friend in silence; but the morning's dread situation had slid from Johnson Boller's shoulders as a drop of water from a duck's back. For a second or two he had been slightly jarred at the magnitude of the break he had made—but that was all over now.

"My mistake, old scout," he chuckled softly. "You saved the day—what are you glowering about?"

"Clod!" gasped Anthony.

"Clod your necktie!" Johnson Boller said airily. "Well, did you ever see the like of it? Did you ever see anything like the little squeezicks, Anthony! She's back, bless her little heart! She couldn't stand it."

"Umph!" said his host.

"And so I'm let out of it!" Mr. Boller chuckled on. "We'll just scoot along to the little dove-cote, old vinegar-face, and see how she looks after all this time. I can get my things later on. Well—I'm sorry to leave you with the problem on your hands, you know."

"Don't let it disturb you!" Anthony snapped.

"But at that, you know, fate's doing the kind, just thing by snatching me out," Mr. Boller concluded earnestly and virtuously. "It wasn't my muddle in the first place, and somehow I feel that you haven't acted just on the level with me, about any of it."

Anthony's mouth opened to protest. Yet he did not protest. Instead, he jumped, just as one jumps at the unexpected explosion of a fire-cracker—for down the corridor a scream, shrill and sharp, echoed suddenly.

And after the scream came a long, choking gasp, so that even Wilkins appeared in the doorway and Johnson Boller darted forward to learn what had overtaken his only darling. He was spared the trouble of going down the corridor, however. Even as he darted forward, Beatrice had rejoined them; and having looked at her just once Johnson Boller stood in his tracks, rooted to the floor!

Because Beatrice, the lovely, the loving, Beatrice of the melting eyes and the high color, had left them. The lady in the doorway was white as the driven snow and breathing in a queer, strangling way; and whatever her eyes may have expressed, melting love for Johnson Boller was not included.

For this unpleasant condition the hat in her hand seemed largely responsible. It was a pretty little hat, expensively simple, but it was the hat of a lady!

And, looking from it to Johnson Boller, Beatrice finally managed:

"This—this! This hat!"

Johnson Boller moved not a muscle.

"Who is the woman?" Beatrice cried vibrantly. "*Who is she?*"

And still neither Anthony nor Johnson Boller seemed able to canter up to the situation and carry it off with a blithe laugh. Anthony was making queer mouths; Johnson Boller was doing nothing whatever, even now; and when three seconds had passed Beatrice whirled abruptly on the only other possible source of information present, which happened to be Wilkins.

"You were here!" she said swiftly.
 "You answer me: who was the woman?"

"The—the woman, ma'am?" Wilkins repeated.

Beatrice came nearer and looked up at him, and there was that in her eyes which sent Wilkins back a full pace.

"You—you creature!" Beatrice said.
 "What woman was in this apartment last night?"

Now, as it chanced, Wilkins was far more intelligent than he looked. Give him the mere hint to a situation and he could lumber through somehow. Only a little while ago, when Hobart Hitchin came upon them, he had caught the key to this affair—so he smiled quite confidently and bowed.

"There was no woman here last night, ma'am," said Wilkins, "only Mrs. Boller, the wife of that gentleman there!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE CRASH.

NOW it was the turn of Beatrice to become rigid.

She did not even wink, those first few seconds. She looked straight at Wilkins, searching his soul; and Wilkins, pleasantly conscious of having done the right thing well, preserved his quiet, respectful smile and wondered just which lady this newest might be.

He was telling the truth. He was telling the horrible, the incredible truth—and although those eyes of Mrs. Boller's might have suggested that she was capable of passionate murder if goaded far enough, they belied her actions just now. One slim, white hand went to her throat for a moment, as if to ease her breathing, but when she spoke her tone was very low, very quiet indeed:

"Mrs. Boller was here?"

"Yes, madam!" Wilkins responded in round tones.

"All last night?"

"Er—yes, madam. She—"

Johnson Boller returned to life! John-

son Boller, with a thick, senseless shout, bounded forward and landed directly between Wilkins and his beloved as he snarled:

"Say, you—you lying dog! You—"

"Let him alone!" his wife said quickly.
 "Permit him to tell me the truth!"

"He's not telling you the truth!" cried Johnson Boller. "He's lying! He—why, Wilkins, I'll smash your face into so many nasty little pieces that—"

"I beg pardon, sir!" Wilkins said hastily. "The—the lady that was here—"

"There was no lady here!" Mr. Boller shouted.

Wilkins put up his hands.

"Well, the lady that was eating breakfast, sir, after a manner of speaking," he stammered. "Her that was introduced as Mrs. Boller, which caused me to take it, sir, that she—"

"Say! I said there was no lady here and there was no lady here! Get that, you putty-faced idiot!" Johnson Boller cried frantically, for he was beyond reason. "What do you mean by standing there and lying and babbling about some woman—"

Again Wilkins's intelligence manifested itself. To be a perfect servant, one's teeth must remain in place and one's face must be free from bruises. Wilkins, after a brief, intent look at Johnson Boller's fists, turned and fled!

"So this," said Mrs. Johnson Boller with deadly calm, "is what happens when you think I've gone away!"

Her husband turned upon her and threw out his hands.

"Beatrice!" he cried. "I swear to you—"

"Don't touch me, you filthy creature!" said his Beatrice. "I—I couldn't have thought it. You seemed different from other men!"

"This woman—" Johnson Boller floundered, and then caught Anthony's cold eye. It was an amused eye, too, and the sneer was in it; and Johnson Boller pointed at its owner suddenly and said "If— if there was a woman here, blame him!"

Beatrice Boller looked Anthony Fry up and down, and her lips curled.

"I do—a little!" she said bitterly. "I've never cared very much for you, Mr. Fry, but—oh, why did you do that? You know as well as I know that Johnson isn't that—that sort of a man! If he wanted to come here and stay with you, couldn't you have been, just for once—*decent?*"

"*Madam!*" thundered Anthony Fry, when breath came to him.

There was no music in Beatrice's laugh; an ungreased saw goes through hardwood more sweetly.

"Spare yourself the effort of that righteous rage," she said. "I know your saintly type of man so well, and I've begged Johnson to have nothing to do with you."

"And I give you my word—" Johnson Boller began.

"That he brought the woman here?" his wife asked.

"Yes!"

"And you remained!" finished Johnson Boller's better half. "Where is she?"

"She isn't here now!" came almost automatically from Anthony.

Once more Beatrice laughed.

"Isn't she, though?" said she. "That sort doesn't leave a twenty-dollar hat behind, Mr. Fry—nor a bag worth perhaps five times as much. She had moved in quite cozily, hadn't she? If I hadn't appeared, her trunk would have been along—or perhaps it is here now? If I hadn't—" Mrs. Boller continued, and her voice broke as the unearthly calm splintered and departed.

"*Where is she?*" And, her whole mien altering in an instant, Mrs. Boller's hands clenched tightly and her face flamed with outraged fury. "*Where is she?*"

Johnson Boller looked around wildly and helplessly.

"I tell you, she isn't here!" he began. "You see—"

"And I tell you that that's a lie!" said his wife. "I'll find her, and when I *do* find her, Johnson Boller, some one will

pay on the spot for the home I've lost! Do you hear? I'll suffer—suffer for it, perhaps! *But she'll pay!*"

The Spanish grandmother had risen in Beatrice and declared herself! Cold-blooded assassination shook the air of Anthony's apartment. His head spun; he wondered hysterically if there would be much screaming before it was all over—if the police and the Lasande employees would break in before the ghastly finish of the affair. There would be just one finish, and it was written in those flaming eyes, written more clearly than any print!

And afterward? Well, there would be no afterward for Anthony. He understood that perfectly, yet he was too numb to grieve just now. Fifteen minutes after the worst had happened, the Lasande would present him with a check covering the balance of his lease and would request him to go; such was the procedure here and it had proved court-proof. Altogether he could afford to laugh at them. He had merely to sit down and wait until the news had traveled a bit; Mary's father or Robert Vining would attend to the rest—and there would be the end of Anthony Fry's stately, contented existence.

Beatrice was gone!

Flaming eyes, heaving bosom, pathetic little hat—all had vanished together, but they had vanished down the corridor, and life leaped suddenly through Anthony's veins. Even now there was a chance—faint and forlorn, but still a chance to save Mary's life at least! He turned, did Anthony Fry, just as Johnson Boller flew after his demented spouse, and glided into Johnson Boller's bedroom.

Mary, very white indeed, was waiting.

"Where is she now?" she panted.

"You heard?"

"Of course I heard!"

"Miss Mary," said Anthony, "I'm afraid that the time has come when we'll have to stop planning and act. The lady is—er—essentially crazy just now. It is painful enough, but you'll have to leave as you are. Yes, even without a hat, for she has that. Simply leave!"

"And if I'm recognized?"

"It is unavoidable."

Mary stamped her foot.

"Well, it isn't, and I think you're the stupidest old man I ever knew!" she said flatteringly, as she sped to the closet.

"Here! Give me a hand with it!"

"With what?"

"The wardrobe trunk, of course. I've been looking at it and trying to get it open, but I cannot do it in there. I'm going out in that trunk!"

"Eh?" said Anthony, tugging at it quite stupidly.

"Open it!" Mary commanded.

"Yes, there's room and to spare, if you'll take out those drawers and things!" the girl said quickly. "No! Pile them in the closet neatly; she'll look in there! Now, about your man: is he strong?"

"Very, I believe."

"Get him here, quick!" said Mary.

She seemed to have taken matters into her own hands; more, she seemed to know what she was about. Anthony, after an instant of blank staring, pushed four times on the button of Johnson Boller's room, which signal indicated that Wilkins was needed in a hurry.

Some four or five seconds they stood, breathing hard, both of them, and listening for the sounds of disaster which might echo any minute from the corridor. They had not echoed when Wilkins appeared.

"You! Wilkins is your name?" Mary said. "Wilkins, I'm going to get into the trunk! Have you grasped that?"

"Why—yes, miss!"

"And you, instantly, are going to take the trunk, with me in it, to my home—you know where that is? You don't, of course. Well, load the trunk into a taxi and tell the man to go across to West End Avenue!"

"And the corner of Eighty-umpteenth Street!" Anthony supplied.

"Exactly!" said the girl. "Go to the side door and take in the trunk, through the yard, of course, and say that it is for Felice—Felice Moreau, my maid. Have you the name, Wilkins?"

"Felice Moreau, miss. Yes, miss." said the blunderer.

"And then take it to her room and get out!" Mary concluded. "Don't lock the thing. Load it into the back of the cab with yourself and try to get it open a little so that I'll have air, when we've started!"

Saying which, Mary Dalton, who knew a really desperate situation when she saw one, and who also inherited much of her father's superb executive ability in a genuine emergency—Mary gathered her skirts and stepped into the trunk, huddling down as prettily and gracefully as if it had been rehearsed for weeks!

She looked at Wilkins, and Wilkins, with a sweep, had closed the lid; and with a great emotional gulp Wilkins looked at his master and said:

"My eye, sir! A bit of all right, that, Mr. Fry!"

Anthony Fry nodded quickly and thrust several bills into his hand.

"Don't stand there talking about it!" he said. "Get your hat and hustle, Wilkins! Take the first taxi you see and—and handle her gently! Felice Moreau, Wilkins—remember that."

"I shall, indeed, sir!" said the faithful one; and, delicate consideration in every finger, he lifted the trunk and walked into the living-room, while Anthony Fry held his breath and followed every move with fascinated eyes.

Through the room, then, went Wilkins and trunk together and to the door. The sober black felt affair he had used these three years was on Wilkins's head now, and he lugged the trunk onward—turned in the outer hall and lugged it to the freight elevator—and now, as Anthony watched from the doorway of his lately peaceful home, onto the freight elevator.

The door closed on the little car. The door closed on Anthony's apartment, with Anthony inside—and again he was that stately, dignified, reticent and austere being: the Anthony Fry of yesterday!

A trifle stiffly, perhaps, he moved to his pet armchair, and into it he sank with an

undeniable thud, grasping the arms fondly as one might grasp a friend returned from a long and perilous journey, and staring straight ahead.

Amazing! More than that, dumfounding! Five minutes back he had been seriously resigned to ruin and death. Now he was quite utterly all right once more!

Anthony looked about at all the familiar things; it seemed to him that he had not seen them for a long, long time, and that they stretched out welcoming hands to him. Weakly, he smiled and rested his head in the well-worn spot on the back.

What a wonderfully capable little person she was! Why had none of them thought of a trunk before? Or—what matter if none of them had, so that Mary had gained the inspiration? She had saved herself and she had saved Anthony—bless her little heart! She had saved everything, because she was gone!

And she was perfectly safe in Wilkins's hands. Wilkins, faithful, powerful soul, would carry her tidily into the room of the maid Felice, wherever that might lie in Dalton's absurdly ornate pile, and between Felice and Mary a story would be arranged to cover everything. Momentarily, Anthony frowned, for he disapproved of mendacity in any form—but there are some lies so much better than the truth that shortly he smiled again and hoped from the bottom of his heart that Mary's lie would be a winner.

And now that all was well—Anthony sat upright quite abruptly. All was not exactly well as yet; Johnson Boller and his wife were coming down the corridor and, almost as he heard them, the lady passed him.

She said nothing. Beatrice had passed the talking stage. Cheeks white again and eyes blazing, she threw open the door of Anthony's chamber and shot inward! One felt the pause as she looked around; one heard the door of the closet open—and then the door of the other closet. Then one saw the pleasing Beatrice again as she shot out, hat still in hand.

One lightning, searing glance whizzed over the calm Anthony and the purple, perspiring Johnson Boller. Then Beatrice had turned and hurtled into Johnson Boller's room itself, and Johnson Boller dropped into the chair beside Anthony and whined!

"It's over!" said he. "It's over!"

"Oh, no," Anthony said.

"And you listen to this!" Johnson Boller thundered suddenly, sitting up and pointing one pudgy finger at his friend. "The poor kid's crazy! I can't stop her! She'll kill the little skirt as sure as there's a sky overhead, and she'll go to the chair for it, laughing! And when she has gone, Fry, when it's all over, *I'm* going to shoot you full of holes and then kill myself! Get me? This world isn't big enough for you to get away from me, now! I swear to you—"

"You might better dry up," said Anthony with his incomprehensible calm.

Boller turned dully. Beatrice was with them again, and yet there had been no scream, no crash. There was about Beatrice nothing at all to suggest a woman who has tasted the sweets of revenge. White lips shut, she sailed past them, on her way to Wilkins's pantry and his humble bedroom beyond.

"Didn't she find her?" choked Boller.

"She didn't!"

"Why not?"

"She isn't there."

"Where'd she go?"

Anthony smiled cynical condescension.

"Once in a while I'm able to manage these things if I'm left alone," he said, assuming much credit to which he had no title.

"Well, is she out of this flat?" Johnson Boller asked hopefully.

"She certainly is, you poor fool," said his host.

Beatrice had finished her unlovely hunt. Even again, she was with them; and now she looked straight at Johnson Boller, ignoring the very existence of Anthony Fry.

"I haven't found her," said Beatrice.

"She's hidden somewhere, or else she's with *other* friends in this wretched, sanctimonious hole."

"Beatrice—" Johnson Boller began, with a great, hopeful gasp.

"But I *will* find her!" the lady assured him, "and when I do—I'm going now."

"Home?"

Momentarily, Beatrice's eyes swam. It seemed a good sign, and Johnson Boller rose hurriedly. The eyes ceased swimming and blazed at him!

"I am never going there again," Beatrice informed him, with the old, chilling calm. "I shall go to a hotel, and later, I hope, back to father and mother. You will hear from my lawyers, Johnson, within a day or two."

"But Beatrice—" Johnson Boller protested. "That doesn't mean that you're crazy enough to—to try divorcing me?"

"I am not crazy, and there will be very little trouble about it, Johnson," the lady said gravely. "That is what it means. Good-by."

A moment she paused before Johnson Boller, looking him up and down with a scorn so terrible that, innocent or otherwise, he cringed visibly. Another moment her eyes seemed to soften a little, for they were deep and wonderful, maddeningly beautiful, but millions of miles from the unworthy creature who had once called them his own. This, apparently, was Beatrice's fashion of saying an eternal good-by to one she had once loved—for having looked and thrilled him, she moved on, and the door closed behind her.

"She means it!" croaked Johnson Boller.

"She'll cool down," said Anthony.

"She will not, and—she means it!" cried his friend, wrath rising by great leaps. "She's going to sue me for divorce—*me*, that never even looked a chicken in the eye on the street. She's going to bust up our happy little home, Anthony, and it's your fault!"

"Poppycock!" said his host.

"That be damned!" stated Johnson

Boller, and this time he actually howled the foul words. "That's what she wants to do, and I don't blame her! But she'll never do it, Anthony! Your reputation's all right—it's unfortunate for the girl, of course, but I'm going to stop her!"

"How?"

"I'm going to tell the cold truth and make the girl back it up!"

"Hey?"

"I owe something to myself and to Beatrice, and I don't owe anything to you or the Dalton girl! Where's my hat?"

Anthony gripped him suddenly.

"Are you cur enough," said he, angrily, "to sacrifice Miss Dalton simply to—"

"You bet I am!" said Johnson Boller. "If it comes down to that, *the truth* can't hurt her, and any little odds and ends of things that happen before all hands understand the truth will happen to you—not me!"

Anthony smiled wickedly.

"Just listen to me a moment before you start!" he said curtly.

"Listen to what?"

"Something I have to say which will interest you very much! This trifling family affair of yours isn't nearly so serious as you fancy. In a day or two or a week or two it will all blow over—and if it doesn't you may thank your lucky stars to be rid of a woman so infernally unreasonable," said Anthony. "But I'm hanged if I'll permit you to sacrifice that girl!"

"Ho!" said Johnson Boller derisively. "How are you going to stop it?"

"In just this way!" Anthony continued suavely. "You breathe just one word of the truth, Johnson, and I will tell a story which involves *you* and, while there will not be a word of truth in it, it will get over in great shape, because everybody knows that I'm a man whose word is as good as his bond. I'll tell such a story about you as will raise the very hair on your head and have an infuriated mob after you before the papers have been on the street for twenty minutes! Do you understand?"

"The mysterious woman will be an innocent country girl, I think, who came here to make a living and lift the mortgage on the old farm, and whom you approached on the street and finally dazzled with a few lobster palaces! She'll be beautiful and virtuous, Johnson, and I think she'll tell me, in tears, how you fed her the first cocktail she ever tasted! She'll—"

"Wait!" Johnson Boller said in a hoarse voice.

"That is the merest outline of the story I shall tell, and when I've had time to work out the details, I'll guarantee that Beatrice will never even consent to live in the same city with you—even if you bring sworn proofs of the story's falsity! I'll represent you to be a thing abhorred by all half-way decent men and even shunned by self-respecting dogs! Don't think I'm bluffing about it, either,

Johnson! I mean to protect Mary Dalton!"

There is a vast difference between the coarse, rough character, however blusteringly impressive he may be, and the truly strong one. Frequently, the one is mistaken for the other, but under the first real stress the truth comes out.

Johnson Boller, for example, looking into his friend's coldly shining eye, did not draw himself up and freeze Anthony with his conscious virtue. He did puff out his cheeks defiantly, to be sure, and mutter incoherently, but that lasted for only a few seconds.

Then the eye won and Johnson Boller, dropping into his chair again, likewise dropped his head into his hands and groaned queerly.

Anthony, looking contempt at him, fancied that he wept.

Anthony sneered and smiled.

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.



INDESTRUCTIBLE

BY H. STANLEY HASKINS

IS that you, Death? Hello, old skate!
 Whatever you do, you have come too late!
 I've had a life brimful of joy—
 Good luck as a man, good luck as a boy.
 It's been all right with me from the first;
 I've had more'n my share, so do your worst!
 You can't take away the suns I've seen
 Go down in the west; or the silver sheen
 Of a starlit lake; or the mating call
 Of a drowsing bird when the shadows fall.
 You can't snatch from me the soft love-light
 Of my mother's eyes, or the blessed sight
 Of a child of mine in his romping play;
 Or my wife's sweet lips at the close of day;
 Or the meals I've had; or the restful sleep;
 Or the joys of health which have thrilled so deep.

I laugh at you, you blamed old skate.
 Whatever you do, you have come too late!



Jimmy Fagan's Lost Love

by
Bide Dudley

CHARLEY FISKE, leader of the band and orchestra of Ward's Magnificent Minstrels, at breakfast in the troupe's private car, stirred his coffee and gazed out the window. Heisty Varin, comedian, sat across the table. Two or three minutes went by and Fiske still gazed. Heisty stood it as long as he could.

"Come out of it, Charley!" he said. "What's the matter—homesick?"

"Not me!" replied the leader, smiling. "I was just thinking of Jimmy Fagan, our last season's solo tenor. To-morrow's town is Greenville, isn't it?"

"It is," said Heisty. "But what of it? Did Jimmy come from Greenville?"

"Yes. He used to be a clerk in a hardware store there. He had a wonderful tenor voice, and did a lot of singing around in amateur shows and for clubs. One night, about six years ago, Ward and his bunch attended a social session of the Elks at Greenville, and Ward heard Jimmy sing. Next day he joined the tenor out with the minstrels."

"That's the way he got me in Peoria," said Heisty, "only I was in a café."

"I'll never forget about Jimmy," Fiske went on. "He was in love with a Greenville girl, but he had a rival whose father was wealthy. Jimmy wasn't earning more than ten a week when the minstrels dropped into town. When Ward offered him fifteen and cakes to sing tenor solos with the troupe, he went to the girl and, without mentioning the show proposition, asked her to tell him if she intended to marry him. She said she cared a whole lot for him, but didn't think he could support her as befitted her station in life. Can you beat that? A station in life in Greenville!"

"Turned him down, eh?"

"Flat! It broke Jimmy all up. He found Ward without delay and joined out with the show. Most of the details were learned by the boys after the new tenor had become acquainted with the bunch and had become confidential.

"Say, but that boy could sing! And believe me or not, the turn-down the girl gave him mellowed his voice and made him throw his heart into his work. He used to try to forget her, except when he was singing his solo. Then, it seemed, he

appeared to be singing to her. He admitted to me once that he pictured her in his mind when he sang. He had a solo called 'There's Nobody Just Like You,' and every time he spilled it tears would come in his eyes."

"Sentimental guy, eh?"

"I should say so."

"What about the girl?"

"She married the other fellow a month after Jimmy quit Greenville. They settled down and got along all right, I guess. All Greenville knew about the turn-down of Jimmy."

"The next season when we went back to the town a dozen people asked me about Jimmy, and they were all disappointed to learn he wasn't with us that year. They told me they really believed the girl loved Jimmy. But then—you know how people in small towns talk. I used to see the girl at the show every time we played the town. She always sat in the right stage-box, and I used to kid myself into the idea that she attended in the hope that Jimmy might appear."

"Fagan only stayed with the troupe one season, I understand."

"He was with us that one season and then went to Baltimore to live. He got a job singing in a big church there. But he came back last season. He hadn't been in Greenville for four or five years."

"Last season we approached Jimmy's home from the South. A couple of days before we struck it, who should bob up but Jimmy. He walks up to the crowd while we're giving our street concert in Guthrie, and almost disrupts the whole affair with his hand-shaking and old-home stuff. More than a dozen of the boys knew him from his first season, and everybody was tickled to see him."

"Ward asks him what he's doing, and Jimmy says he's figuring on joining out with the show again. Ward was delighted. The result was, when we left Guthrie that night, Jimmy Fagan was in his old berth on the car, and was on the program for a tenor solo. His voice was just as good as ever."

"Next morning he handed me the orchestration of a new song entitled, 'I Love You Still,' and told me he was going to use it in the first part. It was a pretty ballad—one a fellow as sentimental as Jimmy could make stick out anywhere. Jimmy said it wasn't published, and I didn't ask him any more about it. I rehearsed the orchestra in it, and by the time we reached Greenville Jimmy was ready to sing it."

"We'd all forgotten about Jimmy's romance. Being pretty busy, it didn't occur to me at first that Greenville was Jimmy's old home and the home of his lost love. He didn't say a word about it, but I was reminded of it that afternoon when I saw people greeting the tenor on the street, and again later, when I saw him walking past the home of the girl and looking at it in what I thought was a wistful way."

"He was across the street, and apparently so nervous he was almost tiptoeing along. I was passing in an automobile, accompanied by a local man, and he pointed out the girl's house and told the old story of the tenor's romance. Just about that time I noticed Jimmy, and it immediately occurred to me that Jimmy hadn't forgotten by a whole lot."

"At supper time in the car, I ventured to remark that I'd seen him near his old flame's home, but he passed it off with a grin. It didn't appear to me that he was bothered much."

"But listen, Heisty! That night at the show Jimmy set the whole town talking. The fact that he was with the company had spread all over town. It also became noised about that the girl was to sit in the right stage-box at the evening performance, accompanied by her mother. Greenville was all worked up by 7 P.M. Everybody wondered if Jimmy had forgotten. Ward afterward told me the curiosity on the part of the people to see how Jimmy and the girl would act added two hundred dollars to the gross receipts."

"The boys in the company whispered Jimmy's romance all through the dress-

ing-rooms before the curtain went up, and when Billy Mahan, the clog-dancer, looked through the peep-hole and saw the girl in the box, the troupe was a mass of subdued excitement—all but Jimmy. He was as cool as a cucumber, and pretended not to hear the conversation flying around.

"Jimmy had the red on, and, all in all, he was a mighty pretty picture for a girl to look at. When the curtain was lifted, Jimmy sat in his chair in the semicircle only about seven feet from the girl. So far as we could see, he didn't look at her once until his turn came to sing. Then he looked, you bet your life!

"'I take great pleasure,' said Hari Wells, the interlocutor, stepping to the footlights, 'in announcing that Jimmy Fagan, a native of this city, will next favor us with a tenor ballad, entitled "I Love You Still."'

"Starting the first verse, Jimmy looked squarely at the girl and—say, boy, but he sang! It seemed as though he was trying to rebuke her with his art, if that's a good way to put it. He threw his heart and soul into the song, and tears appeared in his eyes. The audience was absolutely noiseless, as though spellbound. Jimmy shot that little love-ditty straight at her. As for the girl—well, she sat there like a bump on a log.

"The chorus was real love stuff. It went like this:

"I love you still, I love you still;
No pow'r on earth my love can kill.
Where'er you are, whate'er you be,
You still are all in all to me.

"That was the sort of sentiment the song contained. And Jimmy poured it into that girl's ears laden with what seemed to be the heartaches of a lost love. The people in the audience looked from him to her and back again. The girl grinned and seemed a bit uneasy.

"When Jimmy sat down the applause was a riot. He took three bows, but that didn't satisfy the crowd. So he sang a third verse and concluded with the chorus, all the while shooting his

gaze across the footlights into the eyes of the girl in the box.

"When the audience finally quieted down Jimmy slipped out of his chair and went to his dressing-room. We didn't see him any more until we reached the car. There we found him asleep in his berth. Next morning he appeared to be as happy as ever. Nobody mentioned the girl or the way he sang to her, as everybody feared he'd be embarrassed.

"We weren't due to leave Greenville until 11 A.M. About 10 o'clock Jimmy and I strolled up-town and into the post-office to see if there was any mail for the troupe. A group of about fifteen of the townspeople was there. When they saw Jimmy curiosity began working on them. Finally an old fellow with white whiskers decided to quiz the tenor a bit. He approached Jimmy with the rest of the gathering at strict attention.

"'Howdy, Jimmy!' he said.

"'Why, howdy, Mr. Barnes!' the tenor replied.

"'Um-er, you ben away from town about four and a half year now, ain't you?'

"'Something like that.'

"'Um-er, well, I heered you sing last night.'

"'You did?'

"'Yep. Um-er, nice song, that!'

"The townspeople were edging closer. Each one was at attention.

"'You liked the song, eh?' came from Jimmy.

"'Great!' said the old man. 'It jest seemed to—er, fit the occasion.'

"'It did?'

"'Yep! I bet you wrote that song yerself.'

"'No, I didn't,' Jimmy replied. 'I received it from Baltimore four days ago.'

"'Well, who did write it?'

"'My wife.'

"'Your wha—?' Old Man Barnes fell back a pace, amazed.

"'Oh, h—I' he exclaimed.

"Jimmy had told the truth, too."

The Holy Scare

by George Washington Ogden

Author of "The Bondboy," "The Crucible of Courage," "Cowards," "The Blood Lender," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

SAUL CHADRON, president of the Drovers' Association, hires Mark Thorn, a gunman and professional assassin, to throw a "holy scare" into the homesteaders by shooting certain of their leaders. He gives him a list of their names, Alan Macdonald's leading. Frances Landcraft, daughter of the colonel commanding the near-by army post, finds the slip and, without knowing what it is, gives it to Alan. He falls in love with her and she, though the cattlemen have tried to make it appear that he is a "rustler" and cattle thief, is much attracted to him. He attends a cattlemen's masked ball, but is discovered and narrowly escapes. The next day he comes to the post, goes to the colonel, and asks to be permitted to pay court to Frances. The colonel, amazed and angry, refuses, telling him that the girl is already engaged to Major King. Alan, nothing daunted, leaves. Frances, in a heated interview with her father, declines to marry King, and tells him she has already broken her engagement with him. Thorn kills three of the settlers and attempts to kill Alan, but gets his hired-man instead. Macdonald goes on his trail, and runs him to earth reporting to Chadron; captures him and takes him, bound, to his cabin where four of Chadron's men attempt to kill both of them. In the fight three of the cowboys are killed, one (Chadron's foreman, Chance Dalton) is severely wounded, and Thorn escapes. Chadron attempts to get Colonel Landcraft to send the troops, but is refused. Major King, however, privately indicates that if he were in command the troops would be ordered out. King, though refusing, for financial and worldly reasons, to accept Frances's dismissal, is really in love with Nola, Chadron's daughter, and she with him. Nola, jealous of and hating Frances, pretends friendship, and invites her to visit the ranch. Frances accepts.

Nola is kidnaped by Thorn, but the homesteaders get the blame. Frances meets Alan and some of his men, and many things are explained to her. Alan starts to rescue Nola. Chadron, who has sent for a big gang of gunmen, leads them against the settlers, but is led into a trap and all his men captured. Frances faces him and tells him what he is. Fearing she will tell what she knows outside, he holds her prisoner while he goes to get the troops. Alan brings Nola back, and in the confusion Frances escapes with him, but they are pursued by the men Chadron left on guard at the ranch.

CHAPTER XVI.

DANGER AND DIGNITY.

"DID you carry her that way all the way home?"

Frances asked the question abruptly, like one throwing down some troublesome and heavy thing that she had labored gallantly to conceal. It was the first word that she had spoken since they had taken refuge from their close-pressing

pursuers in the dugout that some old-time homesteader had been driven away from by Chadron's cowboys.

Macdonald was keeping his horse back from the door with the barrel of his rifle, while he peered out cautiously again, perplexed as to why Dalton had not led his men against them in a charge.

"Not all the way, Frances. She rode behind me till she got so cold and sleepy I was afraid she'd fall off."

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for January 13.

"Yes, I'll bet she put on half of it!" she said spitefully. "She looked strong enough when you put her down there at the gate."

This unexpected little outburst of jealousy was pleasant to his ears. Above the trouble of that morning, and of the future which was charged with it to the blackness of complete obscurity, her warrant of affection was like a lifting sunbeam of hope.

"I can't figure out what Dalton and that gang mean by this," said he, the present danger again pressing ahead of the present joy.

"I saw a man dodge behind that big rock across there a minute ago," she said.

"You keep back away from that door—don't lean over out of that corner!" he admonished almost harshly. "If you get where you can see, you can be seen. Don't forget that."

He resumed his watch at the little hole that he had drilled beside the weight-bowed jamb of the door in the earth front of their refuge. She sat silent in her dark corner across from him, only now and then shaking her glove at the horses when one of them pricked up his ears and showed a desire to dodge out into the sunlight and pleasant grazing spread on the hillside.

It was cold and moldy in the dugout, and the timbers across the roof were bent under the weight of the earth. It looked unsafe, but there was only one place in it that a bullet could come through, and that was the open door. There was no way to shut that; the original battens of the homesteader lay under foot, broken apart and rotting.

"Well, it beats me!" said he, his eye to the peep-hole in the wall.

"If I'd keep one of the horses on this side it wouldn't crowd your corner so," she suggested.

"It would be better, only they'll cut loose at anything that passes the door. They'll show their hand before long."

He enlarged the hole to admit his rifle-

barrel. She watched him in silence. Which was just as well, for she had no words to express her admiration for his steadiness and courage under the trying pressure of that situation. Her confidence in him was so entire that she had no fear; it did not admit a question of their safe deliverance. With him at her side, this dangerous grave matter seemed but a passing perplexity. She left it to him with the confidence and up-looking trust of a child who does not fully understand.

While she understood the peril of their situation, fear, doubt had no place in her mind. She was under the protection of Alan Macdonald, the infallible.

No matter what others may think of a man's infallibility, it is only a dangerous one who considers himself endowed with that more than human attribute. Macdonald did not share her ease of mind as he stood with his eye to the squint-hole that he had bored beside the rotting jamb.

"How did you find her? Where was she?" she asked, her thoughts more on the marvel of Nola's return than her own present danger.

"I lost Thorn's trail that first day," he returned, "and then things began to get so hot for us up the valley that I had to drop the search and get those people back to safety ahead of Chadron's raid. Yesterday afternoon we caught a man trying to get through our lines and down into the valley. He was a half-breed trapper who lives up in the foothills, carrying a note down to Chadron. I've got that curious piece of writing around me somewhere—you can read it when this blows by. Anyway, it was from Thorn, demanding ten thousand dollars in gold. He wanted it sent back by the messenger, and he prescribed some picturesque penalties in case of failure on Chadron's part."

"And then you found her?"

"I couldn't very well ask anybody else to go after her," he admitted, with a modest reticence that amounted almost

to being ashamed. "After I made sure that we had Chadron's raiders cooped up where they couldn't get out, I went up and got her. Thorn wasn't there, nobody but the Indian woman, the 'breed's' wife. She was the jailer—a regular wild-cat of a woman."

That was all of it, it seemed, as far as Macdonald was concerned. He had the hole in the wall—at which he had worked as he talked—to his liking now, and was squinting through it like a telescope.

"Nola wasn't afraid to come with you," she said positively.

"She didn't appear to be, Frances."

"No; she *knew* she was safe, no matter how little she deserved any kindness at your hands. I know what she did—I know how she—how she—*struck* you in the face that time!"

"Oh," said he, as if reminded of a trifle that he had forgotten.

"Did she—put her arms around your neck that way *many* times while you were carrying her home?"

"She did *not*! Many times! Why, she didn't do it even once."

"Oh, at the gate—I saw her!"

He said nothing for a little while, only stood with head bent, as if thinking it over.

"Well, she didn't get very far with it," he said, quite seriously. "Anyway, she was asleep then, and didn't know what she was doing. It was just the subconscious reaching up of a falling, or dreaming, child."

She was not a little amused, in a quick turn from her serious bent of jealousy, at his long and careful explanation of the incident. She laughed, and the little green cloud that had troubled her blew away on the gale of her mirth.

"Oh, well!" said she, from her deep corner across the bright oblong of the door, tossing it all away from her. "Do you think they'll go away and let us come out after a while?"

"I don't believe they've got any such intention. If it doesn't come to a fight

before then, I believe we'll have to drive the horses out ahead of us after dark, and try to get away under the confusion. You should have gone on, Frances, when I told you."

The horses were growing restive, moving, stamping, snorting, and becoming quarrelsome together. Macdonald's little range animal had a viciousness in it, and would not make friends with the chestnut cavalry horse. It squealed and bit, and even tried to use its heels at every friendly approach.

Macdonald feared that so much commotion might bring the shaky, rotten roof down on them. A hoof driven against one of the timbers which supported it might do the trick, and bring them to a worse end than the waiting bullets of Dalton and his gang.

"I'll have to risk putting that horse of yours over on your side," he told her. "Stand ready to catch him, but don't lean a hair past the door."

He turned the horse and gave it a slap. As it crossed the bar of light falling through the door, a shot cracked among the rocks. The bullet knocked earth over him as it smacked in the facing of the door. The man who had fired had shot obliquely, there being no shelter directly in front, and that fact had saved the horse.

Macdonald peered through his loophole. He could not see the smoke, but he let them know that he was primed by delivering a shot at random. The answer was a volley, a bullet or two striking the rear wall of the cave.

After that they waited for what might come between then and night. They said little, for each was straining with unpleasant thoughts and anxieties, and put to constant watchfulness to keep the horses from slewing around into the line of fire. Every time a tail switched out into the streak of light a bullet came nipping in. Sometimes Macdonald let the shots go unanswered, and again he would spring up and drive away at the rocks which he knew sheltered Dalton and his men,

almost driven to the point of rushing out and trying to dislodge them by storm.

So the day wore by. They had been in the dugout since a little after sunrise. Sunset was pale on the hilltops beyond them when Macdonald, his strained and tired eyes to the loophole, saw Dalton and two of his men slipping from rock to rock, drawing nearer for what he expected to be the rush.

"Can you shoot?" he asked her, his mouth hot and dry as if his blood had turned to liquid fire.

"Yes, I can shoot," she answered steadily.

He tossed one of his revolvers across to her, dimly seen now in the deepening gloom of the cave, and flung a handful of cartridges after it.

"They're closing in on us for the rush, and I'm going to try to stop them. Keep back there where you are, and hold your horse under cover as long as you hear me shooting. If I stop first, call Dalton and tell him who you are. I believe in that case he'll let you go."

"I'm going to help you," she said, rising resolutely. "When you—stop shooting"—she choked a little over the words, her voice caught in a dry little sob—"then I'll stop shooting, too!"

"Stay back there, Frances! Do you hear—stay back!"

Somebody was on the roof of the dugout; under his weight clods of earth fell, and then, with a soft breaking of rotten timber, a booted foot came through. It was on Frances's side, and the fellow's foot almost touched her saddle as her frightened horse plunged.

The man was tugging to drag his foot through the roof now, earth and broken timber showering down. Macdonald only glanced over his shoulder, as if leaving that trapped one to her. He was set for their charge in front. She raised her revolver as the other leg broke through, and the fellow's body dropped into the enlarged hole. At that moment the men in front fired a volley through the gaping door. Frances saw the intruder drop to

the ground, torn by the heavy bullets from his companions' guns.

The place was full of smoke, and the turmoil of the frightened horses, and the noise of quick shots from Macdonald's station across the door. She could not make anything out in the confusion as she turned from the dead man to face the door, only that Macdonald was not at his place at the loophole now.

She called him, but her voice was nothing in the sound of firing. A choking volume of smoke was packing into the cave. She saw Macdonald's horse lower its head and dash out, with a whip of its tail like a defiance of her authority. Then in a moment everything was still out there, with a fearful suddenness.

She flung herself into the cloud of smoke that hung in the door, sobbing Macdonald's name; she stumbled into the fresh, sweet air, almost blind in her anxiety and the confusion of that quickly enacted scene, her head bent as if to run under the bullets which she expected.

She did not see how it happened, she did not know that he was there; but his arm was supporting her, his cool hand was on her forehead, stroking her face as if he had plucked her drowning from the sea.

"Where are they?" she asked, only to exclaim and shrink closer to him at the sight of one lying a few rods away in that sprawling limp posture of those who fall by violence.

"There were only four of them—there the other two go." He pointed down the little swale where the tall grass was still green. Macdonald's horse had fallen to grazing there, his master's perils and escapes all one to him now. It threw its head up and stood listening, trotted a little way and stopped, ears stiff, nostrils stretched.

"There's somebody coming," she said.

"Yes—Chadron and a fresh gang, maybe."

He sprang to the dugout door, where Frances's horse stood with its head out inquiringly.

"Jump up—quick!" he said, bringing the horse out. "Go this time, Frances; don't hang back a second more!"

"Never mind, Alan," she said from the other side of the horse, "it's the cavalry—I guess they've come after me."

Major King was at the head of the detail of seven men which rode up, horses a lather of sweat. He threw himself from the saddle and hurried to Frances, his face full of the liveliest concern. Macdonald stepped around to meet him.

"Thank Heaven! you're not hurt," the major said.

"No, but we thought we were in for another fight," she told him, offering him her hand in the gratefulness of her relief. He almost snatched it in his eagerness, and drew her toward him, and stood holding it in proprietary way. "Mr. Macdonald—"

"The scoundrels heard us coming and ran—we got a glimpse of them down there. Chadron will have to answer for this outrage!" the major said.

"Major King, this is Mr. Macdonald," said she firmly, breaking down the high manner in which the soldier persisted in overlooking the homesteader.

Major King's face flushed; he drew back a hasty step as Macdonald offered his hand in the frank and open manner of an equal man who raised no thought nor question on that point.

"Sir, I've been hearing of the gallant *rescue* that you made of another young lady this morning," he said with sneering emphasis. "You are hardly the kind of a man I shake hands with!"

The troopers, sitting their blowing horses a rod away, made their saddles creak as they shifted to see this little dash of melodrama. Macdonald's face was swept by a sudden paleness, as if a sickness had come over him. He clenched his lean jaw hard; the firmness of his mouth was grimmer still as his hand dropped slowly to his side. Frances looked her indignation and censure into Major King's hot eyes.

"Mr. Macdonald has defended me like

a gallant gentleman, sir! Those ruffians didn't run because they heard you coming, but because he faced them out here in the open, single-handed and alone, and drove them to their horses, Major King!"

The troopers were looking Macdonald over with favor. They had seen the evidence of his stand against Chadron's men.

"You're deceived in your estimation of the fellow, Miss Landcraft," the major returned, red to the eyes in his offended dignity. "I arrived at the ranch not an hour ago, detailed to escort you back to the post. Will you have the kindness to mount at once, please?"

He stepped forward to give her a hand into the saddle. But Macdonald was before him in that office, urged to it by the message of her eyes. From the saddle she leaned and gave him her hand.

"Your men need you, Mr. Macdonald—go to them," she said. "My prayers for your success in this fight for the right will follow you."

Macdonald was standing bareheaded at her stirrup. Her hand lingered a moment in his, her eyes sounded the bottom of his soul. Major King, with his little uprising of dignity, was a very small matter in the homesteader's mind just then, although a minute past he had fought with himself to keep from twisting the arrogant officer's neck.

She fell in beside Major King, who was sitting his saddle grim enough in his way now, and they rode away. Macdonald stood, hat in hand, the last sunbeams of that day over his fair, tangled hair, the smoke of his conflict on his face, the tender light of a man's most sacred fire in his eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

BOOTS AND SADDLES.

WHEN Major King delivered Frances—his punctilious military observance made her home-coming nothing less—to Colonel Landcraft, they found that grizzled warrior in an elec-

trical state of excitement. He was moving in quick little charges, but with a certain grim system in all of them, between desk and bookcases, letter files, cabinets, and back to his desk again. He drew a document here, tucked one away there, snipped an elastic about others assembled on his desk, and clapped a sheaf of them in his pocket.

Major King saluted within the door.

"I have the honor to report the safe return of the detachment despatched to Alamito Ranch for the convoy of Miss Landcraft," he said.

Colonel Landcraft returned the salute, and stood stiffly while his officer spoke.

"Very well, sir," said he. Then flinging away his official stiffness, he met Frances half way as she ran to meet him, and enfolded her to his breast, just as if his dry old heart knew that she had come to him through perils.

Breathlessly she told him the story, leaving no word unsaid that would mount to the credit of Alan Macdonald. Colonel Landcraft was as hot as blazing straw over the matter. He swore that he would roast Saul Chadron's heart on his sword, and snatched that implement from the chair where it hung as he spoke, and buckled it on with trembling hand.

King interposed to tell him that Chadron was not at the ranch, and begged the colonel to delegate to him the office of avenger of this insult and hazard that Frances had suffered at the hands of his men. For a moment Colonel Landcraft held the young officer's eye with thankful expression of admiration, then he drew himself up as if in censure for wasted time, saluted, took a paper from his desk, and said:

"It must fall to you, Major King, to demand the reparation for this outrage that I shall not be here to enforce. I am ordered to Washington, sir, to make my appearance before the retiring board. The department has vested the command of this post in you, sir—here is the order. My soldiering days are at an end."

He handed the paper to Major King,

with a salute. With a salute the young officer took it from his hand, an eager light in his eyes, a flush springing to his pale face. Frances clung to her father's arm, a little trembling moan on her lips as if she had received a mortal hurt.

"Never mind, never mind, dear heart," said the old man, a shake in his own voice. Frances, looking up with her great pity into his stern, set face, saw a tear stealing down his cheek, toughened by the fires of thirty years' campaigns.

"I'll never soldier any more," he said; "the politicians have got me. They've been after me a long time, and they've got me. But there is one easement in my disgrace—"

"Don't speak of it on those terms, sir!" implored Major King, more a man than a soldier as he laid a consoling hand on the old man's arm.

"No, no!" said Frances, clinging to her father's hand.

Colonel Landcraft smiled, looking from one to the other of them, and a softness came into his face. He took Major King's hand and carried it to join Frances's, and she, in her softness for her father, allowed it to remain in the young soldier's grasp.

"There is one gleam of joy in the sundown of my life," the colonel said, "and that is in seeing my daughter pledged to a soldier. I must live in the reflection of your achievements, if I live beyond this disgrace, sir."

"I will try to make them worthy of my mentor, sir," Major King returned.

Frances stood with bowed head, the major still holding her hand in his ardent grasp.

"It's a crushing blow, to come before the preferment in rank that I have been led to expect would be my retiring compensation!" The colonel turned from them sharply, as if in pain, and walked in marching stride across the room. Frances withdrew her hand, with a little struggle, not softened by the appeal in the major's eyes.

"My poor wife is bowed under it," the colonel spoke as he marched back and

forth. "She has hoped with me for some fitting reward for the years of service I have unselfishly given to my country, sir, for the surrender of my better self to the army. I'll never outlive it; I feel that I'll never outlive it!"

Colonel Landcraft had no thought apart from what he felt to be his hovering disgrace. He had forgotten his rage against Chadron, forgotten that his daughter had lived through a day as hazardous as any that he had experienced in the Apache campaigns, or in his bleak watches against the Sioux. He turned to her now, where she stood weeping softly with bowed head, the grime of the dug-out on her habit, her hair, its bonds broken, straying over her face.

"I had counted pleasurably on seeing you two married," he said, "but something tells me I shall never come back from this journey, never resume command of this post." He turned back to his marching, stopped three or four paces along, turned sharply, a new light in his face. "Why shouldn't it be before I leave—to-night, within the hour?"

"Oh, father!" said Frances, in terrified voice, lifting her face in its tear-wet loveliness.

"I must make that train that leaves Meander at four o'clock to-morrow morning; I shall have to leave here within"—he flashed out his watch with his quick, nervous hand—"within three-quarters of an hour. What do you say, Major King? Are you ready?"

"I have been ready at any time for two years," Major King replied in trembling eagerness.

Frances was thrown into such a mental turmoil by the sudden proposal that she could not, at that moment, speak a further protest. She stood with white face, her heart seeming to shrivel and fall away to laboring faintness. Colonel Landcraft was not considering her. He was thinking that he must have three hours' sleep in the hotel at Meander before the train left for Omaha.

"Then we shall have the wedding at

once, just as you stand!" he declared. "We'll have the chaplain in and—go and tell your mother, child, and—oh, well, throw on another dress if you like."

Frances found her tongue as her danger of being married in that hot and hasty manner grew imminent.

"I'm not going to marry Major King, father, now or at any future time," said she, speaking slowly, her words coming with coldness from her lips.

"Silence! You have nothing to say, nothing to do but obey!" Colonel Landcraft blazed up in sudden explosion, after his manner, and set his heel down hard on the floor, making his sword clank in its scabbard on his thigh.

"I have not had much to say," Frances admitted bitterly, "but I am going to have a great deal to say in this matter now. Both of you have gone ahead about this thing just as if I was irresponsible, both of you—"

"Hold your tongue, miss! I command you—hold your tongue!"

"It's the farthest thing from my heart to give you pain, or disappoint you in your calculations of me, father," she told him, her voice gathering power, her words speed, for she was a warrior like himself only that her balance was not so easily overthrown; "but I am not going to marry Major King."

"Heaven and hell!" said Colonel Landcraft, stamping up and down.

"Heaven *or* hell," said she, "and not hell—if I can escape it."

"I'll not permit this insubordination in a member of my family!" roared the colonel, his face fiery, his rumpled eyebrows knitted in a scowl. "I'll have obedience, with good grace, and at once, or damn my soul, you'll leave my house!"

"Major King, if you are a gentleman, sir, you will relieve me of this unwelcome pressure to force me against my inclination. It is quite useless, sir, I tell you most earnestly. I would rather die than marry you—I would rather die!"

"Sir, I have no wish to coerce the lady—" Major King's voice shook, his

words were low—"as she seems to have no preference for me, sir. Miss Landcraft perhaps has placed her heart somewhere else."

"She has no right to act with such treachery to me and you, sir," the colonel said. "I'll not have it! Where else, sir—who?"

"Spare me the humiliation of informing you," begged Major King, with averted face, with sorrow in his voice.

"Oh, you slanderous coward!" Frances assailed him with scorn of word and look. Colonel Landcraft was shaking a trembling finger at her, his face thrust within a foot of her own.

"I'll not have it! you'll not—who is the fellow, who?"

"There is nothing to conceal, there is no humiliation on my part in speaking his name, but pride—the highest pride of my heart!"

She stood back from them a little, her lofty head thrown back, her face full of color now, the strength of defense of the man she loved in her brave brown eyes.

"Some low poltroon, some sneaking civilian—"

"He is a man, father—you have granted that. His name is—"

"Stop!" thundered the colonel. "Heaven and hell! Will you disgrace me by making a public confession of your shame? Leave this room before you drive me to send you from it with a curse!"

In her room Frances heard the horses come to the door to carry her father away. She had sat there, trembling and hot, sorry for his foolish rage, hurt by his narrow injustice. Yet she had no bitterness in her heart against him, for she believed that she knew him best. When his passion had fallen he would come to her, lofty still, but ashamed, and they would put it behind them, as they had put other differences. Her mother had gone to share the last moments of his presence, and to intercede for her. Now Frances listened, her hot cheek in her hand, her eyes burning, her heart surging in fevered

stroke. There was a good deal of coming and going before the house; men came up and dismounted, others rode away. Watching, her face against the cool pane, she did not see her father leave. Yet he had not come to her, and the time for his going was past.

Her heart was sore and troubled at the thought that perhaps he had gone without the word of pacification between them. It was almost terrifying to her to think of that. She ran down the stairs and stood listening at his closed door.

That was not his voice, that heavy growl, that animal note. Saul Chadron's; no other. Her mother came in through the front door, weeping, and clasped Frances in her arms as she stood there, shadowy in the light of the dim hall-lamp.

"He is gone!" she said.

Frances did not speak. But for the first time in her life a feeling of bitterness against her father for his hardness of heart and unbending way of injustice, lifted itself in her breast. She led her mother to her own room, giving her such comfort as she could put into words.

"He said he never marched out to sure defeat before," Mrs. Landcraft told her. "I've seen him go many a time, Frances, but never with such a pain in my heart as to-night!"

And Saul Chadron was the man who had caused his going, Frances knew, a new illumination having come over the situation since hearing his voice in the colonel's office a few minutes past. Chadron had been at Meander, telegraphing to the cattlemen's servants in Washington. He had demanded the colonel's recall, and the substitution of Major King, because he wanted a man in authority at the post whom he could use.

This favoritism of Chadron made her distrustful at once of Major King. There must be some scheming and plotting afoot. She went down and stood in the hall again, not even above bending to listen at the keyhole. Chadron was talking again. She felt that he must have

been talking all the time that she had been away. It must be an unworthy cause that needed so much pleading, she thought.

"Well, he'll not shoot, I tell you, King; he's too smart for that. He'll have to be trapped into it. If you've got to have an excuse to fire on them—and I can't see where it comes in, King, damn my neck if I can—we've got to set a trap."

"Leave that to me," returned Major King coldly.

"How much force are you authorized to use?"

"The order leaves that detail to me. 'Sufficient force to restore order,' it says."

"I think you ought to take a troop, at the least, King, and a cannon—maybe two."

"I don't think artillery will be necessary, sir."

"Well, I'll leave it to you, King; but I'd hate like hell to take you up there and have that feller lick you. You don't know him like I do. I tell you he'd lay on his back and fight like a catamount."

"Can you locate them in the night?"

"I think we'd have to wait up there somewhere for daybreak. I'm not just sure which cañon it is."

There was silence. Frances peeped through the keyhole, but could see nothing except thick smoke over bookcases and files.

"Well, we'll not want to dislodge them before daylight, anyway," said King.

"If Macdonald can back off without a fight, he'll do it," Chadron declared, "for he knows as well as you and I what it'd mean to fire on the troops. And I want you to git him, King, and make sure you've got him."

"It depends largely on whether the fellow can be provoked into firing on us, Chadron. You think he can be; so do I. But in case he doesn't, the best we can do will be to arrest him."

"What good would he be to me arrested, King? I tell you I want his scalp, and if you bring that feller out of there in a sack you'll come back a brigadier. I

put you where you're at. Well, I can put you higher just as easy. But the purty I want for my trouble is that feller's scalp."

There was the sound of somebody walking about, in quick nervous strides. Frances knew that Major King had got up from his usurped place at the desk—place unworthily filled, this low intrigue with Chadron aside, she knew—and was strutting in the shadow of his promised glory.

"Leave it to me, Chadron; I've got my own account to square with that wolf of the range!"

A sharp little silence, in which Frances could picture Chadron looking at King in his covert, man-weighing way. Then Chadron:

"King, I've noticed now and then that you seemed to have a soft spot in your gizzard for that little girl of mine. Well, I'll throw her in to boot if you put this thing through right. Is it a go?"

"I'd hesitate to bargain for the young lady without her being a party to the business," King replied, whether from wisdom born of his recent experience, or through lack of interest in the proposal Frances could not read in his voice.

"Oh, she'd jump at you like a bull-frog at red flannel," Chadron assured him. "I could put your uniform on a wooden man and marry him off to the best girl in seven States. They never think of lookin' under a soldier's vest."

"You flatter me, Mr. Chadron, and the uniform of the United States Army," returned King, with barely covered contempt. "Suppose we allow events to shape themselves in regard to Miss Chadron. She'll hardly be entertaining marriage notions yet—after her recent experience."

Chadron got up so quickly he overturned his chair.

"By God, sir! do you mean to intimate you wouldn't have her after what she's gone through? Well, I'll put a bullet through any man that says—"

"Oh, hold yourself in, Chadron; there's no call for this."

King's cold contempt would have been like a lash to a man of finer sensibilities than Saul Chadron. As it was, Frances could hear the heavy cattleman breathing like a mad bull.

"When you talk about my little girl, King, go as easy as if you was carryin' quicksilver in a dish. You told me she was all right a little while ago, and I tell you I don't like—"

"Miss Chadron was as bright as a red-bird when I saw her this afternoon," King assured him, calmly. "She has suffered no harm at the hands of Macdonald and his outlaws."

"He'll dance in hell for that trick before the sun goes down on another day!"

"His big play for sympathy fell flat," said King, with a contemptuous laugh; "there wasn't much of a crowd on hand when he arrived at the ranch."

Silence. A little shifting of feet, a growl from Chadron, and a curse.

"But as for your proposal involving Miss Chadron, I am honored by it," said King.

"Any man would be!" Chadron declared.

"And we will just let it stand, waiting the lady's sanction."

That brightened Chadron up. He moved about, and there was a sound as if he had slapped the young officer on the back in pure comradeship and open admiration.

"What's your scheme for drawin' that feller into firin' on your men?" he asked.

"We'll talk it over as we go," said King as a bugle lifted its sharp, electrifying note in the barracks.

"Boots and saddles!" Chadron said.

"Yes; we march at nine o'clock."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRAIL OF THE COFFEE.

"YOU done right to come to the mission after me, for I'd ride to the gate-post of hell to turn a trick ag'n' Saul Chadron!"

Banjo's voice had a quaver of earnestness in it that needed no daylight to enforce. The pitchy night made a bobbing blur of him as he rode his quick-stepping little horse at Frances Landcraft's side.

"Yes, you owe him one," Frances admitted.

"And I'll pay him before mornin' or it won't be no fault of mine. That there little ten-cent-size major he'd 'a' stopped you if he'd 'a' known you was goin', don't you suppose?"

"I'm sure he would have, Mr. Gibson."

"Which?" said Banjo.

"Banjo," she corrected.

"Now, that sounds more comfortable," he told her. "I didn't know for a minute who you meant; that name's gittin' to be a stranger to me."

"Well, we don't want a stranger along to-night," said she seriously.

"You're right, we don't. That there horse you're ridin', he's a good one; as good as any in the calvary, even if he ain't as tall. He was an outlaw till Missus Mathews tamed him down."

"How did she do it—not break him like a bronco buster?"

"No, she done it like she tames Injuns, and other folks, by gentle words and gentler hands. Some they'll tell you she's sunk down to the ways of Injuns, clean out of a white man's sight in the dirt and doin's of them dead-horse eatin' 'Raphahoes. But I know she ain't. She lets herself down on a level to reach 'em, and git her hands under 'em so she can lift 'em up, the same as she puts herself on my level when she wants to reach me, or your level, or anybody's level, mom."

"Her eyes, and her soft ways, tell you that, Banjo, as plain as any words."

"She's done ten times as much as that big-backed buffalo of a preacher she's married to ever done for his own people, or ever will. He's clim' above 'em with his educated ways. The Injun's ironed out of that man. You can't reach down and help anybody up, mom, if you go along through this here world on stilts."

"Not very well, Banjo."

"You need both of your hands to hold your stilts, mom; you ain't got even a finger to spare for a low-down feller like me."

"You're not a low-down fellow, Banjo. Don't be calling yourself names."

"I was low-down enough to believe what they told me about Macdonald shootin' up Chance Dalton. I believed it till Missus Mathews give me the straight of it. One of them Injun police fellers told her how that job was put up, and how it failed to work."

"A man named Lassiter told me about it."

They rode along in silence a long time after that. Then Banjo:

"Well, I hope we don't bust out onto them calvary fellers too sudden and meet a flock of bullets. I'd never forgive the man that put a bullet through my fiddle."

"We'll go slowly, and keep listening; I can tell calvary from cowboys as far as I can hear."

"I bet a purty you can, brought up with 'em like you was."

"They'll not be able to do anything before daylight, and when we overtake them we'll ride around and get ahead while they're waiting for morning. I don't know where the homesteaders are, but they'll be sending out scouts to locate them, and we can watch."

They were following the road that the calvary had taken an hour in advance of them. Listening now, they rode on without words. Now and then a bush at the roadside flipped a stirrup, now and again Banjo's little horse snorted in short impatience, as if expressing its disapproval of this journey through the dark. Night was assertive in its heaviness, but communicative of its mysteries in its wild scents—the silent music of its hour.

There are those who, on waking in the night, can tell the hour by the smell, the taste, the elusive fine aroma of the quiet air. Before midnight it is like a new-lit censer; in the small hours the smell of old camp-fires comes trailing, and the scent of rain upon embers.

But Frances Landcraft was not afraid of the night as she rode silently through it with Banjo Gibson at her side. There was no shudder in it for her as there had been on the night that Nola was stolen; it could not have raised up a terror grim enough to turn her back upon the road.

Her one thought was that she must reach Macdonald before Chadron and King could find him, and tell him that the troops were coming, and that he was to be trapped into firing upon them. She knew that many lives depended upon her endurance, courage and strategy; many lives, but most of all, Alan Macdonald's life. He must be warned, at the cost of her own safety, her own life if necessary.

To that end the troops must be followed, and a desperate dash at daylight must be made into Macdonald's camp. Perhaps it would be a race with the calvary at the last moment.

Banjo said it was beginning to feel like morning. An hour past they had crossed the river at the ford near Macdonald's place, and the foothills stood rough and black against the starry horizon. They were near them now, so near that the deeper darkness of their timbered sides fell over them like a cold shadow.

Suddenly she checked Banjo with a sharp word.

"I heard them!" she whispered.

Banjo's little horse, eager for the fellowship of its kind as his master was for his own in his way, threw up its head and whinnied. Banjo churned it with his heels, slapped it on the side of the head, and shut off the shrill call in a grunt, but the signal had gone abroad. Out of the stillness before them a horse answered, and the slow wind prowling down from the hills ahead of dawn carried the scent of cigarettes to them as they waited breathlessly for results.

"They're dismounted, and waiting for daylight," she said. "We must slip away and ride around them."

They were leaving the road, the low brush rasping harshly on their stirrups—as loud as a bugle-call, it seemed to

Frances—when a dash of hoofs from ahead told that a detachment was coming to investigate. Now there came a hail. Frances stopped; Banjo behind her whispered to know what they should do.

"Keep that little fool horse still!" she said.

Now the patrol, which had stopped to hail, was coming on again. Banjo's horse was not to be sequestered, nor his craving for companionship in that lonesome night suppressed. He lifted his shrill nicker again, and a shot from the outriders of cavalry was the answer.

"Answer them, tell them who you are, Banjo—they all know you—and I'll slip away. Good-by, and thank you for your brave help!"

"I'll go with you—they'll hear one as much as they'll hear two."

"No, no—you can help me much better by doing as I tell you. Tell them that a led horse got loose from you, and that's the noise of it running away."

She waited for no more words, for the patrol was very near, and now and then one of them fired as he rode. Banjo yelled to them.

"Say, you fellers! Stop that fool shootin' around here, I tell you!"

"Who are you?" came the answer.

"Banjo, you darned fool! And I tell you right now, pardner, the first man that busts my fiddle with a bullet 'll have to mix with me!"

The soldiers came up laughing. Frances stopped to listen. Presently she heard them coming on again, evidently not entirely satisfied with Banjo's story. But the parley with him had delayed them; she had a good lead now.

In a little swale, where the greasewood reached above her head, she stopped again to listen. She heard the troopers beating the bushes away off to one side, and knew that they soon would give it up. When they passed out of her hearing, she rode on, slowly, and with caution.

She was frontiersman enough to keep her direction by the north star—Colonel

Landcraft had seen to that particular of her education himself—but Polaris would not tell her which way to go to find Alan Macdonald and his dusty men standing their vigil over their cooped-up enemies. Nothing but luck, she knew, could lead her there, for she was in a sea of sagebrush, with the black river valley behind her, the blacker hills ahead, and never a mark of a trail to follow anywhere.

She had rounded the cavalry troop and left it far behind; the silence which immersed the sleeping land told her this. No hoof but her own mount's beat the earth within sound; no foot but hers strained saddle-leather within miles of her now, she believed.

There was only one thing to do: ride slowly in the direction that she had been holding with Banjo, and keep eyes, ears, and nose all on the watch. The ways of the range were early; if there was anybody within a mile of her to windward she would smell the smoke of his fire when he lit it, and see the wink of it, too, unless he built it low.

But it was neither the scent of fire nor the red eye of it winking on the hill that at length gave her despairing heart a fresh handful of hope—nothing less than the aroma of boiling coffee, indeed. It had such a feeling of comfort and welcome, of domesticity and peace in it, that she felt as if she approached a door with a friend standing ready to take her horse.

Her horse was not insensible to the cheer that somebody was brewing for himself in that wild place. She felt him quicken under her, and put up his head eagerly, and go forward as if he was nearing home. She wondered how far the smell of coffee would carry, and subsequent experience was a revelation on that point.

She had entered the hills, tracking back that wavering scent of coffee, which rose fresh and sudden now, and trailed away the next moment to the mere color of a smell. Now she had it, now she lost it, as she wound over rugged ridges and through groves of quaking asp and balm

of Gilead trees, always mounting among the hills, her eager horse taking the way without guidance, as keen on the scent as she.

It must have taken her an hour to run down that coffee-pot. Morning was coming among the fading stars when she mounted a long ridge, the quick striding of her horse indicating that there was something ahead at last, and came upon the camp-fire, the coffee, and the cook, all beside a splintered gray rock that rose as high as a house out of the barrenness of the hill.

The coffee-maker was a woman, and her pot was of several gallons' capacity. She was standing with the cover of the boiler in one hand, a great spoon in the other, her back half bent over her beverage, in the position that the sound of Frances's coming had struck her. She did not move out of that alert pose of suspicion until Frances drew rein within a few feet of her and gave her good morning. When the poor, harried creature saw that the visitor was a woman, her fright gave place to wonder.

Frances introduced herself without parley and made inquiry for Macdonald.

"Why, bless your heart, you don't aim to tell me you rode all the way from the post in the night by yourself?" the simple, friendly creature said. "Well, Mr. Macdonald and most of the men they've left to take them scoun'rels sent in here by the cattlemen to murder all of us over to the jail at Meander."

"How long have they been gone?"

"Why, not so very long. I reckon you must 'a' missed meetin' 'em by a hair."

"I've got to catch up with them, right away! Is there anybody here that can guide me?"

"My son can, and he'll be glad. He's just went to sleep back there in the tent after guardin' them fellers all night. I'll roust him out."

The pioneer woman came back almost at once and pressed a cup of her coffee upon Frances. Frances took the tin vessel eagerly, for she was chilled from her long

ride. Then she dismounted to rest her horse while her guide was getting ready and warm her numb feet at the fire. She told the woman how the scent of her coffee had led her out of her groping like a beacon light on the hill.

"It's about three mile from here down to the valley," the woman said. "Coffee will carry on the mornin' air that way."

"Do you think your son—"

"He's a comin'," the woman replied.

The boy came around the rock, leading a horse. He was wide awake and alert, barefooted, bareheaded, and without a coat. He leaped nimbly onto his barebacked beast, and Frances got into her saddle as fast as her numb limbs would lift her.

As she rode away after the recklessly riding youth she felt the hope that she had warmed in her bosom all night paling to a shadow. It seemed that circumstances were ranging after a chart marked out for them, and that her own earnest effort to interfere could not turn aside the tragedy set for the gray valley below her.

Morning was broadening now; she could see her guide distinctly even when he rode many rods ahead. Dawn was the hour for treacherous men and deeds of stealth; Chadron would be on the way again before now, with the strength of the United States behind him to uphold his outlawed hand.

When they came down into the valley there was a low-spreading mist over the gray sage, which lent a warmth to the raw morning wind. There was a sense of indistinctness through the mist which was an ally to Chadron. Ten rods away, even in the growing morning, it would have been impossible to tell a cowboy from a cavalrman.

Here a haystack smoldered in what had been a farmstead yard; its thin, blue smoke wavered up in the morning, incense over the dead hope of the humble heart that had dreamed it had found a refuge in that spot. At the roadside a little farther on the burned ruins of a cabin lay. It had stood so near the wheel-

track that the heat of its embers was warm on Frances's face as she galloped by. The wire fence was cut between each post, beyond splicing or repair; the shrubs which some home-hungry woman had set in her dooryard were trampled; the well-curb was overthrown.

Over and over again as they rode that sad picture was repeated. Destruction had swept the country, war had visited it. Side by side upon the adjoining lines many of the homesteaders had built their little houses, for the comfort of being near their kind. In the corner of each quarter-section on either side of the road along the fertile valley a little home had stood three days ago. Now all were gone, marked only by little heaps of embers which twinkled a dying glow in the breath of the morning wind.

Day was spreading now. From the little swells in the land as she mounted them Frances could see the deeper mist hovering in the low places, the tops of tall shrubs and slender quaking asp showing above it as if they stood in snow. The band of sunrise was broadening across the east; far down near the horizon a little slip of lemon-rind moon was faltering out of sight.

But there was no sight, no sound, of anybody in the road ahead. She spurred up beside her guide and asked him if there was any other way that they might have taken. No, he said; they would have to go that way, for there was only one fordable place in the river for many miles. He pointed to the road, fresh-turned by many hoofs, and clamped his lean thighs to his bare horse, galloping on.

"We'll take a cut acrost here, and maybe head 'em off," he said, dashing away through the stirrup-high sage, striking close to the hills again, and into rougher going.

The ache of the most intense anxiety that she ever had borne was upon Frances; hope was only a shred in her hand. She believed now that all her desperate riding must come to nothing in the end.

She never had been that long in the saddle before in her life. Her body was numb with cold and fatigue; she felt the motion of her horse, heard its pounding feet in regular beat as it held to its long, swinging gallop, but with the detached sense of being no party to it.

All that was sharp in her was the pain of her lost struggle. For she expected every moment to hear firing and to come upon confusion and death at the next lift of the hill.

In their short cut across the country they had mounted the top of a long, slender ridge which reached down into the valley like a finger. Now her guide pulled up his horse so suddenly that it slid forward, its hoof plowing the loose shale.

"You'd better go back—there's goin' to be a fight!" he said, a look of shocked concern in his big, wild eyes.

"Do you see them? Where—"

"There they are!" He clutched her arm, leaning and pointing. "And there's a bunch of fellers comin' to meet 'em that they don't see! I tell you there's goin' to be a fight!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"I BEAT HIM TO IT."

THE last dash of that long ride was only a whirlwind of emotions to Frances. It was a red streak. She did not know what became of the boy; she left him there as she lashed her horse past him on the last desperate stretch.

The two forces were not more than half a mile apart, the cavalry just mounting at the ruins of a homestead where she knew they had stopped for breakfast at the well. A little band of outriders was setting off, a scouting party under the lead of Chadron, she believed. Macdonald's men, their prisoners under guard between two long-strung lines of horsemen, were proceeding at a trot. Between the two forces the road made a long curve. Here it was bordered by brushwood that hid a man on horseback.

When Frances broke through this screen which had hidden the cavalry from Macdonald, she found the cavalcade halted, for Macdonald had seen her coming down the hill. She told him in few words what her errand to him was, Tom Lassiter and those who rode with him at the head of the column pressing around.

The question and mystification in Macdonald's face at her coming cleared with her brisk words. There was no wonder in her being there to him any more. It was like her to come, winging through the night straight to him, like a dove with a message. If it had been another woman to take up that brave and hardy task, then there would have been marvel in it. As it was, he held out his hand to her, silently, like one man to another in such a pass where words alone would be weak and lame.

"I was looking for Chadron to come with help, and attempt a rescue, and I was moving to forestall him, but we were late getting under way. They"—waving his hand toward the prisoners—"held out until an hour ago."

"You must think, and think fast!" she said. "They're almost here!"

"Yes. I'm going ahead to meet them, and offer to turn these prisoners over to Major King. They'll have no excuse for firing on us then."

"No, no! Some other way—think of some other way!"

He looked gravely into her anxious, pleading eyes. "Why, no matter, Frances. If they've come here to—do that they'll do it, but this way they'll have to do it in the open, not by a trick."

"I'll go with you," she said.

"I think perhaps—"

"I'll go!"

Macdonald turned to Lassiter in a few hurried words. She pressed to his side as they two rode away alone to meet the troops, repeating as if she had been denied:

"I'll go!"

There was a dash of hoofs behind them,

and a man who rode like a sack of bran came bouncing up, excitement over his large face.

"What's up, Macdonald—where 're you off to?" he inquired.

Macdonald told him in a word, riding forward as he spoke. He introduced the stranger as a newspaper correspondent from Chicago, who had arrived at the homesteaders' camp the evening past.

"So they got troops, did they?" the newspaper man said, riding forward keenly. "Yes, they told me down at the city they'd put that trick through. Here they come!"

Macdonald spurred ahead, holding up his right hand in the Indian sign of peace. Major King was riding with Chadron at the head of the vanguard. They drew rein suddenly at sight of what appeared to be such a formidable force at Macdonald's back, for at that distance, and with the dimness of the scattering mist, it appeared as if several hundred horsemen were approaching.

Distrustful of Chadron, fearing that he might induce Major King to shoot Macdonald down as he sat there making overtures of peace, Frances rode forward and joined him, the correspondent coming jolting after her in his horn-riding way. After a brief parley among themselves, Chadron and King, together with three or four officers, rode forward. One remained behind and halted the column as it came around the brushwood screen at the turn of the road.

Major King greeted Frances as he rode up, scowling in high dignity. Chadron could not cover his surprise so well as Major King at seeing her there, her horse in a sweat, her habit torn where the brambles had snatched at her in her hard ride to get ahead of the troops. He gave her a cold good-morning, and sat in the attitude of a man pricking up his ears as he leaned a little to peer into the ranks of the force ahead.

The homesteaders had come to a halt a hundred yards behind Macdonald; about the same distance behind Major

King and his officers the cavalry had drawn up across the road. Major King sat in silence a moment, as if waiting for Macdonald to begin. He looked the homesteader captain over with severe eyes.

"Well, sir?" said he.

"We were starting for Meander, Major King, to deliver to the sheriff fifty men whom we have taken in the commission of murder and arson," Macdonald replied with dignity. "Up to a few minutes ago we had no information that martial law had superseded the civil in this troubled country, but since that is the case, we will gladly turn our prisoners over to you, with the earnest request that they be held, collectively and individually, to answer for the crimes they have committed here."

"Them's my men, King—they've got 'em there!" said Chadron, boiling over the brim.

"This expedition has come to the relief of certain men, attacked and surrounded in the discharge of their duty by a band of cattle-thieves of which you are the acknowledged head," replied Major King.

"Then you have come on a mistaken errand, sir," Macdonald told him.

"I have come into this lawless country to restore order and insure the lives and safety of property of the people to whom it belongs."

"The evidence of these hired raiders' crimes lies all around you, Major King," Macdonald said. "These men swept in here in the employ of the cattle interests, burned these poor homes, and murdered such of the inhabitants as were unable to fly to safety in the hills ahead of them. We are appealing to the law; the cattle-men never have done that."

"Say, Mr. Soldier, let me tell you something." The newspaper correspondent, to whom one man's dignity was as much as another's, kicked his horse forward. "These raiders that bloody-handed Chadron sent in here have murdered children and women; do you know that?"

"Who in hell are you?" Chadron de-

manded, bristling with rage, whirling his horse to face him.

"This is Chadron," Macdonald said, a little flash of humor in his eyes over Chadron's hearing the truth about himself from an unexpected source.

"Well, I'm glad I've run into you, Chadron; I've got a little list of questions to ask you," the correspondent told him, far from being either impressed or cowed. "Neel is my name, of the *Chicago Sphere*. I've—"

"You'd just as well keep your questions for another day—you'll send nothing out of here!" said Major King sharply.

Neel looked across his nose at King with triumphant leer.

"I've sent out something, Mr. Soldier-man," said he; "it was on the wire by midnight last night, rushed to Meander by courier, and it's all over the country this morning. It's a story that 'll give the other side of this situation up here to the War Department, and it 'll make this whole nation climb up on its hind legs and howl. Murder? Huh, murder's no name for it!"

Chadron was growling something below his breath into King's ear.

"Fifty-three men and boys—look at them, there they are—rounded up fifty of the cutthroats the Drovers' Association rushed up here from Cheyenne on a special train to wipe the homesteaders out," Neel continued, rising to considerable heat in the partisanship of his new light. "Five dollars a day was the hire of that gang, and five dollars bonus for every man, woman, or baby that they killed! Yes, I've got signed statements from them, Chadron, and I'd like to know what you've got to say, if anything?"

"Disarm that rabble," said Major King, speaking to a subordinate officer, "and take charge of the men they have been holding."

"Sir, I protest—" Macdonald began.

"I have no words to waste on you!" Major King cut him off shortly.

"I'd play a slow hand on that line.

King, and a careful one, if I were you," advised Neel. "If you take these men's guns away from them they'll be at the mercy of Chadron's brigands. I tell you, man, I know the situation in this country!"

"Thank you," said King in cold hauteur.

Chadron's eyes were lighting with the glitter of revenge. He sat grinding his bridle-reins in his gloved hand, as if he had the bones of the nesters in his palm at last.

"You will proceed, with the rescued party under guard, to Meander," continued Major King to his officer, speaking as if he had plans for his own employment aside from the expedition. "There Mr. Chadron will furnish transportation to return them whence they came."

"I'll furnish—" began Chadron in amazement at this unexpected turn.

"Transportation, sir," completed Major King in his cold way.

"These men should be held to the civil authorities for trial in this county, and not set free," Macdonald protested, indignant over the order.

Major King ignored him. He was still looking at Chadron, who was almost choking on his rage.

"Hell! do you mean to tell me the whole dam' thing's goin' to fizzle out this way, King? I want something done, I tell you—I want something *done*! I didn't bring you up here—"

"Certainly not, sir!" snapped King.

"My orders to you—" Chadron flared.

"I'm not marching under your orders at—"

"The hell you ain't!" Chadron exploded.

"It's an outrage on humanity to turn those scoundrels loose, Major King!" Neel said. "Why, I've got signed statements, I tell you—"

"Remove this man to the rear!" Major King addressed a lieutenant, who communicated the order to the next lowest in rank immediately at hand, who

passed it on to two troopers, who came forward briskly and rode the protesting correspondent off between them.

Other troopers were collecting the arms of the homesteaders, a proceeding which Macdonald witnessed with a sick heart. Frances, sitting her horse in silence through all that had passed, gave him what comfort and hope that she could express with her eyes.

"Detail a patrol of twenty men," Major King continued his instructions to his officer, "to keep the roads, and disarm all individuals and bands encountered."

"That don't apply to my men!" declared Chadron positively. In his face there was a dark threat of disaster for Major King's future hopes of advancement.

"It applies to everybody as they come," said King. "Troops have come in here to restore order, and order will be restored."

Chadron was gaping in amazement. That feeling in him seemed to smother every other, even his hot rage against King for this sudden shifting of their plans and complete overthrow of the cattlemen's expectations of the troops. The one little comfort that he was to get out of the expedition was that of seeing his raiders taken out of Macdonald's hands and marched off to be set free.

Macdonald felt that he understood the change in King. The major had come there full of the intention of doing Chadron's will; he had not a doubt of that. But murder, even with the faint color of excuse that they would have contrived to give it, could not be done in the eyes of such a witness as Frances Landcraft. Subserviency, a bending of dignity even, could not be stooped to before one who had been schooled to hold a soldier's honor his most precious endowment.

Major King had shown a hand of half fairness in treating both sides alike. That much was to his credit, at the worst. But he had not done it because he was a high-souled and honorable man. His eyes betrayed him in that, no matter how stern

he tried to make them. The coming of that fair outrider in the night had turned aside a great tragedy, and saved Major King partly to himself, at least, and perhaps wholly to his career.

Macdonald tried to tell her in one long and earnest look all this. She nodded, seeming to understand.

"You've double-crossed me, King," Chadron accused, in the flat voice of a man throwing down his hand. "I brought you up here to throw these nesters off of our land."

"The civil courts must decide the ownership of that," returned King sourly. "Disarm that man!" He indicated Macdonald, and turned his horse as if to ride back and join his command.

The lieutenant appeared to feel that it would be no lowering of his dignity to touch the weapons of a man such as Macdonald's bearing that morning had shown him to be. He approached with a smile, half apologetic. Chadron was sitting by on his horse, watching the proceeding keenly.

"Pardon me," said the officer, reaching out to receive Macdonald's guns.

A swift change swept over Macdonald's face, a flush dyeing it to his ears. He sat motionless a little while, as if debating the question, the young officer's hand still outstretched. Macdonald dropped his hand quickly, as if moved to shorten the humiliation, to the buckle of his belt and opened it with deft jerk. At that moment Chadron, ten feet away, slung a revolver from his side and fired.

Macdonald rocked in his saddle as Frances leaped to the ground and ran to his side. He wilted forward, his hat falling, and crumpled into her arms. The lieutenant relieved her of her bloody burden, and eased Macdonald to the ground.

Major King came riding back. At his sharp command troopers surrounded Chadron, who sat with his weapon still poised, like one gazing at the mark at which he has fired, the smoke of his shot around him.

"In a second he'd 'a' got me, but I

beat him to it—by God, I beat him to it!" he said.

Macdonald's belt had slipped free of his body. With its burden of cartridges and its two long pistols, it lay at Frances's feet. She stooped, a little sound in her throat between a sob and a cry, jerked one of the guns out, wheeled upon Chadron, and fired. The lieutenant struck up her arm in time to save the cattleman's life. The blow sent the pistol whirling out of her hand.

"They will go off that way sometimes," said the young officer, with apology in his soft voice.

The soldiers closed around Chadron and hurried him away. A moment Major King sat looking at Macdonald, whose blood was wasting in the roadside dust from a wound in his chest. Then he flashed a look into Frances's face that had a sneer of triumph in it, wheeled his horse, and galloped away.

In a moment the lieutenant was summoned, leaving Frances alone between the two forces with Macdonald. She did not know whether he was dead. She dropped to her knees in the dust and began to tear frantically at his shirt to come to the wound. Tom Lassiter came hurrying up with others, denouncing the treacherous shot, swearing vengeance on the cowardly head that had conceived a so murderous thing.

Lassiter said that he was not dead, and set to work to stem the blood. It seemed to Frances that the world had fallen away from her, leaving her alone. She stood aside a little, her chin up in her old imperious way, her eyes on the far hills where the tender sunlight was just striking among the white-limbed aspen-trees. But her heart was bent down to the darkness of despair.

She asked no questions of the men who were working so earnestly after their crude way to check that precious stream; she stood in the activity of passing troopers and escorted raiders, insensible of any movement or sound in all the world around her. Only when Tom Lassiter

stood from his ministrations and looked at her with understanding in his old, weary eyes, she turned her face back again, slowly resolute, to see if he had died.

Her throat was dry. It took an effort to bring a sound from it, and then it was strained and wavering.

"Is he—dead?"

"No, miss, he ain't dead," Tom answered. But there was such a shadow of sorrow and pain in his eyes that tears gushed into her own.

"Will—will—"

Tom shook his head. "The Lord that give him alone can answer that," he said.

The troops had moved on, save the detail singled for police duty. These were tightening girths and trimming for the road again a little way from the spot where Macdonald lay. The lieutenant returned hastily.

"Miss Landcraft, I am ordered to convey you to Alamito Ranch—under guard," said he.

Banjo Gibson, held to be harmless and insignificant by Major King, had been set free. Now he came up, leading his horse, shocked to the deepest fibers of his sensitive soul by the cowardly deed that Saul Chadron had done.

"It went clean through him!" he said, rising from his inspection of Macdonald's wound. And then, moved by the pain in Frances's tearless eyes, he enlarged upon the advantages of that from a surgical view. "The beauty of a hole in a man's chest like that is that it lets the pizen dreem off," he told her. "It wouldn't surprise me none to see Mac up and around inside of a couple of weeks, for he's as hard as old hick'ry."

"Well, I'm not going to Alamito Ranch and leave him out here to die of neglect, orders or no orders!" said she to the lieutenant.

The young officer's face colored; he plucked at his new mustache in embarrassment. Perhaps the prospect of carrying a handsome and dignified young lady in his arms for a matter of twenty-odd

miles was not as alluring to him as it might have been to another, for he was a slight young man only a little while out of West Point. But orders were orders, and he gave Frances to understand that in diplomatic and polite phrasing.

She scorned him and his veneration for orders, and turned from him coldly.

"Is there no doctor with your detachment?" she asked.

"He has gone on with the main body, Miss Landcraft. They have several wounded."

"Wounded murderers and burners of homes! Well, I'm not going to Alamito Ranch with you, sir, unless you can contrive an ambulance of some sort and take this gentleman, too."

The officer brightened. He believed it could be arranged. Inside of an hour he had Tom Lassiter around with a team and spring wagon, in which the homesteaders laid Macdonald tenderly upon a bed of hay.

Banjo waited until they were ready to begin their slow march to the ranch, when he led his little horse around.

"I'll go on to the agency after the doctor, and send him over to Alamito as quick as he can go," he said. "And I'll see if Mother Mathews can go over, too. She's worth four doctors when it comes to keepin' the pizen from spreadin' in a wound."

Frances gave him her benediction with her eyes and farewell with a warm hand-clasp, and Banjo's beribboned horse frisked off on its long trip, quite refreshed from the labors of the past night.

Frances was carrying Macdonald's cartridge-belt and revolvers, the confiscation of which had been overlooked by Major King in the excitement of the shooting. The young lieutenant hadn't the heart to take the weapons from her. Orders had been carried out; Macdonald had been disarmed. He let it go at that.

Frances rode in the wagon with Macdonald, a canteen of water slung over her shoulders. Now and then she moistened his lips with a little of it, and bathed his

eyes, closed in pathetic weariness. He was unconscious still from the half-ton blow of Saul Chadron's big bullet. As she ministered to him she felt that he would open his eyes on this world's pains and cruel injustices nevermore.

And why had Major King ordered her, virtually under arrest, to Alamito Ranch, instead of sending her in disgrace to the post? Was it because he feared that she would communicate with her father from the post, and discover to him the treacherous compact between Chadron and King, or merely to take a mean revenge upon her by humiliating her in Nola Chadron's eyes?

He had taken the newspaper correspondent with him, and certainly would see that no more of the truth was sent out by him from that flame-swept country for several days. With her at the ranch, far from telegraphic communication with the world, nothing could go out from her that would enlighten the department on the deception that the cattlemen had practised to draw the government into the conflict on their side. In the mean time, the Drovers' Association would be at work, spreading money with free hand, corrupting evidence with the old dyes of falsehood.

Major King had seen his promised reward withdrawn through her intervention, and had made a play of being fair to both sides in the controversy. Except that he kept one hand on Chadron's shoulder, so to speak, in making honest men of those bloody rascals whom he had sent there to burn and kill. They were to be shipped safely back to their place, where they would disperse, and walk free of all danger of prosecution afterward. Out of that one service to the cattlemen Major King scarcely could hope to win his coveted reward.

She believed that Alan Macdonald would die. It seemed that the fever which would consume his feeble hope of life was already kindling on his lips. But she had no tears to pour out over him now. Only a great hardness in her heart

against Saul Chadron, and a wild desire to lift her hand and strike him low.

Whether Major King would make her attempt against Chadron's life or her interference with his military expedition his excuse for placing her under guard remained for the future to develop. She turned these things in her mind as they proceeded along the white river-road toward the ranch.

It came noontime, and decline of sun; the shadow of the mountains reached down into the valley, the mist came purple again over the foot-hills, the fire of sunset upon the clouds. Alan Macdonald still lived, his strong, harsh face turned to the fading skies, his tired eyelids closed upon his dreams.

CHAPTER XX.

LOVE AND DEATH.

MAGGIE and Alvino had the ranch to themselves when the military party from the upper valley arrived, Mrs. Chadron and Nola having driven to Meander that morning. It had been their intention to return that evening, Maggie said. Mrs. Chadron had gone after chili-peppers and other things, but principally chili-peppers. There was not one left in the house, and the mistress could not live without them, any more than fire could burn without wood.

Dusk had settled when they reached the ranch, and night thickened fast. The lieutenant dropped two men at the corral gate—her guard, Frances understood—and went back to his task of watching for armed men upon the highroads.

Under the direction of Frances, Maggie had placed a cot in Mrs. Chadron's favored sitting-room with the fireplace. There Macdonald lay in clean sheets, a blaze on the hearth, and Maggie washing his wound with hot water, groaning in the pity which is the sweetest part of the women of her homely race.

"I think that he will live, miss," she said hopefully. "See, he has a strong

breath on my damp hand—I can feel it like a little wind.”

She spoke in her native tongue, which Frances understood thoroughly from her years in Texas and Arizona posts. Frances shook her head sorrowfully.

“I am afraid his breath will fail soon, Maggie.”

“No; if they live the first hour after being shot, they get well,” Maggie persisted with apparent sincerity. “Here, put your hand on his heart—do you feel it? What a strong heart he has to live so well! What a strong, strong heart!”

“Yes, a strong, strong heart!” Tears were falling for him, now that there was none to see them scalding their way down her pale cheeks.

“He must have carried something sacred with him to give him such strength, such life.”

“He carried honor,” said Frances, more to herself than to Maggie, doubting that she would understand.

“And love, maybe?” said Maggie, with soft word, soft upward-glancing of her feeling dark eyes.

“Who can tell?” Frances answered, turning her head away.

Maggie drew the sheet over him and stood looking down into his white face.

“If he could speak, he would ask for his mother, and for water then, and after that the one he loves. That is the way a man’s mind carries those three precious things when death blows its breath in his face.”

“I do not know,” said Frances slowly.

There was such stress in waiting, such silence in the world, and such emptiness and pain! Reverently as Maggie’s voice was lowered, soft and sympathetic as her word, Frances longed for her to be still, and go and leave her alone with him. She longed to hold the dear spark of his faltering life in her own hands, alone, quite alone; to warm it back to strength in her own lone heart. Surely her name could not be the last in his remembrance, no matter for the disturbing breath of death.

“I will bring you some food,” said Maggie. “To give him life out of your life, you must be strong.”

Frances started out of her sleep in the rocking-chair before the fire. She had turned the lamp low, but there was a flare of light on her face. Her faculties were so deeply sunk in that insidious sleep which had crept upon her like a bindweed upon wheat that she struggled to rise from it. She sprang up, her mind groping, remembering that there was something for which she was under heavy responsibility, but unable for a moment to bring it back to its place.

Nola was in the door with a candle, shading the flame from her eyes with her hand. Her hair was about her shoulders; her feet were bare under the hem of her long dressing-robe. She was staring; her lips were open; her breath was quick, as if she had arrived after a run.

“Is he—alive?” she whispered.

“Why should you come to ask—what is his life to you?” asked Frances, sorrowfully bitter.

“Oh, Maggie just woke and came up to tell me: mother doesn’t know—she’s just gone to bed. Isn’t it terrible, Frances!”

Nola spoke distractedly, as if in great agony or great fear.

“He can’t harm any of you now; you’re safe.” Frances was hard and scornful. She turned from Nola and laid her hand on Macdonald’s brow, drawing her breath with a relieved sigh when she felt the warmth of life still there.

“Oh, Frances, Frances!” Nola moaned with expression of despair. “Isn’t this terrible?”

“If you mean it’s terrible to have him here, I can’t help it. I’m a prisoner here against my will. I couldn’t leave him out there alone to die.”

Nola lowered her candle and stared at Frances, her eyes big and blank of everything but a wild expression that Frances had read as fear.

“Will he die?” she whispered.

"Yes; you are to have your heartless way at last. He will die, and his blood will be on this house, never to be washed away!"

"Why didn't you come back when we called you—both of you?" Nola drew near, reaching out an appealing hand. Frances shrank from her, to bend quickly over Macdonald when he groaned and moved his head.

"Put out that light—it's in his eyes!" she said.

Nola blew out the candle and came glimmering into the room in her soft white gown.

"Don't blame me, Frances; don't blame any of us. Mother and I wanted to save you both; we tried to stop the men, and we could have held them back if it hadn't been for Chance. Chance got three of them to go; the others—"

"They paid for that!" said Frances, a little lift of triumph in her voice.

"Yes, but they—"

"Chance didn't do it, I tell you! If he says he did it he lies! It was—somebody else."

"The soldiers?"

"No, not the soldiers."

"I thought maybe—I saw one of them on guard in front of the house as we came in."

"He's guarding me; I'm under arrest, I tell you. The soldiers have nothing to do with him."

Nola stood looking down at Macdonald, who was deathly white in the weak light of the low, shaded lamp. With a little timid outreaching, a little starting and drawing back, she touched his forehead, where a thick lock of his shaggy hair fell over it, like a sheaf of ripe wheat burst from its band.

"Oh, it breaks my heart to see him dying—it — breaks — my — heart!" she sobbed.

"You struck him! You're not *fit* to touch him; take your hand away!"

Frances pushed her arm roughly. Nola drew back, drenched with a sudden torrent of penitential tears.

"I know it, I know it!" she confessed in bitterness. "I knew it when he took me away from those people in the mountains and brought me home. He carried me in his arms when I was tired, and sang to me as we rode along there in the lonesome night! He sang to me, just like I was a little child, so I wouldn't be afraid—afraid—of him!"

"Oh, and you struck him, you struck him like a dog!"

"I've suffered more for that than I hurt him, Frances—it's been like fire in my heart!"

"I pray to God it will burn up your wicked pride!"

"We believed him, mother and I believed him, in spite of what Chance said. Oh, if you'd only come back then, Frances, this thing wouldn't have happened!"

"I can't see what good that would have done," said Frances wearily; "there are others who don't believe him. They'd have got him some time, just like they got him—in a coward's underhanded way, never giving him a chance for his life."

"We went to Meander this morning, thinking we'd catch father there before he left. We wanted to tell him about Mr. Macdonald, and get him to drop this feud. If we could have seen him I know he'd have done what we asked, for he's got the noblest heart in the world!"

Whatever Frances felt on the noble nature of Saul Chadron she held unexpressed. She did not feel that it fell to her duty to tell Nola whose hand had struck Macdonald down, although she believed that the cattleman's daughter deserved whatever pain and humiliation the revelation might bring. For it was as plain as if Nola had confessed it in words that she had much more than a friendly feeling of gratitude for the foe-man of her family.

Her heart was as unstable as mercury, it seemed. Frances despised her for her fickleness, scorned her for the mean face of friendship over the treachery of her soul. Not that she regretted Major King.

Nola was free to take him and make the most of him. But she was not to come in as a wedge to rive her from this man.

Let her pay her debt of gratitude in something else than love. Living or dead, Alan Macdonald was not for Nola Chadron. Her penance and her tears, her moanings and sobs and her broken heart, even that, if it should come, could not pay for the humiliation and the pain which that house had brought upon him.

"When did it happen?" asked Nola.

"This morning, early."

"Who did it—how did it happen? You got away from Chance—you said it wasn't Chance."

"We got away from that gang yesterday; this happened this morning, miles from that place."

"Who was it? Why don't you tell me, Frances?"

They were standing at Macdonald's side. A little spurt of flame among the ends of wood in the chimney threw a sudden illumination over them, and played like water over a stone upon Macdonald's face, then sank again, as if it had been plunged in ashes. Frances remained silent, her vindictiveness, her hardness of heart, against this vacillating girl dying away as the flame had died. It was not her desire to hurt her with that story of treachery and cowardice which must leave its stain upon her name for many a year.

"The name of the man who shot him is a curse and a blight on this land, a mockery of every holy human thought. I'll not speak it."

Nola stared at her, horror speaking from her eyes. "He must be a monster!"

"He is the lowest of the accursed—a coward!" Frances said.

Nola shuddered, standing silently by the couch a little while. Then: "But I want to help you, Frances, if you'll let me."

"There's nothing that you can do. I'm waiting for Mrs. Mathews and the doctor from the agency."

"You can go up and rest until they come, Frances; you look so tired and pale. I'll watch by him; you can tell me what to do, and I'll call you when they come."

"No; I'll stay until—I'll stay here."

"Oh, please go, Frances; you're nearly dead on your feet."

"Why do you want me to leave him?" Frances asked, in a flash of jealous suspicion. She turned to Nola, as if to search out her hidden intention.

"You were asleep in your chair when I came in, Frances," Nola chided her gently.

Again they stood in silence, looking down upon the wounded man. Frances was resentful of Nola's interest in him, of her presence in the room. She was on the point of asking her to leave when Nola spoke.

"If he hadn't been so proud, if he'd only stooped to explain things to us, to talk to us, even, this could have been prevented, Frances."

"What could he have said?" Frances asked, wondering indeed what explanation could have lessened his offense in Saul Chadron's eyes.

"If I had known him, I would have understood," Nola replied in a soft, low voice, as if communing with herself.

"You! Well, perhaps—perhaps even you would have understood."

"Look—he moved!"

"Sh-h-h! Your talking disturbs him, Nola. Go to bed—you can't help me any here."

"And leave him all to you!"

The words flashed from Nola, as if they had sprung out of her mouth before her reason had given them permission to depart.

"Of course with me; he's mine!"

"If he's going to die, Frances, can't I share him with you till the end—can't I have just a little share in the care of him here with you?"

Nola laid a hand on Frances's arm as she pleaded, and turned her white face appealingly in the dim light.

"Don't talk that way, girl!" said Frances roughly; "you have no part in him at all—he is nothing to you."

"He is all to me—everything to me! Oh, Frances! If you knew, if you knew!"

"What? If I knew what?" Frances caught her arm in fierce grip, and shook her savagely.

"Don't—don't—hurt me, Frances!" Nola cringed and shrank away, and lifted her arms as if to ward a blow.

"What did you mean by that? Tell me—speak!"

"Oh, the way it came to me, the way it came to me as he carried me in his arms and sang to me so I wouldn't be afraid!" moaned Nola, her face hidden in her hands. "I never knew before what it was to care for anybody that way—I never, never knew before!"

"You can't have this man, nor any share in him, living or dead! I gave up Major King to you; be satisfied."

"Oh, Major King!"

"Poor shadow that he is in comparison with a man, he'll have to serve for you. Living or dead, I tell you, this man is mine. Now go!"

Nola was shaking again with a sudden gust of weeping. She had sunk to the floor at the head of the couch, a white heap, her bare arms clasping her head.

"It breaks my heart to see him die!" she moaned, rocking herself in her grief like a child.

And child Frances felt her to be in her selfishness, a child never denied, and careless and unfeeling of the rights of others from this long indulgence. She doubted Nola's sincerity, even in the face of such demonstrative evidence. There was no pity for her, and no softness.

"Get up!" Frances spoke sternly, "and go to your room."

"He must not be allowed to die—he must be saved!" Nola reached out her hands as if to call back his struggling soul.

"Belated tears will not save him. Get up—it's time for you to go."

Nola bent forward suddenly, her hair sweeping the wounded man's face, her lips near his brow. Frances caught her with a sound in her throat like a growl, and flung her back.

"You'll not kiss him—you'll never kiss him!" she said.

Nola sprang up, not crying now, but hot with sudden anger.

"If you were out of the way he'd love me!"

"Love *you!* you little cat!"

"Yes, he'd love me—I'd take him away from you like I've taken other men! He'd love me, I tell you—he'd love *me!*"

Frances looked at her steadily a moment, contempt in her eloquent face. "If you have no other virtue in you, at least have some respect for the dying," she said.

"He's not dying, he'll not die!" Nola hotly denied. "He'll live—live to love me!"

"Go! This room—"

"It's my house; I'll go and come in it when I please."

"I'm a prisoner in it, not a guest. I'll force you out of the room if I must. This disgraceful behavior must end, and end this minute. Are you going?"

"If you were out of the way, he'd love me," said Nola from the door, spiteful, resentful, speaking slowly, as if pressing each word into Frances's brain and heart; "if you were out of the way."

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.

Next Week—Greatest Drama of the Year
THE SIN THAT WAS HIS
 BY FRANK L. PACKARD

Posh Luker ~ His Memoirs



by



John Barnett

III—A FISTFUL OF DIAMONDS

IT was Slippy Williams who pointed out the owner of the diamonds to Posh Luker. He had taken him up to a certain West End bar one afternoon for that very purpose. Both Slippy and Mr. Luker were in funds at the moment, but they felt slightly out of place among their novel surroundings.

Mr. Williams was smoking a large cigar with a band around it, and Posh Luker was making his first acquaintance with green Chartreuse.

"This is a real proper drink, Slippy," he remarked approvingly. "It has such a satisfying sort of grip to it. I can't help envying them as can afford to drink it regular with all meals."

"There's the chap I was talking about!" Slippy whispered suddenly. "That big flash negro!"

Mr. Luker looked up and beheld a full-sized negro entering the bar. There was

no question about his bigness. He must have stood at least six foot four in his socks; his shoulders were of a surprising bulkiness, and his arms were noticeably long. His face, to Mr. Luker's prejudiced fancy, suggested the countenance of a well-pleased orang-utan.

As for his costume, it appeared to be designed primarily to attract attention. It included a light tweed suit with a pattern like a chess-board, a bright-green felt hat, and patent leather boots with white cloth uppers. But it was his jewelry that really caught and tried the eye.

Upon his brown fingers were half a dozen diamond rings; his tie pin was a glittering atrocity; and his watch-chain fairly made Posh Luker's mouth water.

That gentleman tells me that he only wonders why the negro was not wearing earrings and one or two diamonds stuck through his nose. He is convinced that he

would surely have done so if he had thought of it.

"A fair knockout, isn't he?" Slippy whispered.

"He *is* pretty flash," Posh Luker answered judiciously.

"You watch him now," Slippy said. "He generally goes through the same pleasing little performance."

"The negro had reached the bar, pushing his way offensively through the crowd. His manner suggested that he had purchased the building, and also that he reveled in the notice he was attracting.

He called for refreshment in lordly fashion, and when it had been served he thrust his hand into his trouser-pocket and flung a glittering fistful upon the counter. And the eyes of Mr. Luker bulged with genuine wonder. It was a handful of loose diamonds mixed with coins that the negro had chucked down!

"Great snakes!" exclaimed Mr. Luker. "Does he always carry about loose sparks like that?"

"Always," Slippy answered. "He likes to surprise people."

"I'd like to surprise *him*!" Posh Luker muttered. "I've no real affection for them fellows!"

The colored man had picked out a coin and paid for his drink, but he left the diamonds glittering upon the counter. He loudly addressed the girl behind the bar.

"What do you think of them, my dear? Pretty, ain't they? I guess there ain't many trashy white gentlemen that can show you their sort often."

The girl treated him very haughtily.

"I've seen them before," she said with a tired manner. "I'd put them back in my pocket if I were you."

The remark won approving nods from every one about the bar except the man to whom it was addressed. He glared round him viciously.

"I could buy up this whole roomful of white gentlemen without feeling it," he said. "And I'd fight any pair of them at once just to give me an appetite! That's what I think of white folk!"

"He always goes on like that," Slippy remarked. "He don't seem to like us poor whites, somehow!"

"I think there's going to be a blooming row!" Posh Luker said.

It certainly looked like it. The crowd resented the negro's remarks, and several of them said as much with great plainness. There was a menacing movement toward him.

Posh Luker was hoping that the man might be handled with some roughness. He considered that he had asked for it. The negro grinned, pocketed his diamonds, and put up his great fists. He seemed to desire trouble. But at the critical moment the manager confronted him with a policeman at his heels.

"I must ask you to go outside," he said firmly. "You caused a disturbance here yesterday. If you do not go at once I shall be compelled to give you in charge!"

And the negro went, after one calculating glance at the policeman, who was almost as generously built as himself. The crowd laughed and hooted as he made for the door, and he looked back and snarled like a spiteful dog.

"Well," said Slippy, "what do you think of him?"

"He seems a nice cup of tea," Posh Luker answered. "I don't like him at all, but I do like his jewelry. It 'ud be worth handling."

"Just what I think," Slippy agreed. "And I mean to have a shot at handling it, if you'll stand in. I've been making some quiet investergations."

"Well, you can tell me about it," Posh Luker said indulgently. "We're quiet in this corner. Yes, and I'll 'ave some more of that Shartroose stuff. Now, fire ahead." Slippy obeyed.

He may be said to have risen in his profession of late. Recently he had turned his attention to higher matters than the pilfering of articles from shops. Posh Luker admitted that he had the makings of a very tidy cracksmen, except that his nerve was always bad.

It had been spoiled once for all by a re-

tired prize-fighter whose profession he had mistaken. That was why he was always glad to work with his present companion. Mr. Luker had his weaknesses, but want of nerve was not among them.

"That negro's simply rolling in brass," Slippy said. "The sparks he wears ain't nothing to what 'e's got. 'E lives in a big house down Pockbourne way with a high wall and garden all round it, an' keeps no one but colored people there—servants and friends and all.

"And they gets up to some very queer larks in that house, I fancy. But that don't matter to us, except that it makes our job easier when every one in a house is more or less half drunk."

"It do," agreed Mr. Luker. "I'm glad to hear it. You've investergated the house, Slippy?"

"Several times," Mr. Williams answered. "They've got builders at work just now, and there's a ladder quite handy. What's wrong with you and me running down this very evening, Posh, and popping in when they're at dinner?"

Mr. Luker was not accustomed to engage upon a job at such short notice, but he approved of what he had heard of Slippy's plan, especially the presence of the ladder, and the green Chartreuse had inspired him with a dashing confidence.

"I'm on," he said. "But what about tools. I never move without my little persuader, as well you know."

"I've got all else we'll want on me," Slippy answered. "We sha'n't need much. Them bedroom windows are quite simple. We'd better be getting a move on. There's a train from Charing Cross which 'll land us down about eight o'clock."

And the sinful pair duly caught that train. It was a charming, peaceful evening, and all Pockbourne seemed to be asleep. The lanes were quite deserted. A few minutes from the station Slippy halted beneath a high brick wall.

"Here's the crib," he said. "We must nip over the wall. I'll give you a back. There's trees enough inside to give us cover right up to the house."

"Are there any nasty dogs about?" Posh Luker asked.

Slippy paled visibly. He hated dogs and all violent risks.

"There are three," he answered. "'Orrid great brutes! But they keep 'em in a kind of cage well away from the house. At any rate, that's where they are during the daytime, when I've been here."

"We must just trust to luck," Posh Luker said coolly. "Gimme that back."

And he was on the top of the wall in a moment and pulled Slippy after him. They dropped down inside and found themselves in an extensive shrubbery.

Slippy led the way and everything went well. There was no sign of dogs or gardeners. It was a huge garden, but the trees and bushes afforded convenient shelter, and the back of the house was reached without mishap.

"There's the ladder," Slippy whispered, and it was lifted quietly and placed against the house. No lights were showing above the ground floor. Posh Luker inferred quite correctly that dinner was in progress. He reflected cheerfully that everything seemed to have been made for them.

He went first up the ladder, and the fastenings of the window that he tackled yielded promptly to his persuasive skill. They crept through into a bedroom which appeared to be unoccupied, judging by the absence of clothes and other trifles.

"It's the best bedroom that we want," Mr. Luker whispered. "The big negro's own room!"

Slippy was trembling with nervousness, but he motioned with his hand and Mr. Luker opened the door with caution and peeped out. There was no one upon the broad landing.

"That's the door of his room, I think," Slippy whispered, and he had made no mistake.

It was a fine, large bedroom, looking from the front of the house, but what caught Posh Luker's eye at once and warmed his heart with professional joy

was something lying on the dressing-table. It was nothing more or less than a handful of loose diamonds!

"Oh, my aunt! this is the real jam!" Mr. Luker muttered. "I reckon the colored gent left 'em there when he changed 'is togs. Well, they're going in a decent white man's pocket now!"

And they were in his pocket without delay. Mr. Luker is never one to linger unduly when he has made what he considers a fair working profit. Those diamonds in themselves were as rich a swag as any moderate-minded man could ask for, and every moment was, of course, a danger.

Slippy Williams was positively twittering with anxiety. But Mr. Luker insisted on opening one or two drawers, and—that negro's taste in tie pins, studs, and links proved to be characteristically extravagant.

As Mr. Luker told me:

"Mere precious metal weren't no good to that black man. It was stones that he liked, big stones. Well, that suited my taste, too, and Slippy's, just then. We felt quite indulgent like toward that colored gentleman."

They pocketed all that they could get without waste of time, and then prepared for a brisk departure. The landing was still deserted. So was the garden, to all appearance, when they peeped out. They slid down the ladder, replaced it carefully, and crept away light-heartedly among the trees. It seemed to Mr. Luker that never in his lengthy career had he cracked a crib with such ease and gentility.

But, as Mr. Luker remarked to me ruefully:

"It's just at a moment like that, mister, when everythink seems happy and peaceful, that things get up and hit an honest man!"

"The pair were about half-way across the garden and very near the safety of the shrubbery, when Slippy looked round, gave one horrified gasp, and dropped plump down upon his knees!

Mr. Luker looked, too, and echoed that

gasp despite his far greater natural courage.

Three of the biggest dogs that he had ever seen were making after them at full gallop, only twenty yards away!

"What breed they was," said Mr. Luker when telling me this story, "I do not know. It was no moment, mister, for natural 'istory studies! I've seen no dogs like them before, and I hope and pray I never shall again, except safely behind bars! They was as big as small donkeys, their nasty eyes was red as rubies, and they had teeth like crockindiles! They came bounding along as fast as greyhounds, making no noise at all, except for a kind of 'ungry, gasping sound!"

Escape was hopeless.

Posh Luker made a jump for the bough of a tree, but one of the dogs gripped his coat-tail and had him down in a trice.

Then he let go.

To Posh Luker's amazement, they did not make straight for their throats. They merely stood round those unfortunate outlaws for a moment, glaring at them curiously. Some shadowy idea arose in Mr. Luker's resourceful mind of making friends with them.

It is probable that Slippy, who was groaning hideously, never entertained it for a moment. And anyhow it proved idle. The dogs closed in and began with their great heads and shoulders to thrust their victims away from the shrubbery. And in a moment Posh Luker understood their dire intention.

They were herding their captives back to the house!

The two went like lambs. There was nothing else to be done. Mr. Luker, greatly daring, made one attempt to edge away, and the three dogs broke their common silence with a simultaneous growl of so savage a quality that even his stout blood ran cold!

They just had to go. Right to the back of the house the dogs drove their prisoners, and then lifted up their heads and began to bay triumphantly. They

had done their work, and now they were summoning their masters to come and see their bag of game!

"I should like," Mr. Luker told me bitterly, "to hire a lion-tamer to give them dogs the hiding they deserved!"

They had not long to wait. A crowd of people burst from the house, headed by the big negro. There were men in dress clothes, and women garishly clad, and servants in bright livery. And every one of them was black or brown. The prisoners were the only white men present.

The big negro seemed to take in the situation with one glance. "Here we have two burglars, for a thousand dollars!" he said, like a man exhibiting wild animals. "Two unpleasant white burglars!"

Some of the colored ladies appeared to think it their duty to scream at this stage in the proceedings. So they duly screamed.

"We ain't burglars!" Posh Luker declared indignantly. "We're two decent, honest men assaulted quite wanton like by these dangerous dogs of yours—"

The negro bent and patted one of the creatures.

"Good boys!" he said. "You don't like white trash any more than I. Are they honest, Tiger, are they?"

He pointed threateningly at the captives, and the dog he spoke to gave one growl and sprang straight at Slippy's throat! Mr. Williams hurled himself backward a good ten feet with the howl of a lost soul, and the negro laughed and caught Tiger by the collar as he sprang.

Only a man of his weight and strength could have checked the brute.

"Down, Tiger, down, good boy!" he said. "We don't want to hurt these—honest white gentlemen—yet!" He turned upon Mr. Luker with vicious suddenness. "If you are honest men, what are you doing in this garden?"

"We got in here by accident—" Mr. Luker began.

"Ah!" the negro said nastily. "Here,

James and Sam, hold these two, and Peter can go through their pockets! They may have something of an incriminatory nature upon them."

"I protest strongly ag'in' being searched!" Mr. Luker said with honest fury.

As for Slippy, he seemed past the power of speech. Those dogs had cowed him cruelly.

"Hold your tongue, sir!" the negro said ferociously. "Do you want the dogs to deal with you?"

Well, Mr. Luker didn't. Two colored servants held them securely, and another went through their pockets in workman-like style. And then, of course, the murderer was out. The diamonds and the rest of the jewelry were revealed. The big negro smiled, with a cruel gleam of his white teeth.

"Ah!" he said. "So they've been in the house! This shall be looked into. But we need not stand, my friends. Thomas, bring out chairs and coffee and cigars. We will go into the matter at our leisure and decide upon the punishment of these—honest men!"

And the house party sat down in great comfort. No refreshment was offered to the prisoners. It is doubtful if Slippy could have swallowed anything, but Mr. Luker felt a certain yearning for stimulant.

He did not like the look of things at all. They were entirely in the power of that big negro, and he gave the experienced Mr. Luker the impression that he was capable of anything, except decency.

"Now, then," the host began, settling himself in his chair and lighting an immense cigar. "How did you get into the house? I—should—advise—you—to—answer!"

It seemed to Posh Luker best to humor the man.

"We made use of that ladder over there," he replied sulkily.

"Just so," his captor answered. "It may seem careless to have left it about, but, as you have seen, I can trust my

dogs. And now—there is the little question of your punishment. I—rather value those diamonds. And—I do not greatly love white people!”

He turned to his friends.

“I do not think we will call in the police,” he said. “I think we will have a little amusement with these—honest white men!”

His guests voiced their approval with hilarity. They seemed to share their host’s prejudice against white men. Posh Luker’s anxiety deepened.

“If it’s all the same to you, I think I’d prefer you to call in the police,” he said politely.

As he reflected—you *do* know where you are with the beastly police. There seemed to be no rules about this gang of blacks.

And Slippy groaned an agreement. He was in a mood when he would have embraced a policeman if he could only have seen one!

The big negro turned upon Posh Luker with a vicious growl worthy of one of his dogs.

“Don’t you dare to speak! You’ve put yourselves in my hands, and by cripes I mean to have my amusement out of you! You may be my guests for some little while! Anyhow, the night is young. Now, what shall we do first? Ah, I have it! We will have a little boxing—just to begin with!”

“What do you mean?” Posh Luker asked.

The negro pointed to one of his servants.

“Tim there was not unknown in the professional ring a few years ago. He will put on the gloves now with each of you in turn. What do you say to the proposal? He is a far lighter man than either of you. If one of you bests him you shall both go free.”

Tim stepped forward chuckling. He was only a lightweight, and Slippy and Mr. Luker were one hundred and seventy and more, but he looked a very likely hand.

Mr. Williams raised a shrill yell of protest. He had no use at all for any more professional pugilists.

“I ain’t going to box nobody!” he screamed. “Send for the police!”

His tormentor spoke quite quietly.

“You will do as you are told, my man. If you refuse to face Tim you will be flogged into the ring. Do you understand?”

Mr. Williams answered that he did. The unfortunate man seemed to wish that he was dead.

“And what do you say?” asked the negro, turning to Mr. Luker.

That gentleman was made of sterner stuff. He saw that there was no choice in the matter, and he could use his hands more than a little, and anyway, he was a good three stone heavier than Tim.

“I’ll take my chance,” he answered.

The big negro leaned forward in his chair and spoke in a voice which reminded Mr. Luker of a tiger purring at the zoo.

“Suppose you say ‘sir,’ when you address me,” he suggested. “When I was in America I made a little vow that some day or other white trash should say ‘sir’ to me.”

Mr. Luker began to understand why that negro was so bitter against white men.

He hesitated. To use his own words:

“I dunno that I’m a man of much silly vanity, but it did go ag’in’ the grain to say ‘sir’ to that black man!”

“If you don’t,” his host put in, “you shall fight two of those dogs instead of Tim.”

And that settled it.

“I’m ready to have a little turn up with Tim—sir,” Mr. Luker growled very sullenly.

“That’s better,” the negro said with an ugly smile. “The lawn in front of our chairs will do for the entertainment. Get ready. I will act as referee and time-keeper.”

The three combatants removed their superfluous clothing.

Mr. Williams was to face Tim first. The servants brought out boxing-gloves, two wooden chairs, sponges, and water. They marked out a square upon the lawn for a ring. The guests settled themselves comfortably, men and women, to enjoy the fun.

It was poor fun for Slippy Williams!

"Time!" called the big negro, and Mr. Williams got up from his chair like a too-intelligent sheep going to visit a butcher.

Mr. Luker saw at a glance that Tim was very smart and quick with his hands. He was not in much condition, but he had been a boxer of class. He played lightly with Slippy for a minute, and then he rapped home a left-hander upon his nose.

It was not a knock-down blow by any stretch of the imagination, but Mr. Williams snatched at the excuse. He went down with a howl, and he stayed down. He had had more than enough of it. He did not mean having any more. The big negro counted him out with due solemnity. And then he said very quietly.

"Bring a dog-whip!"

It is probable that Slippy did not catch the words. He was lying flat upon his face, pretending to be "out" to the world.

"Try and flog some pluck into that miserable cur!" commanded the negro when the whip arrived.

And one of his servants obeyed with a will! It made Mr. Luker quite sore just to hear the two cuts which Slippy took before he was on his feet again! His screams were quite alarming.

"I told you to box, my man," remarked his tormentor. "I didn't tell you to lie down to the first tap!"

So Mr. Williams went in to fight with desperation, remembering that dog-whip. He did all he could, swinging his long arms wildly, but he knew nothing of the fine arts of boxing. Tim played with him for two rounds, just to please the audience, and then he hooked his left with neatness. It took Slippy upon the chin, and he went down and out in real earnest.

It was two minutes before he knew what had happened.

And then it was Posh Luker's turn.

He had made up his mind that there should be no dog-whips for him! He went in to fight from the start.

Tim was too quick for him, but he had the weight and the heavier punch. He managed to land one on Tim's body that slowed him up considerably. Tim's condition was no better than his own.

Anyhow, Mr. Luker kept going for three bustling rounds, and Tim knew that he had been in a fight. At the end of the third they indulged in an old-fashioned rally, each hitting for all he was worth. Tim crossed Posh Luker with his right on the jaw, and he went peacefully to sleep.

When he came round he was given a mouthful of brandy and felt little the worse. And a few minutes later the pair were led once more before the owner of the house.

"Considering what mean white trash you are, you didn't shape so badly against Tim," he said patronizingly to Mr. Luker. "You have afforded us some little entertainment. To-morrow night you shall again amuse us. I have not quite made up my mind what you shall do, but I think you shall try your hands at dog taming."

"At *what*?" Mr. Williams screamed hoarsely.

"I said at dog taming. You would find that those three dogs of mine would afford ample scope for your powers. Be silent! Your screaming annoys me. Take away the prisoners now, Thomas, and lock them up securely."

The unfortunate pair were led away into the house and shut into a strong room. Bread and water were given them and they were left alone. They held a consultation. Slippy was almost hysterical.

"To tame them horrible dogs, Posh!" he kept moaning. "I'd rather die than try it!"

"I'm not keen on it myself," Mr. Lu-

ker admitted. "It's revenge on that buck negro that I'm really keen on!"

And Slippy spoke about the man at great length, and with striking violence. Posh Luker cut him short at last.

"We've got to get out of here," he said thoughtfully.

"Yes, before that dog taming begins!" Slippy groaned. "Do you see your way to getting out, Posh?"

He spoke like a child turning to its teacher. As Posh Luker remarked modestly to me:

"It's these brains of mine that they all lean on when their own 'ave failed!"

He had been making a careful examination of the room.

"They've took away our tools," he said. "And we can't get out of here without them. Those window bars are uncommon strong. But I've got a simple little plan in my head."

He picked up a wooden chair.

"Yes," he said, "two of them legs will do when we want them. They can stay on for the present. I'm going to 'ave a snooze now. Them beds look fairly comfortable."

And he lay down and went to sleep, declining flatly to tell Slippy of his plan. Mr. Luker holds strongly that it is a mistake to take one's inferiors into one's confidence.

The plan was put into action about four o'clock the next afternoon. The prisoners had known that Thomas and Tim were coming then to bring a meal. When they entered the room Mr. Williams was having a most painful-looking fit upon the floor, his long limbs twisted in a complicated knot!

Slippy Williams was no fighting man, but, as Mr. Luker admits, he had his gifts all the same. He could simulate a fit with great naturalness at need. He seemed to put his whole heart into it.

Thomas and Tim, somewhat startled, advanced and bent above the sufferer.

And Posh Luker came upon them from behind with a substantial chair leg in his hand. He contrived that there should be

little noise, and, administering to each, one tap in the right place, with neatness and address, they both slumbered.

They were gagged and bound with strips of sheet, and then the late prisoners locked the door upon them and made cautiously for the garden.

From the window it had appeared that no one was about, but anyhow, some risks *had* to be taken! Neither was keen on stopping there and taking part in a dog-taming act to make a negro holiday!

They had relied upon the dogs being shut up until the evening, and it appeared that this calculation was correct. They tiptoed into the open air, holding their breath with anxiety. Voices came from a room, but no one seemed to hear their escape.

The shrubbery was reached without incident, and then, as Posh Luker led the way, he saw a sight that seemed to send even his stout heart right up into his mouth!

The big negro was strolling alone in the shrubbery with his back toward his escaping prisoners!

The pair held a brief debate, crouching in the bushes. Slippy was strongly in favor of sneaking away, if that were possible. But Posh Luker was keen to square matters with that negro, and there was business to be considered too.

"A chap as carries a pint of loose diamonds upon him is worth attention," he whispered. "Besides, I owe that colored gentleman rather a lot, and I like to pay my just debts. Try and forget that you're such a despisable, white-livered worm, Slippy, and back up your leader!"

And Posh Luker went forward on tip-toe, leaving his ally to follow or not as he chose. Mr. Williams chose to stay where he was. When Posh Luker was within four yards of the negro's back a stick cracked under his foot, and the black man turned like a flash.

But Mr. Luker was even quicker. That stout chair-leg was still in his hand, and he made one jump forward and struck for all he was worth! As he said:

"It's no time for half-measures when you're dealing with a black Goliath about seven foot high!"

The blow landed fairly. It might have killed a white man, but it only stunned that thick-skulled negro.

He went down upon his face.

Mr. Luker wasted no time. The loose diamonds were in the negro's pocket, and he was wearing a handsome tie-pin and some most costly rings.

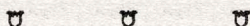
Posh Luker took all he could get. Slippy had advanced when the work was done. They left the negro blissfully un-

conscious, and made for the garden wall at speed. It caused even Posh Luker to shiver to think of that negro catching them after this!

Their luck was in. They boarded a London train as it left the station and got clear away. In case of telegrams they were at pains to leave the train before Charing Cross was reached.

As for the swag, Mr. Luker admits that it was a handsome two days' work. The profits were divided in just proportion according to the headwork and courage that had been displayed.

The fourth story of this interesting series will be entitled "A HOUSEBOAT AND A LADY'S MAID." It will appear next week.



THE RURAL INITIATION

BY JOHN D. SWAIN

THE Mystic Temple over the undertaking parlors.

The preparation of the candidate in the dark fuel closet.
The knocking on the door.

The entry of the Ghostly Counselor, with drawn sword.

The dirge played by the village barber on a melodeon.

The dazzling brilliance of six kerosene lamps with tin reflectors.

The assembled brothers in sheets and pillow-cases.

The black altar with a mail-order catalogue bound in black velvet,
on which reposes a meat-cleaver.

The kneeling, and the oath.

The Arch Priest—erstwhile the leading grocer—and the lifted cleaver.

The bandaged eyes.

The fierce cries of the Druids—sometime market gardeners and livery-men.

The slapsticks, and the icicle laid on the candidate's neck.

The tearing off of the bandage, and the Arch Priest's embrace.

The instruction in secret grip and pass-word.

The pinning on of the fraternal emblem.

The congratulations.

The paying of a year's dues in advance.

The oyster stew and cigars.

The strutting home.

The questioning wife, and the superior smile.

The romantic dreams.

The alarm-clock.

The wood-pile.

The Scarlet Ghost

by Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "We Are French!" "The Million Passing Tales," "Abu, the Dawn-Maker," etc.

(Sequel to "Those Who Walk in Darkness.")

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

MRS. ALICE UNDERWOOD, wife of Rufus Underwood, a farmer of Rising Sun, was formerly "Viola Swan," of the New York Tenderloin. Though determined to reform, the personality of Viola Swan is still rampant, and when Jessie Schofield, a girl of seventeen, secretly leaves Rising Sun to join Alec Breen in New York, Mrs. Underwood is accused by Jessie's aunt, Mrs. Jenvey, of corrupting the girl's morals. Defended by Uncle Joel Kennedy, Mrs. Underwood leaves Rising Sun by flagging the express.

Intent upon bringing Jessie back, Mrs. Underwood is helped out of an awkward predicament on the train by a man named Pennington, who had formerly insulted her. Pennington offers his help in the search for Jessie, who has arrived at the home of Mrs. Moss in New York. Alec Breen "rooms" there, and Mrs. Underwood formerly did. Mrs. Moss pretends not to know anything of Jessie, and to put Mrs. Underwood out of the way temporarily, tries to give her a dose of chloral in some sassafras tea.

Mrs. Underwood does not drink the tea, but pretends she has, and phones Pennington. He manages to talk with her, and leaves with the intention of returning with detective friends of his from headquarters. Jessie has been handed over to Mrs. Spencer, who dresses the girl according to the mode. But Jessie manages to slip away, and reaches the restaurant where Alec Breen is night manager. Alec is beginning to believe that he is really in love with Jessie, and the girl confesses that she ran away from Mrs. Spencer's because she was lonely and wanted to see some one from home.

CHAPTER XLIII.

BLACK OR WHITE?

FOR the first time since going into the restaurant business, Alec was at a loss what to do. For the first time he so far forgot himself as to sit down at a customer's side. Jessie wasn't a customer, precisely, in the narrower meaning of the term; but technically she was.

He had started to falter out some question as to what she would have, and ended up by seating himself at her side.

And sat there for a while lost in a miserable silence.

Jessie continued to weep.

Then Alec, with the air of one who fears to disturb a sleeping child, cautiously pushed back his chair and got up.

There is some instinct which all human animals possess to seek shelter in the familiar occupation at the moment of stress, the habitual activity grown dear and comfortable through use. It was that way with Alec now.

He stepped over to the counter, drew

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for January 6.

a mug of coffee, sugared it, slipped a pair of crullers onto a plate, and brought these things back to the table where Jessie sat.

He put these things before her and quietly withdrew.

No Chesterfield could have paid her an attention more delicate, more finely inspired.

Several of the customers who had been there had now withdrawn. Only Doc and the young gentleman in the gray flannel shirt remained.

Doc was meditative, head down, muttering to himself, the lines of his face drawn into a map of Ultimate Disdain. The young gentleman of the gray shirt had retrieved the soiled copy of an evening paper left by some recent customer, and was absorbing the contents of the sporting page.

Alec, for the time being, paid no attention to either of them. He went about the work of gathering up such empty dishes as happened to be scattered about, and was thankful that there was no immediate occasion for speech.

He was aware of a queer illusion—the same sort of an illusion as had confronted him a little while ago when Jessie Schofield had first appeared at the door. Then, it had been Jessie, yet not Jessie; the physical semblance of the girl whom he had known in Rising Sun, yet this physical semblance made over as by the touch of a magician. It was a change which allured him, yet struck him with distress. This explains, to a degree, what was in his mind now.

That was Jessie Schofield back there, and yet it wasn't Jessie. He wondered what had happened to her, and half formulated his inquiry into the deduction that the magician touch had been secured only at a price—a price paid by Jessie herself, the price of her previous personality.

The Jessie Schofield of Rising Sun he had been willing to marry. But this one? He sought to disguise his secret misgivings by a show of professional activity.

He slapped Doc on the back.

"How's the old hoss?" Alec demanded with simulated joviality.

"Rotten!" Doc mumbled.

"Fry it on both sides and use lots of ketchup," Alec recommended. "That's what I do when I get a Chinese egg. Couldn't tell it from new."

"The world's full of eggs like that," Doc commented. "You're right. World don't know no difference. Not here in New York, leastwise, it don't."

Alec gathered up Doc's mug and plate. He stood there hesitant, trying to extract light on his own situation from Doc's wisdom. Such light as he did extract brought him but small comfort. All his own smartness and wit were being pushed out of him. All that would come into his brain were scraps of observation unconsciously collected since his own advent in New York.

He cast a look back at Jessie. Sight of her brought with it a wave of tenderness and desire, but there was no mistaking it: on the crest of it was a froth of caution, of hopelessness, of dismay.

Was Jessie good? Or was she bad? Was she destined to become such a little fat domesticated pigeon as Doc had described? Or was she to become like certain other girls who patronized this restaurant? He didn't know.

"Don't hurry away, Doc," he urged; "I may want to talk to you about something."

Alec, with Doc's empty dishes in his hand, skated across the floor to gather the dishes of the eater of prune-pie. That worthy was folding his newspaper with the satisfied air of an intellectual who has just finished the reading of a good book.

"Rough House Smitty win his second bout wit' Kid Johnson," he announced. "I knowed him when—"

"Stick around," Alec interrupted. "Something may be going to break. How about another shot of pie"—his voice lurched, for he was doing an unprecedented thing—"on me?"

"Go as far as you like," his guest accepted.

With a flourish, Alec drew two fresh mugs of coffee. Deftly, with the skill of a professional juggler, he secured two plates, one of which received more crullers for Doc, the other the sportsman's pie. He made a step or two as if forgetful of his direction, pirouetted, and delivered the victuals with a flourish of triumph.

The sportsman laughed out loud. Even old Doc grinned. But it wasn't for them that Alec had displayed his virtuosity. Besides, he may have suspected that their approbation was stimulated by the free food he dispensed.

It was to Jessie he looked. He was rewarded by seeing her smile, impulsive, friendly.

But Jessie had wept. The rouge and the powder which had adorned her young face were badly streaked. And, regardless of that smile of hers at seeing him perform, her mood was somber.

Alec elected a cup of buttermilk for himself, cut himself a generous sandwich, and seated himself once more at Jessie's side.

"Eat your crullers, sweetie," he pleaded.

"I'm not hungry," Jessie complained.

"You've started on them, so you might as well finish them," Alec counseled gently, alluding to the tiny nick Jessie had already made in one of them.

The reasoning appeared to influence Jessie favorably. Still with that sad and reflective look on her face she picked up a cruller and bit into it. She tried to chew it meditatively, but the bite disappeared with surprising rapidity. She took another. The entire cruller took the plunge between her generous lips.

"City crullers are much—better—than country crullers," she admitted sadly, after an interval.

Alec was in process of doing full credit to his own nourishment. He washed down the large bite of sandwich he had just taken. He was in too great

a hurry to waste time on proper mastication. He had something to say.

"She could always have all the crullers she wanted," he jolted, half aloud, impetuously. "I know where I can buy 'em at fifty cents a hundred."

"They're awfully good," Jessie rewarded him, distraught, as she picked up the second cruller and bit into it.

If the first cruller went fast, the second one disappeared as if by magic. Jessie was licking her fingers while Alec was still smearing mustard on the second half of his sandwich. Without a word Alec got up, took her plate and brought back another brace of the confection Doc also so greatly loved.

"Who are those two gentlemen?" Jessie asked.

Her mood was softening, her sadness—whatever the inspiration of it—disappearing under the influence of the food.

"Customers of mine," said Alec; "customers and friends. The old gentleman is a doctor. Anyways, I call him Doc. That shows you how well acquainted we are. Fine man, too, highly educated, practically at the head of a scientific institute down the street. You know—one of these sort of old professors? Don't care nothing about money; dotty, but nice.

"The young guy's a friend of mine, too. He just about put Rough House Smitty where he is to-day—probably one of the best-known prize-fighters in the world right now. You ought to hear Smitty call little old Alec by his first name. He threatened to smash me in the bean the last time he was in here—you know, only fooling. He was soused at the time."

"I should think that you'd just love it here," Jessie quavered. "What are those under the glass cover, chocolate éclairs?"

"Sure—try one?"

"I'm not a bit hungry," Jessie answered, detached, yet pleased.

Alec brought her one.

Alec himself was softened by the

food he had taken. He watched Jessie with a recurrence of all the tenderness and desire he had previously experienced as she swallowed her first lump of éclair.

"Feeling better, tootsie?" he whispered.

He was visibly moved, and was dying to know what had happened while she was a guest of the woman who had taken her away from Mrs. Moss's establishment. But, none the less, he preferred this killing suspense to what Jessie might tell him.

Jessie was trying to eat her éclair with dignity. The pastry was so outrageously good, though, that there was something of a struggle between her dignity and her greed. Her mouth was full. She gave Alec a sidelong glance from her still-painted through rather streaked eyes.

Jessie looked exceedingly good to Alec. Into his mind there flashed a small vision of what Rufus Underwood had done.

But Rufus was a farmer.

No city man would act as Rufus had acted.

There returned to him the feeling of sin and superiority which had actuated him during so much of his sojourn at Rising Sun.

CHAPTER XLIV.

BY ROYAL COMMAND.

SUCH a night! Such a dawn! And every day is the Day of Days for some one, some pair whom God hath joined together, some scattered group meshed in the common net of Karma.

While Alec Breen and Jessie Schofield thus faltered, blindly, so with another pair: Viola Swan, who shudders and prophesies in Mrs. Moss's flat, waiting for the dawn as a man condemned might wait either for death or reprieve; Rufus Underwood, her husband, who also groans and keeps his vigil.

Rufus sat there in the room that had been theirs. There was no light except the dusky opalescence of the night—the

night of the open country, starlit, misty, with shadows as black and deep as death, and pale drifts as elusive and subtle as hopes of heaven. There was no sound except that eternal murmur of the Unadilla, the skirl of crickets and frogs, the occasional sough and rustle of the wakeful trees.

The windows were open. The breeze came in. The odors of the night reminded him of her.

"Alice! Alice! Viola! Viola!"

Rufus caught himself as a man will after an emotional outbreak when he is alone. He listened to the echo of his own voice and wondered what it signified. He remembered that other time he had called to her—in a delirium like this. Then she had answered him. It seemed incredible to him that she should never answer him again.

"It can't be," he said.

He looked at the bed where she had slept at his side, and, sitting down on the edge of it, touched the vacancy where she had lain. He did this with a degree of reverence and awe.

What had become of this creature who had occupied this place—this tenderness and warmth he had felt at his side—this mystery and charm which had come into his life, to ennoble him, to make him weak as a child and strong as a god?

He let his head fall into his hands.

Finally, once more he struck a match and lit the lamp. The lamp stood on a table near the bed, and he was surprised to see how many burned matches already lay around it. There had been none a while before. But at first he didn't see the cause of his torment. The breeze had carried it to the floor—a slip of paper.

"Thus, O God," said Rufus to himself, "could a breath from you make this thing as if it had never existed!"

The thought somehow consoled him as he stooped and picked it up—that telegram Mrs. Moss had caused to be sent to him. He read it through. He read each word again. Most of all, his eyes remained on the signature.

The tragic simplicity of it! The tragic folly!

Two lines of doggerel signed with a "V"—brought to him on the wings of the night to scoff at those fine sentiments of his; as the only answer to the prayers, spoken and unspoken, which clamored from his heart.

"You didn't write it," said Rufus. "You didn't write it. You never did a cruel act in your life. You loved all things, made all things love you."

But as Rufus looked up, visualizing there in the lamplight the woman to whom he spoke, there occurred one of those old tricks of consciousness to which humanity must have been accustomed throughout the ages. Whence otherwise could have sprung all those old stories of ghosts and jinn, of devils and angels, witches and errant souls?

Rufus had visualized the Alice Linn he had married—slender, brave, loving, faithful, with a spirit as beautiful as her physical presence. He saw her as a semblance in pale blue. Back of this there evolved another shape—scarlet this time. It was fleeting, momentary. It was gone, but he had recognized it—the wraith of Viola Swan!

Rufus turned down the wick with a shaking hand. He blew out the light and slid down to his knees.

Now, whatever Rufus's petition, behold the answer on the way!

Pennington's chauffeur was a man called Beck. There may have been a more elaborate name on Beck's license-card as a registered chauffeur. There must have been. There were certain other names of his on the books of certain great institutions of State—institutions with steel doors and steel-barred windows. For Beck had been celebrated in his day, despite his youth, in ways just as well forgotten.

He looked the part—not very tall, but exceedingly muscular; a square, seamed face, clean-shaven, which might have been brutal but for its touch of

humor, of enlightenment, of knowledge acquired at the price of great suffering.

For all that, a queer presence for that of a messenger of the Lord!

It was getting late.

The same night which had deftly submerged the hills and valleys of the old Tenderloin, and those of the Unadilla, had similarly immersed Josiah Pennington's country-place.

Beck was sitting in the kitchen talking to the cook. She was much older than Beck—stout, getting gray. No one, looking at them and listening to them for as much as two minutes, would have had any doubt about the depth of affection which existed between them. Beck called her "Honey," and she called him "Willie"—both names ludicrously inappropriate save in the light of love.

There was only once that Beck called her by another name.

The telephone rang. The telephone was in the butler's pantry, just off the kitchen. The cook answered it. She turned to Beck.

"Willie, it's for you. They're telephoning up from the depot that they got a telegram for you from Mr. Pennington."

Beck hustled over and took the receiver.

"They say," he explained, after a colloquy, "that Mr. Pennington wants me to take the car and bring some one to New York."

"To-morrow morning!"

"To-night!"

He spoke again into the instrument:

"Listen! I got to see that myself. The junction? Seven miles—say, I'll be down there in seven minutes!"

"Willie, you'll be killing yourself!"

"Forget it, hon! Mr. Pennington ain't asking me to do anything like that. I'd go the limit, though, if he did."

He threw his arms about the cook, kissed her twice, while she surrendered to his tenderness as if she had been a schoolgirl.

"Good-by, you rascal!" she murmured. "And don't get hurt!"

"Good-by, mother!" he said very softly.

In truth it was just seven minutes later that the big yellow touring-car snorted up to the little railroad-junction, which was the nearest telegraph-office to Pennington's place. Beck read the message through several times, the night-operator helping him to supply the missing punctuation and make the meaning clear. The message instructed him to proceed to Rising Sun without delay, there to find one Rufus Underwood and bring him to New York—"as fast as you can."

"What if this Underwood ain't expecting you?" the operator suggested.

"That won't make a lot of difference," said Beck, folding up the yellow flimsy. "I'll take this along."

"That won't help," the operator laughed, "if he don't want to go along."

Beck gave the telegrapher a glance of simple conviction.

"Say," he declared; "this is all the same as a warrant. It's got Mr. Pennington's signature on it, ain't it? Well, that name's all the same as if it was the governor's, so far as I'm concerned. I'm off! Good-by, and thanks!"

"Good-by! Good luck!"

The last word the telegrapher spoke was still reverberating in his brain when there were a dozen sputtering explosions, a cyclopean snort, a crescendo whine.

"That fellow ought to be an engineer," the operator muttered with a touch of awe as he glanced at his clock. "Rising Sun, twenty miles by the dirt-road! I bet at that he could beat the Cannon-Ball Express!"

The road was deserted.

Beck had that in his favor. It was a fact ever present in his mind as he lifted the thing that carried him on the wings of the wind over hill after hill. It was like a fantom that ran to a music of thunder through a world at an end. The night was like the night after Judgment Day.

In this world there was only one living

thing. The thing was a man. The man's name was Rufus Underwood.

He had to be found.

Quick!

Over the hills and through long valleys into which the yellow car gleamed and dissolved like a falling star; the rumble and shriek of a startled bridge; the swift rush through a zone of damp chill where the road followed a river; then up and up, as a rocket climbs, to the crest where another long fall began; scarcely less swift through a dark town where only the houses looked on with amazement—their windows like open mouths and wonder-stricken eyes; four more villages; another town! This time, the car slowed up.

Beck found the railroad-station.

Bainbridge!

He jumped from his car, ran over to a lighted window. There was another sleepless telegrapher there. He was a mere you'd, interested at once.

"I don't know of no Rufus Underwood," he said; "but there is an Underwood farm out near the river this side of Rising Sun. You can get there quicker if you take the fork to the right where it crosses the right of way. Look out when you come there, too. Twenty-nine's due in a couple of minutes."

"Thanks! So long!"

Beck was gone.

As the car leaped after the glimmer of its own searchlights like a greyhound after a spectral stag the night was penetrated by the long, weird call of a locomotive-whistle.

Number Twenty-nine!

A fast freight!

Beck could see it from a swiftly melting rise of ground. He gave one thought to Pennington's cook. He gave one thought to Pennington himself.

The yellow car flung into the fork to the right as the fast freight rushed in to accept the challenge.

"Missed me by a mile!" panted Beck as the freight bellowed just back of him. It was bellowing still as the night un-

folded enough to disclose the dim conformation of a darkling farm under a hill.

A glance, and from this house, like a signal, there came a gleam of yellow light.

Some one was astir in an upper chamber.

There was a lane. A dog barked. A gate flashed into existence. The yellow car crunched to a standstill.

"I'm not going," said Rufus.

But there was no great decision in his voice. There never can be human decision in the presence of superhuman mystery; and with that this night had been filled until now it overflowed.

"You're coming," Beck said with assurance.

Beck was calm. He understood men—as one who has been among men when their souls were naked. He was friendly, but his assurance was monumental and adamant. He put out a gauntleted hand until it touched the head of unconvinced and growling Duke. His eyes, though, remained on the face of the man he had come to find.

"You're coming," he repeated almost soothingly. "Those are my orders from Mr. Pennington."

"Who's Mr. Pennington?" Rufus asked.

"A regular fellow," Beck answered; "one that don't make no false passes. I know. I'd tell you about it only I ain't got the time. Get on your coat and your shoes. I'll give you the run of your life. We'll leave a trail of rube sheriffs right on all the way from here to New York. When we get there we'll learn the traffic-cops a trick or two. Hurry up!"

"Suppose I refuse!"

"You can't!" flared Beck. His jaw came out. He buckled his right arm. "There is a jolt in this!" he softly declared.

Rufus met Beck's eyes. Into his baffled brain there plunged a rioting

throng of what his thoughts, questions, gropings, and petitions had been while he was still alone. A ghostly phalanx! Out of the surge there came a flash, or a note, or revelation.

It thrilled him like the blare of a trumpet—Gabriel's!

When Gabriel blows his trumpet in the bright light!

"Wait!" thrilled Rufus. "I believe you were sent. I'll go!"

CHAPTER XLV.

THE COSMIC CENTER.

JUST as every day becomes the Day of Days for some person or group of persons, so a mean house in a mean street may become for some human atom, or association of human atoms, the dead center of the universe—the pivotal point of Cosmos.

See how the threads of a number of destinies were suddenly stretched, taut and straight, to Mrs. Moss's place!

No one would have thought it to see the elderly house standing there in the midst of its somewhat squalid neighbors, there in the thick of that part of New York known as the old Tenderloin.

The street itself was more sordid than ever in the dawn—which is the way with all human things which are old and evil. Then the contrast is more hideous—the unloveliness of grime and stench, of degradation and secrecy, matched against the supernal purity of the upper air, the refreshed beauty and sweetness of the sky.

And Mrs. Moss's house, despite that certain primness about it, was of the essence of the street. The stained glass of the front door which glowed more or less warmly in the night was now merely the red rim of an eye gone blind. The house itself was silent and sullen. Such human interest as it might possess was hidden in its heart—the nest of warm and ugly secrets, like the heart of many

another creature with a reputation for respectability to maintain.

Yet Mrs. Moss's house was the magnet. Toward it, as straight, as unconscious of other attraction as the black sands of another magnetic field, there sped and aspired the mortal sands of this one.

There was Josiah Pennington's friend—the lady named Julia. The invisible hooks were in every feminine fiber of her—each hook at the end of an invisible thread as strong as silk—each thread drawing her as surely to Mrs. Moss's house as if she had been in the clutch of gravity with nothing but ether to intervene.

She was jealous, miserable, and frantic for relief.

There was something about the happenings of this night which had kept her awake and apprehensive, something which she had been unable to fathom. Men are as inexplicable to women, at times, as women are to men; and the very rarity of this phenomenon makes the sufferings of the woman all the keener.

Julia had always thought she understood Pennington—more or less of a boy, impulsive as to evil, constant as to good.

What had occurred to change him so?

Why had he left her so abruptly? Why had he gone so eagerly at the summons of that other woman? He had told her that this other woman was not so very young, not so very beautiful; but her intuition told her that in this Pennington had deceived her—for his own peace and hers. But she knew no peace.

There was another woman!

"I'll go there again," she whispered. "I'll go there as soon as I dare in the morning. I have a right."

"I'll go there again," was also the message with which another woman was staying her impatience as the night wore on. "I'll go there myself, and if that brat's there I'll slap her face until she'll wish she was dead."

Mrs. Lilly Spencer this time—the nice, rich lady who had taken Jessie Schofield from Mrs. Moss's house and from whose own house Jessie had fled.

Mrs. Spencer had passed a sleepless night, which was no extraordinary thing for her, perhaps; but the night had been one of bitterness and trouble as well.

In the first place, there was Jessie's inexplicable truancy. In the second place, there was the impolite intrusion of the police. It wasn't a raid, precisely; just the inquisitive visit of a number of cynical young men from headquarters with orders straight from their supreme chief to find a certain girl from the village of Rising Sun.

Mrs. Spencer, quite professionally, had denied all knowledge of the existence of such a person. The young men had impolitely insisted on a search of the premises. Mrs. Spencer herself was considerably more surprised than the detectives themselves when Jessie failed to materialize.

The disappearance was there to rankle even when the detectives were gone. Right on into the dawn it rankled. There was only one place where she could hope to find relief, and that was in Lettie Moss's miserable flat-house, to which she presumed—and also hoped, for purposes of revenge—the missing girl had returned.

The blue dawn was streaking in through various chinks of the heavily curtained windows. But no breath of the outer freshness could get in to palliate the heavy atmosphere there—an atmosphere of Turkish tobacco and cold incense—as Lilly Spencer stiffly began to change her dress.

A long and tedious process, for she would have to remove as well the heavy make-up she used when in the artificial light of her house, put on a make-up more suitable for the street.

She examined her heavily painted and sin-sculptured face in her mirror.

"My God!" she meditated; "but you're looking old."

Old! Old! And what lay ahead of her at Mrs. Moss's house?

But if the detective intelligence of the big town had, earlier in the night, sent its young men to Mrs. Spencer's place in quest of the girl reported missing by no less a personage than Josiah Pennington, that intelligence now, with the coming of the dawn, was none the less responsive to the magnetic drag which others felt.

A house in the Thirties! The landlady of it an old woman with a past! Letitia Moss!

"I'll take a look in on that place myself," said the guiding intelligence. "This is the first favor Josh Pennington has ever asked of me since he was a freshman and I was a sophomore—and I had him down and he wanted me to let him up. Crock," he added, aloud this time, to his policeman secretary, "you and I will have breakfast together. I want you to go along with me on a little run up into the old Tenderloin."

The secretary, young and healthy, built for welterweight honors in the boxing-ring, had he cared to go after them, looked up from the typewriter he was arduously punching with a finger of each hand. He reassembled his thought.

"Chief," he said cheerfully, "at that, I think we ought to bring Lilly Spencer down here."

"She'll be here, Crock," the chief answered. "We've got enough on her to send her away for twenty years—if she don't beat it for Philadelphia, or Chicago, or the coast! That's what I'm thinking about old lady Moss, as well. The woman's a crook. We've had her long enough. We'll give her the tip. She's old. Let her retire to the country—Hoboken, say; or Schenectady, or—"

"The morgue," laughed Crock.

None slept, once the magnet had them in its clutch. This was the Day of Days, Mrs. Moss's house the cosmic center.

It was more or less like that with Pennington's self.

He also had passed the sleepless night. Not if the former Viola Swan, the present Mrs. Rufus Underwood, had been a princess of the blood, or a relative, or a sweetheart even, could he have been more devoted to her cause.

He had brought good will enough to her assistance from the first, yet no great enthusiasm. But the enthusiasm came later on. Only gradually did his imagination permit him to grasp the full scope of the drama in which he had been cast, if only for a minor rôle. Now it was unfolding itself to his mental vision with the vividness, and something of the grandeur, of the dawn.

His friend at headquarters had kept him informed of what the police were doing—how the girl had presumably been traced to the—after a fashion—hospitable home of one Mrs. Lilly Spencer; how, in that place, both the girl and her trail utterly disappeared.

So much had Pennington communicated by telephone to her who had put the scar on his face.

In the solitude of his private quarters at the Gotham Club, Pennington meditated on all this as the night wore on. He knew now why he was trying so hard to do all that Viola Swan would have him do. To win her ultimate commendation might not hasten the departure of that red brand from his face, but it would wipe out entirely the scar on his heart—which was more important.

"I'll go to see her," he told himself; "go just as early as I decently can—whatever Julia may say or think!"

But as he thought of Julia now, in connection with this present case, Pennington felt the stab of a self-accusation. Men toyed with tragedy; the women paid.

"Suppose you married Julia!"

That was the purport of what had flickered in his mind. He saw that this was possible. He saw that this was good. But there was no hesitancy in his

mind, no question at all, as he declared to himself the more pressing business:

"But first—first—to Mrs. Moss's house!"

Jessie Schofield and Alexander Breen had also turned their faces to the house in the old Tenderloin—as primitive mariners, innocent of compass, looked to the pole star on a stormy night. All the other stars of their heaven were in movement. Their solid earth had gone as unstable as the waves.

Only Mrs. Moss's house gleamed fixed and magnetic.

Alec had finally succumbed to the corroding anxiety. He had asked Jessie—in a roundabout way, but clearly enough—just what had happened to her in Mrs. Spencer's house.

Now, Jessie may have told the truth. Again, it is possible that she had not. Perhaps she was just drawing on imagination, on what she had read in "Metropolitan Life Unveiled, or The Mysteries and Miseries of America's Great Cities." You can hardly ever tell, when a girl like her gets fairly started on such a theme. Moreover, there was the spectacle of Alec Breen—

Such thick carnivorous passion in his throat, Tearing a passage through the wrath and fear—as Elizabeth Barrett Browning said of the lion.

That was Alec, in any case, as Jessie warmed up, told of an orgy in Mrs. Spencer's house—senators and captains of industry present, and a "foreign nobleman"—floods of champagne—the giddy dance!

And right on, the worse the more of it, until Jessie had to have recourse to poetry again, not from Mrs. Browning this time, but from some verses in that favorite book of hers:

I durst not look to what I was before;
My soul shrank back, and wished to be no more!

She was definite enough, however, when it came to recounting the details

of her escape; so definite that Alec was forced to believe all the rest of the account—how there had been a girl named Pearl, how Pearl had finally advised her to "beat it," lent her the clothes Jessie then wore and also twenty-five cents for car-fare; how Pearl had diverted the attention of a certain swart guardian of the lower portal of Mrs. Spencer's castle until Jessie was safe away.

"This listens," said Alec, trying to be humorous in spite of the quiver that shook his lower lip, "like a fillum with Theda Bara in it."

"I adore Theda Bara," said Jessie.

"And it looks to me," Alec continued, "like Mrs. Moss framed you for the part."

"Oh, not dear old Mrs. Moss!"

"Well, you got to go back to Mrs. Moss's with me," Alec quavered, frightened at his own courage; "and you got to repeat this in the presence of I and my witnesses."

"Why don't you introduce me to your friends?" Jessie invited.

Dawn, when Alec and Jessie, Doc and the gentleman in the gray flannel shirt, left the restaurant in Fourteenth Street. While Alec locked the door the others looked out upon the world about them.

Doc meekly contemplated the dust of the street. The friend of prize-fighters furtively contemplated Jessie. But Jessie saw the dim blue sky-scrappers upspringing to the grays and pinks of the infant day.

The high and gilded peak of the Metropolitan tower flashed out—"in spasms of awful sunshine," as her favorite poet would have said.

"And, oh," sighed Jessie, in a heart-throb that was almost audible:

"From the low earth round you
Reach the heights above you:
From the stripes that wound you
Seek the loves that love you!"

"Gimme your package," said the youth in the gray shirt, with elemental chivalry. "I'll carry it for youse."

"Oh, thank you," Jessie smiled; "but there's nothing in it except a few *éclairs*." Alec turned. They started north.

And all the time that these lesser threads of Destiny were shortening to the appointed hour and place, what of that greater bond that was bringing Rufus Underwood hurtling through the night!

Beck, himself, was like a meteorite rushing to its predestined spot on the surface of the earth.

Beck sat hunched up. One sensitive foot was on a pedal. His nervous and powerful hands held the steering-wheel in a grip which was at once light and strong. For mile after mile he hadn't budged except to the almost automatic reflexes of his matchless driving. For him his body had ceased to exist save as an instrument of his intelligence. His intelligence had ceased to exist save as the instrument of some all-inclusive gratitude—somewhat as the human soul may become, so the philosophers say, the instrument of the Spirit.

Rufus, equally motionless, watched the flight of prostrate miles. The road was a spinning river stricken white. On the black shores reeled and fell inconceivable shapes in a perpetual hurricane. Farms, forests, rivers, whole townships, and counties, whatever was solid and substantial in ordinary times, were all stricken with the same breath of annihilation.

Rufus was a poet, something of the seer.

He read in this transmutation of earthly things something of the divinity of man. His own soul soared up and out ahead of the racing machine, which man had made and man directed, to a vision of the goal.

This was life.

Life was a rush like this through dissolving blackness.

There was no permanent reality, not even in the brief zone of visibility which lighted the road immediately in front.

Reality lay away off there in the darkness, in the magical city, toward which all humanity was speeding, each one in quest of the beloved mate!

Then only would it be Day, all things be revealed!

"It's getting light," said Beck.

"Yes," Rufus answered. "That's the east—almost straight ahead—and the stars have gone."

They hit a hill with a grade so stiff that the machine moaned as it gripped the rough surface of the road and began to climb. Beck pulled a lever. He touched a button. The shine of the headlights deftly surrendered to a blue-gray pallor which suddenly immersed the world about them.

As if relieved by this change of atmosphere, the car sprang on refreshed. While Rufus was still marveling at the changed outlook the car was over the brow of the hill, coasting again—to the rocking panorama of a village.

A speck appeared in the road near the edge of the village.

The speck became a man. The man developed an aspect of human authority waving its arms.

The man and the village both were gone.

"He'll telephone on ahead," said Beck; "but it 'll take more than a rube sheriff to stop us."

The road was steadily improving. Another village dangled across their sight. Another speck appeared which likewise developed into the semblance of a man—a man armed with a shotgun this time. Rufus glimpsed the face of the creature as they rocketed past him.

"Bang!"

"Not the tire, thank God!" Beck exclaimed.

This village, too, was gone. Out into the open country, into the softly widening dawn, the car was sprinting as if the race were only begun.

"He shot at us," said Beck, not without satisfaction. "It 'll happen again."

"What if they stop us?"

"They won't stop us," said Beck. "I've got a hunch. This is one of those runs that go through to the finish."

"You're right," said Rufus.

He also felt the conviction that this was "one of those runs that go through to the finish." They were as messengers of the King. No earthly power or authority was so high and strong as that which sped them on.

The day sprang up. New York was near.

Thus the black sands of all these diverse destinies were caught, for the time being, in the same magnetic field; the center of this field a certain mean building in a certain mean street. Human thus far were these sands—as human as humanity may ever be considered simply that.

Now enter the superhuman.

For one more element was caught in the converging lines which led to Mrs. Moss's house. As straight as an arrow it came—out of the unknown, also a messenger of the King, also with an authority no man could question, no earthly power could stop or stay. The element has been pictured as the Rider on the Pale Horse.

The thing was Death!

CHAPTER XLVI.

REVELATION.

THROUGHOUT the latter part of the night Viola Swan had found herself alone—alone, that is, save for those spirit visitors which always come and go at such a time.

Rufus, Uncle Joel, Mrs. Jenvey, the preacher from the little wooden church, Aunt Allie, Andy Jones; then Alec Breen, Jessie Schofield, Mrs. Moss, Pennington—all these had kept her company in the spirit. Ghosts! And all the time that other—the Scarlet Ghost; but this one so real that at no time could she have said:

"Thou art Viola Swan. I—I—am Alice Linn; I am Mrs. Rufus Underwood!"

No; most of the time she herself was the Scarlet Ghost.

This was its birthplace. This was its habitat. This was its very atmosphere—an atmosphere which was killing to Alice Linn. It was Viola Swan who brooded there, who listened to the furtive footfalls, who unraveled and identified the blurred and tangled noises of the night.

She was alone when she received her several messages from Pennington, telling her that he had gone to police headquarters and there had been promised help; again when he had telephoned merely to inquire if she was all right, if she had any news; still again when he told her that Jessie Schofield had been traced to Mrs. Spencer's house and that she had thence disappeared.

From what Pennington told her, and from what she herself had learned, but most of all through the gradual evolution of her soul's own vision, she had built up a pretty clear conception of what had taken place—Jessie's welcome in this house, the hoodwinking of Alec Breen, the girl's subsequent transfer to Mrs. Spencer.

The precise part taken in all this by Alec she did not perceive. But this didn't matter greatly. She knew Alec. He might put on the travesty of villain or hero, but his real character was that of the clown.

On her own account she bore Alec no malice. Not even the thought that it was he who had possibly lured Jessie to New York aroused in her any desire for punishment so far as he was concerned.

He was but an element in the conspiracy of circumstance. So also was she herself; so also Jessie's antecedents.

It was Mrs. Moss who was the villain of the drama—the old, the sagacious, the unclean, the polluter of the hitherto pure. The spectral presence of the old woman haunted these rooms as could

none other. The very smell of these rooms was Mrs. Moss; so was the dimness of them; so was their response to the throb and cacophony of the old Tenderloin. The soiled walls and the decrepit furniture were vibrant with her contact. They were saturated with the secrets of old Mrs. Moss's heart and brain, tainted to the same degree of corruption and decay.

At last Viola Swan could stand it no longer.

She felt a sudden craving for some sort of physical communication with Rufus if only indirectly. This craving she could satisfy in a measure by speaking to Jo, the cellar-man, learning from him at least that her telegram had been safely sent.

It was always night, more or less, in Mrs. Moss's rooms. But as Viola crept softly out into the hall—where there was a flight of steps leading down into the cellar, under those which led to the upper floors—she noticed that the night was waning, that it was dawn. She recognized this with a little gasp, as one might receive some great spiritual truth when the soul itself gropes in darkness.

Opening the door at the head of the cellar-stairs, she heard the clang and scrape of a steel scoop on a cement floor. Even at this early hour Jo was at work.

She found him between the coal-bin and the small furnace used to insure a hot-water supply to the upper regions. She called him by name. He straightened up; eyed her, startled, through the gloom for the few seconds it took him to recognize her.

Then, straightway, he became all amiable attention.

"I got your change for you," he said. "I guess it was more than you thought it would be."

He hastily propped the scoop against the side of the coal-bin, made the preliminary passes at digging into his pocket.

"Thirteen words," he began.

"Thirteen!" Viola exclaimed. "There were thirty, Jo."

Jo was afflicted by a spasm of recollection. The spasm dazed then flustered him. He didn't have enough wit to frame a protective lie. He coughed, seized his scoop, shook down the coal with it and made a great show of stoking the furnace. Noise—plenty of noise! That was Jo's idea of escaping from a bad situation.

Viola waited patiently for a lull in the racket. She wouldn't admit it, but kept telling herself all the time that Jo had simply made some minor mistake; but the fact of it was, all the time that she was waiting for Jo to end his noise she was trying to beat out the flames that had started up inside of her like the flames in the furnace—flames that hurt her and frightened her more than anything which had happened thus far this night. She was always intuitional.

Jo came to the end of his noise, shuffled about dejected—like a fugitive overtaken in a cul-de-sac.

"What happened to my telegram?" Viola asked softly.

She could read a portion of his secret in the growing trouble of his white and black face. It was something to pour oil on that inner conflagration of hers. But, even now, she was telling herself that she must be calm, must be strong.

"I didn't mean no harm," said Jo. "In this life you got to do what you're told to do. Look at me, shovelin' coal down here when I'd rather be out pickin' apples or somethin'. Look at you! I bet you don't like it here in this dern house any more than I like it down here in this dirty cellar. I've watched you, Miss Swan, with my own eyes. I'm nothin' but a cellar-man—and a bum one at that—but I see often enough that you was doin' things you didn't want to do no more than I want to do what I got to do."

"Jo, didn't you send the telegram at all?" Viola asked—with a ray of hope almost. "It wouldn't be too late to

send another one. Put down your shovel. Tell me the truth. Don't be afraid."

Instinctively, she was using with him much the same method she would have used with a frightened child.

"Mrs. Moss told me to burn your telegram," Jo blurted in an agitated whisper. "She wrote another one to the same address—wrote it next door in Cooney's delicatessen store. I was there and see her do it. She told me to copy it out on a telegraph-blank."

"And did you?"

"Thirteen words," said Jo. "I copied it all right. I got what Mrs. Moss wrote right here, if you don't believe me."

With a sort of crisping suspense Viola waited. The flames were raging inside of her now. She was merely smothering them as best she could, dreading what might follow their bursting forth. It was with an air almost of indifference that she received a soiled fold of paper which Jo extracted from an old pocket-book and handed over to her.

She read that substitute message which had been sent—grotesque—as grotesque as a grimace painted on the face of a corpse. She read it slowly, over and over again, and was unconscious of it even when the paper slipped from her fingers and fluttered to the floor.

Jo retrieved it and returned it to his purse as something possessing value.

"She's wicked, she is, the old lady," he said cautiously. "She's got the devil himself skinned for sin, she has. I knew that I hadn't ought to switch these telegrams. A fellow could go over the road for that. Yes, sir! Even if it is poetry. But she told me to do it, she did; and you know how it is yourself when the old lady says something."

And so on. But Viola didn't hear him.

It was to the conflagration inside of her to which she listened. A palace was burning up in there—or a temple; something she had designed and buildied out of her hopes and dreams. And the edifice was tenanted by all those whom she loved. Even Alice Linn was doomed.

Alice and Rufus were there together. Out of the red inferno it was only the Scarlet Ghost whose name was Viola Swan which could survive.

She murmured a word or two of excuse and comfort for Jo's benefit, but they were words which not even she understood.

She turned and made her way back to the stairs. She walked with constraint and breathed with constraint, and was trying to think with constraint; only, she couldn't think. She could *feel*. That was all she could do, and the feeling by this time was a whirlwind of fire.

At the top of the stairs she halted. In the midst of her turmoil and red anarchy yet another sensation had come to her—a sensation strange and small.

She stood there wavering as she sought to identify it.

Something like peace it was, something like divine comfort. Yet, how could either of these things be hers at the present time?

Then she recognized it.

This was the same feeling which had come to her earlier in the night, there while she was lying on Mrs. Moss's bed—that feeling of maternity such as a young mother must know when her first-born nestles for the first time at her breast.

"Something to live for—*die for!*" whispered Viola Swan.

No, it was her other self which must have whispered that.

But it was Viola Swan who reentered Mrs. Moss's flat and stood there, pale, transfigured, strangely exalted, in the presence of Mrs. Moss herself.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"VENGEANCE IS MINE."

MRS. MOSS had been pottering about the far side of the room. She turned as Viola entered. Whatever the change that had come over the girl's appearance, it was something

that made Mrs. Moss start slightly, draw back a little with a look of bafflement, of consternation.

"I was just thinking that you might want a bite of early breakfast," said Mrs. Moss.

She kept her eyes on Viola. With no special volition on her own part, Viola kept her eyes on Mrs. Moss. Viola's voice was soft and reasonable when she spoke.

"I've seen that telegram," she said. "What telegram?"

Mrs. Moss was flustered, but as an old campaigner she was hastily looking to her trenches.

"The telegram you sent."

"I didn't send no telegram, Viola. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't call me Viola. I'm not Viola. I'm Alice Linn, if you will. I'm Mrs. Rufus Underwood. I sent a telegram to my—my husband. You intercepted it. You sent something else instead."

She was still speaking with an effort to be gentle and reasonable. Perhaps Mrs. Moss misinterpreted her mood. She tried to inject an element of gaiety.

"Oh, that was just a little joke," she babbled softly. She was momentarily convulsed with mirth. At least, she attempted to give herself the appearance of that. The mirth went out in a flash of something like indignation. "You know how to take a joke, don't you, Viola?"

"I've asked you not to call me Viola!"

Not that it mattered very much. The girl was merely making an effort to save herself by thought; that was all.

Mrs. Moss decided to try the offensive.

"You appear to be sort of uppish all of a sudden," she commented. "I don't see what particular give you've got to be so particular about your name. So you're Alice Linn, are you! That ain't the name your sweetheart asked for you by when he come here last night and spent an hour with you—right here in my own bedroom, too. Why, you ought

to be ashamed of yourself trying to throw the bull with me, and me the only friend you got."

"We did no wrong."

Mrs. Moss's retort was a grin and a leer.

"I tell you that we did no wrong," cried Alice Linn, with a mounting emotion—a shade of suppressed hysteria. "I sent a telegram to my husband, I tell you; and you took it and sent him another instead. Oh, I don't know what I ought to do! You're wicked! You're wicked! You made me wicked! You want to keep me wicked I've tried—I've tried—"

She had taken a few steps forward, still blind to the purpose that was leading her on. Mrs. Moss displayed an unmistakable flurry of alarm. She sought to conceal this in a burst of rage.

"Don't you talk to me like that, you snipe!" she gurgled. "Why, I made you what you was. You'd 'a' starved if it hadn't been for me. Now you want to turn on me, do you? You was glad enough, Viola Swan, to have me help you when you was down on your luck. You come back now to fool that poor rube husband of yours while you're receiving your swell friends. Why, honestly, Viola—"

"Don't call me that!"

It was a cry straight from the heart. There was so much grief and desperation in it that Mrs. Moss was momentarily encouraged.

"Alice Linn, are you?" she mocked. "Alice Linn!"

She checked herself and plucked at the breast of the old woolen wrapper she wore.

"I came here to rescue Jessie Schofield—"

"So you said!"

"That was why I called on Mr. Pennington. He had a friend at headquarters—"

"What?"

Mrs. Moss gulped forth the word only after several efforts.

"*They'll come here—*" the girl sobbed.

"*You call in the police! You, you cheap little street-walker! Do you suppose the police don't know you, Viola Swan?*"

"*Alice Linn!*"

Mrs. Moss lost all control of herself. She began to froth at the mouth—as a puff-adder drools blackness. She tore at her dress as if she were short of breath. But her greatest hope of relief seemed to be based on some adequate expression of her rage and hatred.

"*You—you'd try to queer me with the police? You, you scum? Why, they ship a hundred girls like you to the Island every day, you white-livered little street-walker! Bellevue's full of your breed. So's the morgue! Aye, and the morgue's too good for 'em! To hell with you, Viola Swan! That's where you ought to go! That's where I'll send you—you, with your saucer eyes and your chalky face! Think you're beautiful, do you? Listen to this:*

"*I hope you die! I hope you die right here in this house! I hope you die as Viola Swan—with a curse on you! and go back to hell where you was spawned! with strangers there to look at you!—and glad to be rid of you!—and not even the dead-house to give you a box to lie in!*"

"*Don't—don't speak like that,*" gasped Alice Linn.

"*Die! Die!*" fumed Mrs. Moss, with the air of a stricken witch; "and ghosts a tearin' the heart out of you while you're doin' of it—"

The interchange was becoming more or less inarticulate—Mrs. Moss, choking and gurgling out her curses as she continued to shuffle backward, clutching at the withered folds of her throat, jerking at the soiled flabbiness of her unlovely dress; Alice Linn confronting her—Alice somehow white and radiant with the spirit that seemed to be in possession of her.

There was a blue pallor drifting into the room from the window that opened

on the air-shaft, but the gas still flickered in the dim chandelier suspended from the ceiling. It was a squalid stage for any sort of a human drama; yet on just such a stage had Viola Swan first appeared, was destined soon to disappear.

Under the chandelier, like a pool of pale and unwholesome blood, the red cotton tablecloth lay—an emblem of tragedy. It was on one side of this that Mrs. Moss snarled and cursed, slopped backward pulling at her dress; on the other side, that girl possessed of a devil or a god.

In a movement which might have been inspired by her torture the girl's own hands sought her breast.

They came up tense and slow. But at that instant there appeared in her eyes a look of sheer revelation. Her hands had come in contact with the knife which she had hidden there, forgotten. Slowly she drew the knife out and looked at it.

Almost any object devoid of material beauty may assume an aspect of spiritual grandeur when it becomes transmuted by a great meaning—like the relic of a saint, the face of a thinker, the hand of a mother of men. And it was like that now with this knife. The handle of it was black. The blade of it was short and discolored.

But it was as beautiful to the girl who held it as if in very truth it had been a child of hers.

From it her dark eyes flashed up.

Mrs. Moss had also seen the knife. Her mouth was sputtering blasphemies, but she was hypnotized. Her voice was weak.

"*Curse you, Viola Swan! Curse you! Curse you!*"

As inarticulate as the rush of a sewer, but that was the burden of it all;—even now, when Mrs. Moss had seen the knife, she was undoubtedly smitten with fear, and tugging at her gown, shuffled in retreat.

"*Oh,*" cried Alice Linn, with a look of Joan of Arc about her; "*I'm going to kill you—kill you!*"

It was soft and almost a sob; and yet there was a queer thrill of elation in it.

Her voice rose. It still wasn't loud, just tense and piercing.

"It was for this that I came to New York," said Alice Linn. "I came to kill you—clean the earth of your presence. God sent me! He said: 'Kill her! She's lived too long! She's taken My children! She's sullied them! She's broken their hearts! She's poisoned their souls! She's sent them to prison!—to the hospital!—to the morgue! Kill her! Kill her! Kill her!'"

"You'll go to the chair," Mrs. Moss managed to say.

"It's Viola Swan that will die—die with *you*," Alice Linn answered.

"You're forgetting Rufus," gasped Mrs. Moss.

"He'll understand! He'll understand! I offer myself as a sacrificial victim. It's atonement! It's like the Cross! I'll be forgiven!"

Mrs. Moss had backed into a corner whence she could retreat no further, even had she possessed the strength to do so. She supported herself there. She looked as if she were stifling. Her mouth was open. Her scanty hair was coming down. A little wisp of it kept plucking at her rusty shoulder—like a gray and yellow finger bidding her to come away—to some one who was waiting and impatient—the some one being Death.

"They'll put you in a cell—" This from Mrs. Moss.

"Father, forgive her—" This from Alice Linn.

"Beat you till—"

"Pray— Pray—"

"—to hell!"

Suddenly, Mrs. Moss took a shambling step. It was while Alice Linn was still a good six feet away from her. Mrs. Moss appeared to be calling for help; only, she was like one in the grip of a nightmare—straining, straining, unable to utter a sound.

She was fumbling at her gown. Into her face there came a look of awed surprise. Those fishy eyes of hers which had been fixed on the Destroying Angel there

in front of her appeared gradually, yet swiftly, to lose their focus.

Alice Linn, still at a distance, cast down her knife. She would have sprung forward, caught the old woman. She was aware of it, even then, that God had declared a truce, and that the truce was death for the woman whom she herself would have slain.

But before Alice could move, Mrs. Moss collapsed.

She shook and drooped down—throwing up her hands as she did so, as if to ward off another blow from the Unknown, or somewhat as if she were appealing for mercy!

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"WHAT GOD HATH CLEANSED."

SHE lay there huddled on the soiled carpet, face down, by the time that Alice Linn came creeping up to her.

For several seconds Alice had the appearance of one who has just witnessed a miracle, and knows it to be a miracle, and is fearful to intervene. But she turned the limp and heavy figure over on its back. She did this not ungently, yet with an air of wonder, as if still in the presence of something that she couldn't understand.

The old woman was still alive.

Just as Alice absorbed this truth into her own barely stirring consciousness, she heard the thrill of the bell in Mrs. Moss's bedroom—the bell of the outer door.

Who could it be?

Then she became aware of a movement in the hall. There must have been another miracle of a kind in the cellar of the house, for Jo had bestirred himself down there, had come up to open the door himself. Perhaps Jo possessed something of that second sight which seems to go so often with minds otherwise weak.

It was the chief from headquarters and his policeman-secretary—the first of those

whom the magnet was assembling here. They were still in the hall when some one else arrived—the chief's friend, Pennington. The friends shook hands. The secretary, in civilian clothes, saluted.

The chief turned to Jo.

"Where's the landlady?" he asked.

"Back there," Jo gasped and disappeared. Jo must have heard his employer fall.

The three men went to the back of the hall. The chief himself peered through the glass panel of the door to see what might be seen—in a professional way—before making his presence known. He saw an old woman lying there, saw a girl kneeling at her side, saw this girl lift her face and her folded hands in an ineffable gesture of prayer.

The chief and his secretary were both more or less expert in the matter of first-aid, both inured to tragedy. Alice had accepted their presence there, mechanically almost; mechanically she had answered the few questions the chief had asked. But neither he nor his secretary appeared to need such information as she could give them, or to attach, for that matter, much importance to what she said.

"It's her heart," said the chief. "She's had a heart-attack. Crock, I'm afraid that it's all over with the old lady. Try to dig up some ammonia, or something; then get us a doctor."

Presently, Mrs. Moss was showing signs of reviving consciousness. She put up her nerveless hands, began to pluck at the sagging folds of her withered throat. She seemed to bring to this occupation a sort of pleasant and childish curiosity—as if she were touching something which she did not recognize, the presence of which surprised her.

Alice Linn remained there kneeling at Mrs. Moss's side, looking down at Mrs. Moss with pity and wonder, with a curious exaltation. It was a feeling which was both a hope and a prayer, a lamentation and a song of thanksgiving.

Mrs. Moss was dying. Yet also was this the passing of Viola Swan!

The Scarlet Ghost was dead!

Alice Linn in the presence of this truth—a truth which came to her, so it seemed, from the very fountainhead of truth, was incapable of either speech or action.

Had she tried to speak she would have sobbed. No words, anyway, could possibly have expressed what she had in her heart. Had she sought to move she would have fallen. So instinct told her. She felt as if she were standing over a million-foot abyss—amid interstellar space—on a lonely pinnacle—nothing but infinite heaven overhead.

Mrs. Moss finally opened her eyes.

Over the old woman there had come some tremendous and indefinable change. She blinked up mildly. For a while she appeared to see nothing—nothing except the insubstantialities of a waking day-dream. Then she was aware of the girl leaning over her. She smiled. It was a pleasant smile, but devoid of recognition.

For that matter, Alice Linn was not recognizing Mrs. Moss.

Where was all the sin and the violence, the treachery and ugly knowledge? Gone! Absolutely gone! Where were all the things which had been graven and scribbled there, year after year, since the old Cremorne days, as on a monument visited by unholy tourists? Equally gone!

Mrs. Moss's face was cleansed. Her expression was bland. What remained to her of earthly attention was fixed on Rufus Underwood's wife. The room was deathly silent. Mrs. Moss's voice fluttered out, soft but perfectly distinct:

"What's your name, little girl?"

"My name is—Alice Linn!"

To any one familiar with all the circumstances, the question and the answer both would have appeared as a part of some magical rite—white magic—a formula of confirmation, a mystical christening.

It was clear that Letitia Moss believed she had never heard the name before.

Perhaps she never had—this part of her which still remained alive.

"A pretty name!" she whispered. "A pretty name for a pretty little girl. Be a good girl, Alice!"

"Yes," whispered Alice.

Mrs. Moss let herself go for an interval in pleasant reveries.

"You'd better run home, Alice," she spoke again, "or your folks will be getting worried." She smiled. She reflected. "I've got to be going along myself," she whispered, more softly than ever. "Good-by! Be good! Be—"

Into Mrs. Moss's face there crept swiftly a look of growing blindness. There followed this a flash of awe—

"She's dead," said the chief.

As he said this, there was a conviction which reached to the very soul of Alice Linn—or perhaps the conviction came out of her soul—that it wasn't the voice of the chief at all, but the voice of her Maker.

All this was quaking through the inner silences of her being when she heard, from the hall, a burst of hysterical laughter in a voice which she recognized as that of Jessie Schofield, a babble of speech in which she likewise recognized the voice of Alec Breen. She looked about her.

At first glance, the room seemed to be filled with strangers—not all strangers, for she recognized Pennington. There were a couple of women present, both of whom looked miserable. One of these women, young and fairly beautiful, was clinging more or less to Pennington. The other—her misery made hideous by a combination of sin, cosmetics, and old age—was talking to a stout young man whom the former Viola Swan recognized instinctively as belonging to the police.

"You stay right here, Lilly," the young man ordered.

"Lilly Spencer!"

The name had a familiar sound to Rufus Underwood's wife—an echo from the disappearing world in which the Scarlet Ghost had lived.

The chief and his secretary, aided to some extent by Pennington, had removed what was earthly of Letitia Moss to the little bedroom, and closed the door before Jessie Schofield and Alexander Breen, followed by Doc and the youth in the gray shirt, were admitted.

"There she is now," cried Mrs. Spencer. "Ask her—"

But Jessie, forthwith, had seen Alice standing there, rushed to her with her arms out, was received in Alice's arms.

"I've had a perfectly gorgeous time," Jessie sobbed; "but—but—"

She flung her face against Alice's breast and cried—this time without restraint, careless of the strangers present.

Altogether, it was some time, and there was some confusion, before things began to straighten themselves out. But Lilly Spencer was strong for self-justification. She managed to get herself face to face with Jessie Schofield here in the presence of all these witnesses.

"I ask you," she thrilled, "if I done you any wrong, or if any one done you any wrong while you was with me!"

"None!" Jessie answered, abashed. "You were lovely!"

And Jessie even tried to back this up by giving Mrs. Spencer the kiss penitential. But the policeman-secretary interfered.

"That settles it, so far as *she* is concerned," said the secretary; "but you move, none the less—to-day! And the further the better!"

Mrs. Spencer had a spasm of tears. She was beaten.

Alec Breen had also made a movement to interfere as Jessie started to demonstrate just how lovely she considered Mrs. Spencer to be. He actually put his arm about Jessie's waist.

"Hold on," he counseled.

"What are you going to do with her?" Mrs. Underwood demanded softly, with a recurrence of heat.

"Jessie and I are going to wed," Alec announced, with a flash of effrontery.

He turned to Doc and the youth with

the gray shirt. His voice was a sob—a sob of relief, the confirmation of a conviction which he had been nursing all along. He had suspected that Jessie had let her imagination get the better of her.

"She's as pure as the driven snow," he announced.

And he also began to cry, Jessie consoling him.

The lady named Julia turned to Pennington. She was moved. She was contrite.

"You're better than I thought you were," she whispered; "and I am worse. Forgive me! You and I have looked on life and death together, now. I love you. Let's get out of here!"

But before any one could move there was a fresh movement in the hall, a suggestion of clamor. The magnet was drawing in the last of its mortal iron.

Beck, Pennington's chauffeur, threw open the door, looked in. He turned.

"Come in!" he called.

He turned to Pennington, still with the accumulated excitement of high speed upon him.

"I've got him here, sir!" he cried, with a voice suppressed.

Mrs. Underwood gave a little gasp. Every muscle and fiber of her went dynamic even before she saw who the latest arrival was.

Then he was standing there—upright, a flare of blue light flashing from his eyes, eyes that went straight to those of the woman God had given him.

"Rufus! Rufus!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

DAY!

THEY were alone there for a while. The others went away—out into the hall, there to wait for them.

There was speech between them, but such speech as no words can ever formulate—speech needing no words—the speech of perfect comprehension, of that perfect love it is occasionally given mor-

tals to know, thus keeping alive the legend of heaven and the angels.

The words crept in only gradually—like the living things at the creation of the world. And for Rufus and Alice the world was new-created.

"The folks at Rising Sun—will be glad to know—that everything's all right," said Rufus.

"Uncle Joel will understand," Alice murmured.

"Yes," Rufus answered slowly; "and so will Aunt Allie, and Andy Jones, and the preacher, and every one. Mrs. Jenvey will want to go down on her knees to you for what you've done—"

"Nothing—"

"Nothing—except to make the world better—and more beautiful," said Rufus, with that inevitable touch of the seer and the poet about him.

Out in the hall, there was a gradual disassociation of the human elements brought to Mrs. Moss's house—as if, now that the chief dweller in the place was dead—the magnet had lost its virtue.

Pennington and Julia went away with Beck, after much hand-shaking and repeated farewells. So went the chief from headquarters and his secretary, leaving a policeman in charge of the premises against the coming of the coroner. Solitary was the flitting of Mrs. Lilly Spencer—as one who flees in darkness; in deeper darkness still her only respite from the fate which she must have known was overtaking her.

Jo, the cellar-man, crept up to speak to Mrs. Underwood.

"So the old lady's dead," he whispered. He was moon-eyed, overcome with awe. "So the old lady's dead! Say, do you know of any one who needs a cellar-man? I've held this place for twenty years."

They would have offered him a place in the country, but Alec Breen broke in. Alec was himself again—the future sandwich-king.

"We want a dish-washer, Jo," he said. "How about it?"

Jo went foolishly glad. Here was a chance of a lifetime for him.

"He'll get all that he wants to eat, too; won't he, Alec?" Jessie exclaimed, with her hand on Alec's arm.

It was clearly to be seen that Jessie was reaching out to a fresh apogee of romance—a romantic marriage, this time, with no telling what horizons beyond. She would make a proper wife for a sandwich-king—the wife of one who would barter for concessions at Coney Island, at State fairs, wherever the world was in picnic mood. And she looked as if she might well become the mother of many children, as well. To that end nature had designed her, however unaware of the fact she might have been.

"A great day for the race!" Alec ex-

claimed, peering out at the sunshine of the young morning.

"What race?" asked Rufus.

"The human race," cackled Alec, speaking a deeper truth than was his wont.

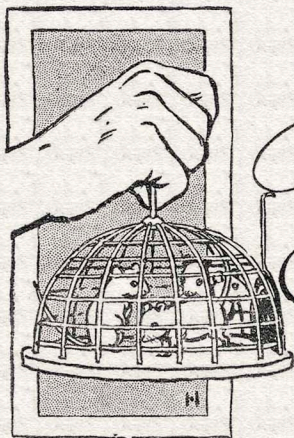
"What shall we do?" whispered Alice, smiling up at Rufus.

"First," said Rufus, "we'll see these two people made one. They belong to each other. It'll give us something to tell the folks in Rising Sun about what happened down here. Then—you and I—to the old home!" They were out on the sill of the house of death. Rufus thrilled:

"Look at the sky—our sky—up there!"

"I see it," Alice answered. "I see it reflected in your eyes."

(The end.)



John Pyle, Rampant

by William
Merriam
Rouse

JOHN PYLE opened his eyes, blinked, ran his fingers through his tousled gray hair, and promptly sat up in bed. He never had very much trouble about waking up, for the husk mattress on his canvas cot was not conducive to sleep after the actual demands of nature had been satisfied.

It was not yet light in the cubby-hole at the head of the stairs where the cot

stood under a canopy of dried apples, festooned from the ceiling, but John knew by the degree of grayness pervading his sleeping quarters that it was broad day outside.

He swung his feet to the floor, and, by a series of quick, expert movements, exchanged his torn nightshirt for a suit of underwear that had long been buttonless, then lacing up a pair of heavy brogans

over gray cotton socks, drew on a blue gingham shirt and adjusted a pair of overalls by a single suspender.

In less than a minute after he had opened his eyes John was tiptoeing down-stairs. Half-way to the lower floor a board squeaked. He stopped and held himself rigid as he listened. There was no sound through the house, and, with a heartfelt sigh of relief, he went on, putting each foot down with the utmost caution.

The kitchen was flooded with sunlight. John went to the sink, filled the wash-basin from the water-pail, and generously soused his hands, face, and hair with much grateful but subdued sputtering. He combed his hair, still thick except on top of his head, with particular attention, and even tried to induce the ends of his forlornly drooping gray mustache to take on a slight curl.

It was the first day of September, and to-morrow, barring death and accidents, he would go to the Plattsburg Fair. For more than twenty years an annual trip to the Plattsburg Fair had been John Pyle's only holiday. To him other days had become more or less as stepping-stones along the path of time that led up to the second of September.

Treading with marvelous lightness, John built a brisk fire in the cook-stove, and then went into the pantry. Butter-milk, a teaspoonful of baking-soda, two big pinches of salt, and the right amount of flour stirred in made pancake batter. He put the teapot on the stove and began to fry cakes. Old Betsy, the aged and now useless house-cat, came purring out of a corner and rubbed against his legs. John let a cake burn as he stooped to stroke her arching back.

"Nice kitty! Poor kitty!" he whispered. "Want some milk?"

Betsy opened her mouth in a faint mew of acquiescence. John sighed and shook his head as he turned some milk from a pan. Betsy must be put out of the way before long, now that she could not hunt. He would have liked to keep

her, and a dog, too, if things had been different.

After he had eaten his breakfast of pancakes and tea and Betsy had polished her saucer, John washed the dishes and climbed softly up-stairs. He made his bed, folded his nightshirt neatly away under the pillow, and stepped to the door of a room from whence came the irregular but unmistakable sounds of a man sleeping on his back with his mouth open. He knocked gently.

"Hey, Ed! Time to get up!"

The only reply was a snort and another snore. John knocked again, louder.

"Aw-waff! Aw right!" came from within.

John went down-stairs, walked through the house, and stopped in the door of a spacious chamber that opened from the parlor. A woman whose black hair showed only faint and occasional streaks of gray lay sleeping in a broad and comfortable bed. Her face, resting on a firm white arm, showed few marks of time, even in the relaxation of sleep.

"Seven o'clock, Dethy!"

Detha Pyle's eyelids lifted and unveiled two big, black orbs that snapped threateningly even before she had completely torn herself from the embrace of slumber.

"Fire's made an' kettle's a-bilin', Dethy!"

Mrs. John Pyle was now thoroughly awake. She raised herself on an elbow and pointed a stern finger at her husband.

"Ye didn't ferget to set that mouse-trap last night before ye went to bed, did ye?"

John squirmed and shifted from one foot to the other.

"Why—er—trap's right out there in the pantry, Dethy; ye kin see it fer yer-self!"

He retreated abruptly, but the voice of his wife followed him across the parlor.

"It's a mighty good thing for ye that ye did! It would of been jest like ye to forget all about it, or to forget it on pur-

pose because ye know that if they's one thing in the world I can't abide it's a mouse!"

John tramped noisily through the kitchen to the outside door, turned quickly and sped with catlike steps into the pantry. He took a wire mouse-trap of the cage variety from a nail, set it on the floor in a conspicuous place, and hurried out of doors. He threw back his bent shoulders and drew in a great breath of the crisp air.

Pyle's first step on the barn floor was greeted by little good morning whinnies from Sam and Slim, his big bay team. He stopped to visit the stall of each horse with a pat and a few words of general praise before he went about the routine of chores. Nearly everything had been done when, as John lifted a particularly large forkful of hay, the single button that held up the back of his overalls flew off with a pop.

"Thunderation!" he exclaimed, and grabbed his departing garment in the nick of time. Holding it up with one hand, he started for the house.

Detha and Ed Cummins, the Pyle hired man, had just sat down to breakfast. Coffee, colored by rich cream, steamed in their cups. A platter of fried eggs, flanked on one side by a big dish of creamed potatoes and on the other by an equally big dish of corned beef hash, stood in the center of the table. There were lesser appeals to the appetite in the form of toast and muffins. John gazed wistfully but resignedly as he said:

"Where kin I find a needle an' thread, Dethy? Just busted the last button off my overalls."

A grin distended the well-fed chops of Ed Cummins as he saw that Pyle's garments were threatened with immediate dissolution. But Detha did not grin. She turned on her husband a countenance blazing with indignation.

"Done a fine job when ye set that mouse-trap last night, didn't ye? Expected to ketch mice without any cheese, I 'spose? I'll bet forty great apples ye

never set it at all last night, but sneaked out an' put it down there on the floor this mornin' to fool me!"

John decided that it would save argument to own up at once.

"By gum, Dethy," he said apologetically, "ye know, jest as I was startin' to set the trap last night I heard a noise in the barn an'—"

Mrs. Pyle snorted.

"An' ye done it jest like ye do everything else, ye miserable, good-fer-nothin', old blockhead! Ye know jest as well as I do that the mice have been runnin' around in the pantry fer a week, an' every time I see one it gives me the creeps! But I 'spose if I want to get anythin' done around here I've got to do it myself. Bimeby I'll have to plough fer ye, an' do yer mowin', an' put yer grain in the barn. What's the matter of ye, anyway? Are ye gettin' simple-minded—more simple-minded, I mean?"

John, who had wriggled under his wife's tongue-lashing until his overalls almost dropped off, at last managed to get in a word.

"Honest to goodness, Dethy, I'll do it to-night jest as sure as—"

"Jest as sure as ye're a natural-born fool! Get out of here!"

He was glad enough to go, even with his costume in a state bordering on total collapse.

It was mighty plain that Detha was in for one of her spells, apparently brought on by the mouse-trap incident. John knew that mice were his wife's pet aversion, in a collection of carefully nourished aversions, but it did seem that she was a little more violent than the occasion warranted.

His shoulders drooped as he wondered, apprehensively, if there wasn't something behind her wrath. She had begun in the same way when she was preparing to make him sleep at the head of the stairs.

In the privacy of the barn John took off his overalls and, with the deftness born of much practise, inserted a shingle-nail in such a manner that it served for the

lost button. He had already started milking when Ed, leisurely picking his teeth, appeared. The philosophy that had served John Pyle through many domestic squalls reasserted itself, and he greeted his hired man with a pleasant smile.

"Goin' to have fair weather fer the fair, I guess," he said, cracking his annual joke.

"The weather's all right, John," replied Ed, with a peculiar emphasis on the word weather that stirred up a vague uneasiness in his employer's mind.

Ed was a pretty good barometer for Detha. When she was the most ram-bunctious he was the most careless about his work, and John had read the signs of more than one coming cataclysm in his conduct. Sometimes Cummins himself came in for a share of the trouble, but he seldom got it very badly. A farm-hand would not stay where he was not well treated and fed; a husband had to.

John went through the morning's work with a troubled spirit. There was a faint possibility that Detha, left to herself, would get over her spell, but he knew that a sight of him would be more than likely to set her off again, and he dreaded the approach of dinner time.

The Plattsburg Fair offered a sort of first aid to the situation, for he would be gone from the early train north to the late train south, and he thanked his lucky stars that the annual holiday came at such an opportune time. Detha would have a chance to cool off.

Dinner-time came with the swift approach that dreaded events take to themselves, and John Pyle's very absorption in the problem of how to avoid trouble was the cause of his undoing. Remembering a matter of business that needed attention, he absent-mindedly stepped to the telephone, a new acquisition by Detha, and took down the receiver. The click of the instrument brought his wife running out of the pantry, a big iron spoon in her hand.

"Get away from that telephone, ye nasty old codger!" she cried. "Didn't

I tell ye that ye couldn't use the telephone unless ye'd stop chewin' tobacker fer good an' all? Hey?"

John dodged a blow from the spoon and skipped nimbly to the other side of the room.

"Now, Dethy—" he began.

"Don't ye 'now Dethy' me!" she interrupted. "Set down there an' eat yer dinner an' then get out of here as quick as ever ye can!"

He obeyed, but with a protest.

"I want to telephone about drawin' some hay to Westport—ye know I've got to figger out my work account of goin' to the fair to-morrer. Will ye telephone fer me, Dethy?"

"No, I won't!" she snapped. "Fair! Huh! Fair! I don't get no time to go trapasin' around to fairs!"

John hastily filled his mouth with a knifeload of boiled potato to prevent the possibility of saying anything more, in case he should so far forget himself as to want to make a remark. The click of knives and forks and the noises incident to Ed Cummins's mastication were the only sounds that broke the silence of the dinner-table. When Ed kept still like that it was a sure sign of the very worst. John knew that Ed liked his easy berth and that he realized not even the necessity for keeping help would stay Mrs. Pyle's tongue in one of her extra special tempers. All the signs pointed to a big storm.

After dinner Pyle walked to his nearest neighbor's to telephone about the hay, and then continued on two miles farther to the railroad station. It was his annual custom to find out before the fair whether the trains had changed time since the year before. They had not—they never did—but it gave him a feeling of satisfaction to reassure himself, and it was in an almost cheerful frame of mind that he went back to his farm, to find that Cummins had not done more than fifteen minutes' work in the interval since dinner.

John fervently wished that he could

get over disliking his hired man for a short time. He knew that if he could bring himself to show the faintest sign of affection for Ed, Mrs. Pyle would discharge that young man so quick it would make his head swim.

When, at the end of a busy day, John scraped his brogans at the back door and went in to supper, a single look at the clouded face of his wife overcast his spirits. She had never looked any more thunderous or slammed dishes with greater vehemence. Knowing that he was hanging on the brink of a domestic volcano he held his peace through the monosyllabic conversation of Mrs. Pyle and Ed until the meal came to an end. Then it seemed a good time to make overtures.

"Don't ye want me to wash yer dishes to-night, Dethy?" he asked.

"Dishes!" she hurled back at him. "If ye can't wash dishes any better than ye kin set mouse-traps, I don't want ye monkeyin' around in my kitchen! An' there's another thing I've told ye to do more than forty-eleven times—that's get rid of that pesky old cat! She don't earn her salt! Between yew an' the cat this house 'll be overrun with mice—the dirty things!"

"Now, Dethy!"

"Good land! Ye make me sick!" she raved. "Can't ye say nothin' but 'now, Dethy'? Go out to the barn where ye belong, an' stay there!"

"All right, Dethy," he agreed hastily. "If ye'll jest lay out my clean shirt an' Sunday clo'es so I kin have 'em to go to the fair I won't bother ye no more, an' I'll set that mouse-trap sure as shootin'!"

Mrs. Pyle put down the stack of dishes she was carrying, faced her husband, and established her hands firmly on her hips. John involuntarily took a step backward. He had time to notice that Ed Cummins was grinning as he smoked in one corner of the kitchen, and his dislike for that young man fairly curdled. Then the storm broke.

"John Pyle," his wife ripped out her words, "ye ain't goin' to the Plattsburg

Fair to-morrer nor any other day! I've stood it for twenty years an' I ain't goin' to stand it no longer! Last year ye went an' drank a glass of beer while ye was gone—I smelt it on yer breath an' ye was brazen-faced enough to admit it yerself! The time is past when ye kin go gallivantin' off to the Plattsburg Fair while I stay to home an' work my fingers to the bone!"

"Now, Dethy, ain't I ast ye to go along every year?" he argued.

"If ye say 'now, Dethy' to me agin I'll knock yer head off!" she picked up the stove poker. "I don't want to go to yer miserable old fairs! I've got business to 'tend to home, an' that's where ye're goin' to stay hereafter! Yer clean shirt is locked up, an' so's yer money, in my trunk, an' yer Sunday clo'es is in my closet! Ye ain't goin' to get 'em, neither! An' what's more, if ye don't set that mouse-trap an' kill that cat before ye go to bed I'll never cook another meal of vittles fer ye as long as I live! Put that in yer pipe an' smoke it!"

John slunk out of the back door. Even if he had not been too stunned to say anything there would have been nothing to say. It was a relief to get out into the open air and hide his chagrin and disappointment under cover of the gathering dusk.

Old Betsy appeared, purring, with her tail aloft and her back arched. He took her up and went into the barn. Sam and Slim nickered. The friendliness of the animals was soothing, for they could sympathize if they did not understand. He sat down on an empty nail-keg, with Betsy in his arms.

It seemed to John Pyle that the bottom had fallen out of everything, and that he had fallen with it into a dark abyss from which there was no escape. His one day of freedom after three hundred and sixty-four days of patient tolerance had meant everything to him: that one day of unrestrained action when he shouldered through crowds and spent his money as he chose meant the reestablish-

ment of his philosophical equilibrium for another year of Detha. He needed it.

There was another cause of grievance—old Betsy. He knew that if he did not kill the cat his wife would, and in a manner highly objectionable to the cat. He and Betsy were in much the same predicament, except that Betsy would meet a reasonably swift end while he would linger on to endure a daily tongue-lashing and the disrespectful grins of a hired man.

For the first time in the twenty years that he had been married John Pyle definitely distrusted the blessings of matrimony. He shivered.

Something was stirring deep in his soul—the same sort of something that had raged within him when he licked Bull Whalen, his rival for the hand of Detha. More than a score of years had elapsed since the memorable fight that had been the talk of the township, and in all that time John Pyle could not remember that he had been angry.

Of course for a long while there had not been anything to get angry about. Detha's black eyes had flashed with admiration instead of wrath in those days, and for many months after their wedding she had seemed even to stand slightly in awe of him.

In some subtle way a change in their relations came about. Little by little Detha usurped the powers that he good-naturedly relinquished until there was a time when, with much scolding, she told him to make his sleeping-quarters in the cubby-hole at the head of the stairs.

Then came an order to get up and make his own breakfast, and not to touch a morsel of the food that his wife might have prepared for her own repast. The Pyles had ceased to be man and wife—they had become woman and husband. To-night, for the first time, John Pyle saw the situation in that light.

He shivered again and gripped old Betsy so hard that she gave a squawk of outraged dignity and fled to the other side of the barn. He got up and kicked

the nail-keg on which he had been sitting. Betsy dashed into Sam's stall and the horses snorted with excitement. John paid no attention to the animals.

He was mumbling over the words of an old adage that emotion had dragged up from the reservoir of his memory.

"A dog, a woman, a hickory-tree—
The more you beat 'em, the better they be."

Suddenly the back door of the house slammed and the irritatingly cheerful whistle of Ed Cummins approached through the gathering darkness. John stopped pacing to and fro and faced the entrance as Ed stepped into the barn. The young man was newly shaved and dressed in his best. He grinned complacently but awkwardly, owing to a high collar, as he thrust his hands into his pockets with a swagger.

"Mis' Pyle said I might go to the Plattsburg Fair to-morrer, so I'm goin' to start on the sleeper to-night," he announced. "Want to send yer love to the fair grounds, John?"

"Fair—yew—to-morrer!" stammered John.

"Sure," replied Ed flippantly, "an' Mis' Pyle said fer ye to kill that cat to-night an' bury her so that she could see the grave in the mornin', an' not to fer-git to set the mouse-trap afore ye went to bed."

So Ed Cummins could go to the fair, could he? And John Pyle could stay at home and work! It was the spark needed to set off the magazine of Pyle's latent wrath. The accumulation of years blew up with an internal convulsion that sent red streaks shooting before his eyes and a current of anger tingling to every nerve.

With a catlike leap he grabbed the younger man by the throat and shook him as old Betsy would have shaken a rat in her palmiest days. He saw terror chase amazement out of Cummins's face and was satisfied. He gripped Ed by the shoulders, spun him around, and lifted him clear of the barn door with a carefully placed kick.

"Go on to the Plattsburg Fair!" called John in a clear but restrained voice. "An' don't come back till ye've learnt how to treat yer betters!"

The rapidity with which Mr. Cummins was disappearing down the road made further remark useless. His recent employer readjusted the nail that held up his overalls, took a chew of tobacco, and glared at the back of the house. Apparently no sound of the brief conflict had reached his wife. It was just as well. Forewarned would have meant forearmed.

John spoke reassuringly to Sam and Slim, and then spent half an hour in coaxing Betsy down from the hay loft, where she had taken refuge during the height of the excitement. He stroked her until her tail stood straight up.

"Poor old kitty! Nice kitty!" he said. "Ye ain't goin' to be killed—not never!"

It had grown quite dark before Pyle, chin up, shoulders back, and with a strange, new feeling of buoyancy in his heart, started for the house. Lights were out and all was quiet. He took the precaution of removing his heavy brogans before he went into the pantry.

Smiling to himself, he cut a titbit of cheese, baited the mouse-trap, and then made a trip down cellar. When he came up he had a can of Detha's choicest citron preserves. He ate what he wanted, left the can open in the pantry, and climbed up to bed with a springing step.

John Pyle awoke while it was still night at the head of the stairs and dressed briskly in the dark. Cheerful sunlight greeted him when he stepped into the kitchen, carrying his shoes in his hand, and he paused to dance noiselessly a few steps of a long-forgotten jig before he began the sputtering morning rites.

Pyle parted his gray hair on one side and plastered the longer ends into a little curlcue. He was surprised to see how much younger it made him look. One rejuvenation suggested another, and it followed logically that he should take the lamp shears and crop his drooping mustache until it bristled smartly and ag-

gressively. It was half an hour before he finished his tonsorial labors and went into the pantry.

Four mice squeaked and tumbled over each other in the cage, so badly terror-smitten that they had neglected to eat all of the cheese. Pyle carried the trap into the kitchen and smiled grimly as he sat down to lace up his shoes. Looking like anything but a man who could be trifled with, he picked up the trap and clumped through the house. He halted in the door of his wife's chamber.

Detha, disturbed by the noise of his approach, muttered and flung out her arms, but she did not awake. Standing erect and motionless John watched her for a long moment before his voice rumbled forth:

"Wake up, there!"

Mrs. Pyle sat bolt upright and her eyes popped open. She stared with uncomprehending gaze.

"Get up!" commanded John.

Returning consciousness dawned in his wife's eyes. Wrath followed hard behind. Her lips drew to a straight line.

"What d'ye mean, John Pyle, talkin' to me like that?" There was an ominous self-repression in her neglect of epithet.

"Get up!"

"Ye good-fer-nothin', imperdent, dodderin', old—"

"Stop!"

Mrs. Pyle stopped, but not because she was ordered to do so—she stopped out of sheer amazement.

"Get up an' give me my clo'es an' what money they is in the house!"

"Jest wait till I get out of bed, John Pyle, an' I'll learn ye how to talk to me!"

She gathered herself to spring out of bed. John slowly and dramatically raised the hand that held the mouse-trap. He walked toward the bed with measured steps and held the four squeaking prisoners out toward his wife. She recoiled.

"See them mice?" he demanded.

Mrs. Pyle looked from the trap to her husband's face but she did not answer.

"Them mice is goin' to get ye up," he

announced, "an' they're goin' to get me my clo'es an' money an' some breakfast—a good breakfast, too!"

He moved the trap an inch nearer his wife's nose.

"Take them nasty things right out of here this minute!" she screamed.

John smiled and shook up his captives. They responded as one mouse. Mrs. Pyle shrieked, shut her eyes, and struck wildly at the trap.

"Ye miserable—"

"One!"

Pyle's finger moved slightly and a wiggling gray form dropped to the bed. With a piercing yell Mrs. Pyle scrambled over the footboard, bounded across the room and climbed onto a chair. The mouse, equally terrified, jumped to the floor and stopped uncertainly, looking from one to the other of the human beings.

"Skeedaddle!" barked John, stamping his foot. The mouse started toward Mrs. Pyle and, completely upset by her screams, bumped his head blindly against a leg of the chair on which she danced a hysterical jig.

"Take it away!" she pleaded. "Oh, John, take it away!"

John, permitting no sign of inward relenting to show in his face, shooed the animal out of the room.

"Now," he said, ostentatiously swinging his trapful of mice, "get them clo'es an' that money!"

Mrs. Pyle climbed down and, with an occasional snuffle, dug into her closet and trunk. Her husband pocketed the money and laid the clothes over one arm.

"I want some breakfast soon as ye get dressed," he remarked as he turned to go out, "an' don't be too durned long about it, neither!"

John hid his mice under the back steps for possible further reference, did the chores, and hurriedly changed his clothes in the kitchen. He had just finished building a fire when Detha came out.

She began to bustle from pantry to kitchen almost cheerfully, it seemed to her husband, and once he was astonished

to catch her looking at him with an unmistakable smile in her eyes. He was still pondering what revenge she might have secretly in mind when she called him to the best meal he had eaten since the early days of their married life.

Not a word was spoken until the end of the meal. Then John settled back in his chair with a sigh of such content as his inner regions had not known for years.

"That was an almighty good breakfast, Dethy," he said.

His wife actually blushed and looked down at her plate.

"I'm glad ye liked it, John," she replied.

There was a moment of rather awkward silence. John got up and put on his hat.

"Guess I better be gettin' along to the station."

Suddenly he found himself looking into Dethy's eyes. She seemed to be nearer to him without having moved.

"I hope ye have a good time, John. I like a man with some spunk."

The next instant Dethy was in his arms. Her head was on his shoulder and he was patting her back with well-intentioned thumps.

The clock had ticked many times when there came a hesitating knock at the door. John and Dethy sprang apart. The round face of Ed Cummins was pressed against the screen.

"Have ye got over bein' mad, Mr. Pyle?" he asked, humbly. "'Cause if ye have I thought mebbe I'd stay to home an' work to-day 'stead of goin' to the fair."

"Come in an' get yer breakfast, Ed. We'll figger out the work to-night when I get home from the fair. I got to hurry to ketch the train now."

As Cummins entered, John went out. Dethy followed him to the steps and he turned and smiled back at her. A dozen rods up the road he turned again. Dethy, still watching, waved her hand. John swung his hat and started on.

"Don't women beat all!" he muttered to himself.

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



ONE of the most puzzling jobs that Ye Editor knows is trying to figure out just how much to tell you about a story in announcing it in this, the Heart to Heart Talks. On the one hand is the desire to catch and hold your interest and attention, and on the other, the fear of telling you too much, and therefore taking the—er—wire edge off your appetite for it.

Suppose, for instance, we were to tell you: "This is the story of a saint who turned sinner—of an archbishop who became a yeggman." You'd want to read *that*, wouldn't you? And yet, to tell you this might spoil for you the gradual working up of a tremendous climax on the part of a master craftsman.

Don't you see how difficult the problem is? It might take the whole first instalment of a serial that is destined to be a best-seller to reach such a point as this; yet, did we not tell you this much, your interest might not be attracted.

That is how the land lies with reference to the tremendous new serial that we will offer you in six parts, beginning next week—

THE SIN THAT WAS HIS

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

Author of "The Miracle Man," "The Beloved Traitor," etc.

As a matter of fact, I have *not* told you its central idea in the foregoing, though I have hinted at it. It is even more startling and far-reaching than this. Yet, just as I said, to tell you what that situation is would be to tell you the whole first instalment, though it could never spoil what is by far the best thing Mr. Packard has ever written.

You have assuredly heard of "The Miracle Man," if not, either read the book or seen the play. When this masterpiece of Mr. Packard's was published in *Munsey's Magazine* three years ago, George M. Cohan saw his opportunity and made of it one of our greatest American plays. "The Miracle Man" is filled with the deepest religious meanings, is perfection—but "THE SIN THAT WAS HIS" is *actually greater!*



DO you remember the furor that was caused a number of years ago by the publication of George Du Maurier's wonderful story of the Latin Quarter of Paris—"Trilby"? Perhaps you have read it, perhaps seen the play, which, by the way, was revived only a season or two ago.

Well, "Trilby" gives a striking and thoroughly convincing picture of the gay, care-free, lawless life led by the art students, their friends, and models in gay Paris. It is not what you can

call an immoral story; it certainly deals with life with a free brush and a full color. Call it immoral, and you will be near the mark.

That is the Paris that was—the Paris before the present great war.

No doubt, you have formed a more or less definite picture for yourself of what Paris as a whole is like since the war started. But just how has it affected the Quartier Latin—the Boul' Mich', the Boulevard Mont-Parnasse, the

gay and frivolous life of Montmartre? It is hard to picture it, isn't it?

Nevertheless the thing has been done, and in masterly fashion, in

"MIMI"

BY J. U. GIESY

next week's complete novelette.

"MIMI" is the simple, touching—and frank little story of an artist and a grisette just before the war and after it started. Like "Those Who Walk in Darkness" and "The Scarlet Ghost," though somewhat somber in coloring, and unmoral like "Trilby," it has its lesson to teach—and it is a great lesson.

The thoughtless young student learned that "no man has ever lived until he has learned how to die." What lesson his sweetheart learned I will leave for you to find out for yourself.

"ONCE IN A THOUSAND YEARS," by Samuel G. Camp, goes to prove, as the author says, that the exception is invariably the rule when you want to demonstrate the rule; that exasperating perversity is not confined to inanimate things; that things always go contrariwise when you most want 'em not to. But the story is so delightfully told that it would be a shame to tell you any of it at all.

Mr. Camp has written some mighty good stories for you in the past year, and this one is still better. You want to keep your eye on this young man!

WHAT really is impossible? Of course, you couldn't jump head first out of a twentieth-story window and expect to escape unhurt, nor dispute successfully the right-of-way of an express-train; but how many other things are there that positively can't be done?

Perhaps fewer than you'd think. At all events, *Rufus Sedgwick*, hero of "BATTLE ROYAL," by John D. Swain, said so; and had proved it a number of times. In fact, *Rufus* was pretty nearly a hundred-per-cent efficient man, and he had an incessant craving for excitement that law-abiding civilization couldn't satisfy. So when his friend the lawyer suggested another impossible thing—

Maybe you'll meet *Rufus* again. It's a cinch you'll want to!

"A SALT-HORSE SAILOR," by Captain Dingle, is another of that able writer's stirring little dramas of the sea. It goes to prove that—well, sometimes you *can* teach old dogs new tricks, and sometimes the proverb holds good.

Joe Briggs was a sailor of the old school—

a sail-or, mind, who had the utmost contempt for such things as steam and modern breech-loading rifles that "you shoots orf like a perishin' pistol." Unfortunately his skipper believed in efficiency and up-to-dateness, and—

It's a fascinating yarn!

NOTICE.—Inquiries concerning stories that we have published will be answered in the Heart to Heart Talks only when the name of the author as well as the title of the story is supplied by the correspondent.

FOUND THE ALL-STORY VIA HARVARD

THE following letter, received at this office recently, encourages us greatly. There has long been a popular impression that a magazine carrying fiction only, aiming to entertain the great mass of readers, was without literary standards. Read the opinion of a discriminating reader and then subscribe at once.

TO THE EDITOR:

I wish to congratulate you upon the discovery of a new and most promising author, and that author upon a most remarkable story. I refer to "The Enemy in His Mouth," by Raymond Ashley. Being a man of rather more than middle age, of conservative—perhaps old-fashioned—ideas and tastes, I have always clung closely to the literary standards of my generation. *Harper's*, *Century*, *Scribner's*, *Atlantic*, *The North American*, and one or two others were the only magazines I recognized. The others—the "popular" magazine, so called—I viewed with smiling, superior tolerance or with out-and-out contempt; I believed them simply collections of sensational or maudlin trash hastily and sloppily thrown together for the amusement of the undiscriminating, uncultured masses. That by any chance a piece of real literature

could get into one of them did not occur to me, until recently a friend, in whose judgment I have always had great faith, told me of this astonishing serial in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Frankly, I had never heard of the magazine before, and even with all my faith in my friend (who, by the way, is connected with the department of English literature at Harvard), I accepted it doubtfully. It is really that doubt that is responsible for this letter, for I feel that I owe you and your magazine an apology. If you published but the *one* story—"The Enemy in His Mouth"—in the year, you would have fully justified the existence of your magazine. It is a story every one should read, and one I confidently prophesy will ultimately become a classic. I will add, a bit shamefacedly perhaps, that my order has gone to my newspaperman, and the ALL-STORY has been added permanently to my list of magazines.

Very truly yours,
E. I. W.
Cambridge, Massachusetts.

"JUST ENOUGH" HUMOR

TO THE EDITOR:

Attracted by the cover-design of the issue containing the first instalment of "The Sea Demons," I purchased and introduced into our family of seven our first copy of the most entertaining magazine in America, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

It was with deep regret that our family, and doubtless the entire ALL-STORY family, reached the concluding chapters of "The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms," knowing that we would never meet *Vandewater* again. However, we know Ahmed Abdullah can, and will, turn out something equally as good.

It seems strange that there was so little enthusiasm shown over "The Sea Demons." True, it was very improbable, in fact, it was impossible; but in view of the fact that so many of us have called for stories of this character, and that Mr. Rousseau gave us just what had been demanded for such a long time, why should not more credit be given this author? I, for one, can give him a good deal of credit, for it surely requires strong

imagination and exceptional writing capability to conceive and develop the plot running through this story.

Taking them as a whole, every one of the stories published in your weekly are interesting. Interesting enough, at least, to hold the attention of the "knockers" to the last line. Surely, no one is required to read anything not worth while, according to their views.

There are two stories that ran as serials during the year just closed that deserves special mention. They are "The Brass Check" and "Too Much Efficiency." Of the former, everything good has already been said at earlier dates, while of the latter, enough praise can never be extended the author of this unusual serial. It is not likely that that story will be surpassed by any coming serial written along the lines most capable of holding public interest—the American household. And through it all ran that "just enough" humor over which Rath has full command.

Awaiting impatiently the promised sequel to "The Brass Check," and wishing you every success.

R. F. KINDER.

Bristol, Rhode Island.

"MID-OCEAN" MAKES SAILOR HOME-SICK

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a reader of your wonderful magazine for some time, starting with "Tarzan of the Apes," and although I am not a subscriber, I have never missed a single copy since. Furthermore, I read every word from cover to cover, and although some of your stories are not so good as the others, I have yet to come across a really poor one.

I have just finished "Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar," and liked it immensely. The only trouble that I can find with the Burroughs stories is that they don't appear often enough. All of your authors, as a whole, are good; but the best among them are Burroughs, Harold Titus, Zane Grey, Jackson Gregory, E. K. Means, Randall Parrish, Stephen Allen Reynolds, Frank Condon, and Captain Dingle.

I sometimes notice in the Heart to Hearts letters knocking the ALL-STORY. If I come across a story that is not quite to my liking, I just say to myself: "Well, somebody might like this, and the other stories more than offset the poor one."

I like stories of the sea, having spent considerable time there myself. The story, "Mid-Ocean," by Stephen Allen Reynolds, makes me feel homesick, as I understand whaling. Some of the best stories that you have published are the *Tarzan* tales, "Sand," "To the Victor," "On a Stallion Shod With Fire," "Contraband," and "The Yellow Furlough." I think the southern

stories by E. K. Means are fine; I enjoy many a good laugh from them. "Messing With Matrimony" I think is the best I read.

Keep up the good work you are doing, and I, for one, will have my ALL-STORY as long as I live. When I get hold of my copy on Thursday there is no let up except to read till the whole book is read. I would like to see the day when the ALL-STORY is a bi-weekly or, better still, a daily feature.

I remain an ALL-STORY-ite forever.

ED MACGREGOR.

Norwood, Rhode Island.

E. J. RATH HAS IT RIGHT

TO THE EDITOR:

Merry Christmas!

Please find a ten cent piece, enclosed in a patent applied way, for which send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for December 9, 1916.

Living at the edge of the tropical jungle, and a subscriber to your always-welcome magazine, I do not doubt that you sent me the above copy, but as I did not receive it, I guess that nothing less than a U-boat captured it on its way.

I sorrowfully missed the end of Mr. E. J. Rath's "Too Much Efficiency." In his *castigat ridendo mores* way, he is certainly right in making fun of the said *efficiency*, which begins to be a two-hundred-per-cent curse in the good U. S. A.

Life is short; why live it as a wooden, senseless automaton instead of enjoying it. The word *efficiency* ought to be spelled *k-u-l-l-u-r*, and must have a lot of hyphens hidden somewhere behind its letters.

Give us again some good stories, like "Contraband," and try to persuade Mr. Burroughs to go beyond Mars. With an imagination like his, I would not let his *John Carter* miss a planet in the whole solar system.

With wishes for success, I am,

Yours very truly,

H. L. LAMBERT.

Bratsy, via Bocas del Toro,

Republic of Panama.

THANKS FOR A FEAST

TO THE EDITOR:

I have never seen anything in the Heart to Heart Talks from Keene, and I think Keene should be heard from, as I know there are a number of ALL-STORY readers here, because when in a few instances I have been late in calling at the bookstore for my favorite magazine, I have not been able to obtain it.

I am an old *Cavalier* reader, and have read the ALL-STORY in Cuba, Isle-of-Pines, and Bermuda, as well as our own United States, and

when I pick up a number like the one of November 25, I feel that we ALL-STORY readers ought to unite in thanking our editor for the feast he has prepared for us. Of course, there have been stories that I haven't liked, but on the whole I think it is the best, brightest, and cleanest magazine I have ever read.

I am a cripple, and spend most of my time reading magazines, and the ALL-STORY is the one I wait for.

There is one thing more. I would be in favor of doing away with the short stories and having one long story instead. Now, who will boost with me to bring this about?

ARTHUR M. MARDEN.

530 Washington Street,
Keene, New Hampshire.

LETTERETTES

I want to say that the story that caused me lots of worry and pleasure was "The Cradle of the Deep." It sure did hypnotize me then, and I haven't got over it yet.

I can't praise it enough, but actions are better than words. Enclosed find one dollar for subscription.

PHILLIP CONNELLY.

Co. F, 3rd Ill. Inf.,
Camp Wilson,
San Antonio, Texas.

I have taken the ALL-STORY for about three years, in fact, before it was called the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I like it very well. I take several others, but they are always laid aside for the ALL-STORY.

Why don't you print more by Fred Jackson? I always liked his stories. I know some of the men kick about him, but since we let some of the stories that please them pass, please put in something that pleases the women.

I also like stories of the north and far West. Zane Grey's stories are fine; in fact, all your stories are good, only tastes differ.

MRS. A. A. MORRIS.

Kendall, Wisconsin.

Enclosed kindly find fifteen cents, for which send me a copy of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for November 11. Have always purchased your par excellent magazine from news-stands, but was a little late this week, and all stands have sold out.

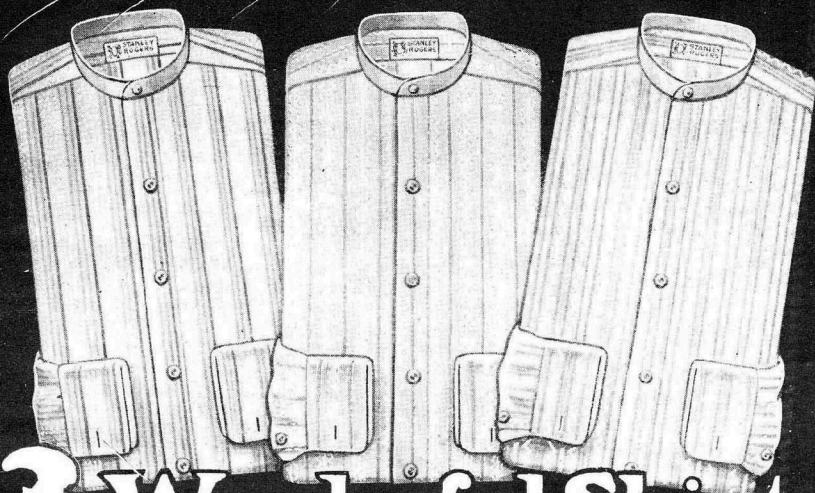
Am reading the serial, "The Black Cloud," and would be greatly disappointed to miss the issue. Also enjoy all the stories. I only hope that our dandy author, J. B. Harris-Burland, has another good story in store for us.

Wishing you every success.

EDWIN M. JEWETT.

202½ South Main Street,
Tulsa, Oklahoma.

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Finish these Stories for Yourself



The girl got \$6 a week and was lonely. "Piggy"—you can imagine his kind—was waiting down-stairs.

go. That was Lord Kitchener's doing. But another night? O. Henry tells about it in a story, Read it.



What Makes Men Fight ?

In one short ugly sentence she stripped him of his manhood. In a moment of jest, she had cut deep into his heart. Always there rang in his ears that mocking laugh which had sent him flying to the front. She had the most tantalizing smile in all San Augustine. He would show the world.

The war was over. He went home—a Colonel and a hero. San Augustine was frenzied over her native son. Straight up the path to her home he went—and then the thing that happened was not at all what you expect. Let O. Henry tell you the story.



Up From the Depths

The man had killed a man—he had not the girl—a stranger—at half-past one at Rooney's. A crisis came—and under the surface of shame, the souls of each stood forth to sacrifice—and to a better, cleaner life. It's not the truth a man tells, but the spirit in which he tells it that counts. That is why O. Henry can write of things not always told, with a clean high spirit.

O Henry

For years now you have read of O. Henry—you have read these advertisements and thought that some day you would own a set for yourself. And you have put off the sending from month to month. The time for that is gone. Now—today—you must order your set of O. Henry to get the low price and the Kipling FREE.

So great is the popularity of O. Henry—so enormous is the demand for his books—that we should like for all time to offer you the sets at the present low price. But we can't. It costs 40 per cent more to make the sets now than it did. Paper costs more—in k costs more; binding costs more. So the price has to go up. But to give you one more chance to get the present price, we have put off the raise in price till March 5th. That is the last day. Send the coupon now and be in time. Never again will you get a set of O. Henry at the present price. These are O. Henry days. With so much else that should absorb us—with Emperors dying almost unnoticed, with twenty million men struggling on a dozen 'fronts,' and with the mad diversion of the New Luxury to hold us back from thinking of anything at all—we are all thinking and talking of the man who called himself O. Henry. Our neglected author is dead in his grave, with scarcely a publisher to walk behind his hearse, and lo! six years after his death he is bursting upon us afresh, as it were, with all the splendor of a rising genius."—Stephen Leacock.

Kipling FREE And besides, to get your prompt action we give you, free, Kipling in six volumes—179 stories—the greatest he ever wrote—the red, red stories of fight and the keen blue stories of peace. 451 Short Stories—2 Long Novels. O. Henry, 12 volumes bound in green silk cloth and gold. Gold tops; illustrated: 274 complete stories; one long novel.

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This is your last chance to get O. Henry at the low price. Don't miss it. Remember one day's delay may make you a latecomer. Be sure your order reaches us before March 5th. And the best way to make sure is to mail this coupon right now. Up—up—goes the sale of O. Henry—higher and higher every day. 1,600,000 in the United States alone. How many thousands in Australia, France, England, Germany, Africa and Asia, we cannot say. But you can have the books on approval, at the low price—with Kipling FREE.

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—golden dreams flooded the man's soul—

dreams that swiftly leaped to the inevitable—dreams that mingled joy and pain, the cry of unborn life, the solemn mystery of creation, the glory of this new, ineffable miracle.

"Sylvia!" he whispered, with the girl's breath hot upon his lips. "Sylvia!"

The girl's arms encircled Bradford lovingly.

"Hold me tight, tight, tight!" she whispered tremulously. "I want to be all yours!"

His answer was another kiss that drew their souls into one soul. And in that kiss they knew the truth, sounded the depths, and stood upon the heights of joy.

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from the corking complete novel, "Four Forty at the Fort Penn," by Perley Poore Sheehan, at the front, to the unique Log-Book chat with readers, at the back. In the middle, there's the start of a thrilling adventure serial of Revolutionary times, "Playing the Man," by Joseph Ivers Lawrence, besides a great array of short stories for the excellence of which THE ARGOSY is noted.

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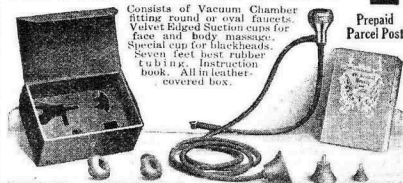
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See the "CLEAN-O-PORE"—use it—note the wonderful results obtained from its daily use. Pin a \$2 bill, your personal check, or a money order to the coupon below, mail to us, and a "CLEAN-O-PORE" outfit will come to you by Parcel Post. It not more than satisfied in 10 days, return it. Your money will be promptly refunded. Improving your appearance is worth ten times \$2, so send *no money now*, before you forget it.

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Enclosed find \$2. Send me, prepaid, by Parcel Post, a "Clean-O-Pore" Massage Outfit on the understanding that if I am not entirely satisfied my money will be promptly refunded.

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Mark an "X" before the job you want, and mail the coupon to us now. We'll show you *your* way to success—more simple and easy than you have dreamed. You'll be under no obligation, and for the sake of your ambition you should act today. Make your mark now. Send the coupon.

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Dept. G-1082

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|Building Contractor |Stenographer |
|Building Superintendent |Bookkeeper |
|Heat & Vent. Engineer |Fire Ins. Inspector |
|Structural Engineer |Fire Ins. Adjuster |
|Structural Draftsman |Fire Ins. Expert |
|Mechanical Engineer |Sanitary Engineer |
|Mechanical Draftsman |Master Plumber |
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N. M. Wendle averaged \$75 to \$125 a day profit; W. F. Mountain made \$100 in 3 days; Sam Gorman took in \$2,000 at White City in a few weeks; F. C. Gardner made and sold 2437 sacks of Candy Floss in ten hours—sales \$121.85—profits over \$15.00—had machine nine years; G. A. Barton made \$411.00 on one barrel sugar costing only \$23; A. J. Model averaged \$25.00 to \$40.00 per day net. Had machine two years.

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Saddles, \$2.00 up. New uniforms, \$1.50 up. Army 7 shot carbine, \$2.00; rifles, 1.12c each. U. S. A. Winchester high power rifle, 6 m. m. \$9.85. Team harness, \$21.85 up. C. W. Army Revolvers, \$4.65. Remington Army Revolver, \$4.85; rifles, 1c each. Mauser High Power Rifle with 200 eggs, \$19.85. 15 Acres Government Auction Goods Bargains illustrated and described in 42c large space wholesale and retail cyclopedia catalogue, mailed 25c each and 30c west of Mississippi River.

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It would cost more than \$15.00 to send a post-card to the more-than-a-million homes that read "The Munsey Magazines" every month. Advertisers who want to cover the same ground for \$17.42 are using this short cut:

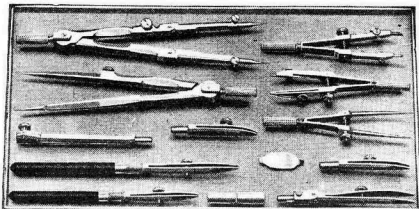
LINE RATE		Special Combination Rate \$4.49 Per Line Less 3 per cent cash discount
Munsey's Magazine	— .80	
The Railroad Man's Magazine	— .80	
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Minimum space accepted, four lines. Ten per cent discount for six consecutive insertions. 3% for cash.

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"A New Force in Business," that gives full particulars about the effectiveness of Classified Advertising in "The Munsey Magazines."

The Frank A. Munsey Company
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Imported Drawing Instruments Free!!

YES, I will give you this exquisite set of imported drawing instruments absolutely free and I will give you a 90x25 inch drawing board, a 24-inch T square, a 12-inch rule, a supply of drawing paper, 2 triangles and a French curve, pencils, erasers, thumb tacks, etc. The instruments come in a superb plush lined leather case—they are genuine working instruments and I don't think you could duplicate this outfit for less than \$15. But I give it away *absolutely free* to the men who get my personal instruction.

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Draw \$125 to \$175 Per Month

There is an urgent demand for skilled draftsmen. Companies are issuing calls every day for men to fill positions paying from \$125.00 to \$175.00 per month. I will give you just the training you need to hold one of these big jobs—right in your own home. Write now.

Chief Draftsman Will Instruct You Personally

I am Chief Draftsman of a large and well known firm. I have been doing the highest paying expert



drafting work for a quarter of a century and I know just the kind of training that is demanded from men who get the big salaries. During my spare time I will train a few ambitious men to hold big jobs, while they remain in their own homes. You will get actual work to do—practical instruction, until you consider yourself competent regardless of how long it takes. Write today—now—act at once.

Pay As You Wish
I want ambitious men. Don't worry about the small charge I make for my instruction. Write today.

Send the Coupon for Big New Book

Send this coupon or a letter or a post card and get my new book. No obligations. Act now.

**Chief Draftsman
Dobe**

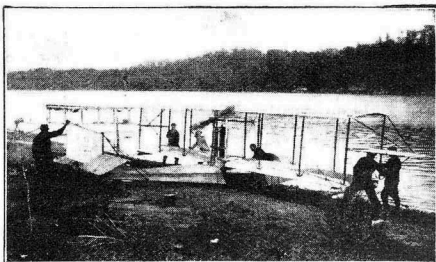
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YES, right in your own home, in your spare time, you can learn all the principles, the theory and the mechanics of Aviation. You can prepare yourself for flying, if you wish. Or you can gain all the practical knowledge to equip you to enter the big paying and fascinating business of aeroplane construction and as aero-mechanical engineer. Send the coupon at once! Find out how our wonderful course in Aviation will give you the knowledge necessary to enter this field. Everybody planning to enter the Aviation fields needs the knowledge which this course offers. This is the first time that anyone has had the opportunity to gain this instruction at home—and without great sacrifice of time and expense. Waste no time in sending coupon.

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What Course Covers:

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Now is the time for every man who has considered Aviation to get into the field. Each day presents new opportunities. The pioneers are going to reap the rich rewards. Automobile history, railroad history, motion picture history will repeat itself in Aviation. The men who get in early are the men who will amass the fortunes. Right now there are opportunities for men who are experts in the mechanics of Aviation that pay anywhere from \$50 to \$500 a week. In aeroplane factories, government branches, aero societies, repair shops. Only trained men will do. Heretofore this was obtainable only at a great sacrifice of time and expense by field training. Now you may secure this same training at home—in much shorter time, a mere fraction of the expense, and without interfering with your regular work.

Endorsed by Aviation Authorities!

Leading aviators and flying organizations have endorsed this course as a quick and reliable means of training for the business and practice of Aviation.

Special Offer

Send the Coupon

Those who write at once will still be able to take advantage of the special limited offer which is now in force by which they may secure a large tuition reduction. Write now while this offer lasts for full particulars. Send coupon—no obligation.

**American School
of Aviation**
431 S. Dearborn
St., Dept. 1082
Chicago, Ill.

Name

Address

**American School
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Dept. 1082 CHICAGO
Gentlemen:—Please send me, free and without obligation, full particulars of your course in Aeronautical Engineering and details of your special limited offer.



I Want 200 Exceptional Men

I have openings right now for at least 200 men of unusual ability. I prefer men of the mechanical turn of mind—who want to be something better than mere mechanics drawing so much per day—busy or idle—at the whim of some captain of industry—the biggest asset the man must have that I want is “stick-to-it-iveness”—a little determination to succeed—a little money—and I will teach you the best business now open to young men.

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Through my national advertising which has now been running for six years, I am creating a nation-wide demand for my Standardized Tire Repair Service, which we have demonstrated is the best thing of its kind in the country. I sell you the plant out-right—you become its sole owner—and there are hundreds of such plants scattered all over the country. Right now there are at least 200 important centers where autoists are demanding my service and cannot get it except at long range. I want good men for these centers. All I ask you to do is to buy my machine which we have demonstrated is the best by selling more than all others combined.

I Create the Demand

I do the advertising in national magazines and periodicals, which brings the autoists to your door. If you buy a machine, I teach you in my thorough training school, absolutely free of charge, the whole business—teach you how to make every possible repair the very best way—how to secure the business—how to hold it—how to develop your expert technical knowledge to sell your customers all their supplies.

This is the Day of Specialists

When you step out of my school you are an expert—you can cut circles around half of the tire men in the country—you know the constructions—the inner mechanism of the tire and tire building—your knowledge is worth dollars to every automobile owner who draws up to your door—and if you have a little selling ability—if you will follow the course which we so carefully teach—your success is assured—auto owners will flock to your place of business—they will give you the preference because they know that you are a trained man—that they can rely upon your advice—that they can rely upon your repairs—that you are no “fly-by-night” concern or you would not represent us.

Big Profits

It gives you a standing in your community—and if you will measure up to the requirements, there is almost no limit to the profits you can make. When I have sold you a machine my interest doesn't lag—I never forget one of my boys—and the minute you are ready I'll teach you how to add accessories to your line—to sell tires—the right tires—the kind the automobile owner wants and that give him the best service. I am prepared to help you. If you so desire, I can fit you out with a stock of tires and accessories—goods that we have demonstrated by test to be as good as the best. If there is not a Haywood Tire Repair Station in your town—if you see no metal sign like the trade-mark appearing in this ad—write me personally and I'll tell you how to get started in this wonderful business—I'll help you—I'll make you a success. This is the most wonderful year the automobile industry has ever known—there are more tires being used today than ever in the history of the world—the cost of operating a car is steadily climbing—consequently every man who owns a car—regardless of his wealth—must consider the biggest item of its upkeep his tire expense. You can reduce it a third to a half.

Owners Will Come to You

Don't you think that every automobile owner in your locality would like to go to you—don't you think that everyone of them would welcome you and your new machine? Then don't delay—write me today—be the first in your town to tie up with this wonderful service. Remember, I am increasing the demand in your town every day—spend thousands and thousands of dollars to educate the public to save their tires—to come to you.

A Business Opportunity Coupon

MR. M. E. HAYWOOD, Personal
826 N. Capitol Ave., Indianapolis, Ind.

DEAR SIR: Please send me full details how I may start a Haywood Sundry Supply Store and Tire Repair Shop in this locality.

Name.....

Address.....

The Haywood Tire & Equipment Co.
826 N. Capitol Ave. INDIANAPOLIS, IND.