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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Sequel to "The Argus Pheasant"

Koyala the Beautiful

by John Charles Beecham

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXXXVII — NUMBER 2

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY
VOL. LXXXVII NUMBER 2
SATURDAY, AUGUST 10, 1918

Koyala the Beautiful

by John Charles Beecham

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

*Sequel to "The Argus Pheasant" **

CHAPTER I.

EN ROUTE TO BORNEO.

THE gray packet headed toward the black and frowning headland that rose to port. There was a faint scraping of chairs on the deck forward and several passengers crowded to the rail. A grim dowager who had been reading the Manila *Press*, ostentatiously challenged a passing ship's officer with the question:

"Are we approaching Cape Kumungun, *mynheer?*"

The sailor bowed punctiliously. "Kaap Kumungun is directly ahead, *madame*," he assured in a strongly Flemish accent, and hurried away.

The dowager glanced at the time-piece she wore pinned to her waist and announced triumphantly, in tones a bit louder than necessary:

"Cape Kumungun at five-thirty, Miss Coston. I win my bet."

Grace Coston did not reply. She was standing at the rail, intently studying the approaching shore through a pair of glasses, and oblivious to all that was occurring about her. The dowager was about to repeat her announcement, when the Yankee trader at her right, picked up the Manila *Press* that had fallen to the deck and offered it to her.

"Your paper, I think, Mrs. Derringer."

"Yes! Thank you."

Glancing upward she chanced to notice the Danish mining engineer at her left, wink covertly at the trader. Her back arched stiffly and she thrust the paper up before her with unnecessary vehemence. The other passengers breathed a sigh of relief. Mrs. Derringer's loquacity had in two days of voyaging made itself painfully obvious to her companions.

Grace Coston put down her marine glasses and sighed tremulously.

"Borneo," she breathed in a half-whisper.

Vincent Brady gazed deeply into the clear blue eyes upturned to meet his. There was admiration in his glance—no man could have looked into Grace Coston's lovely face, fresh as a May morning, and not admire.

* ALL-STORY WEEKLY, February 3 to March 3, 1917.

"Satisfied?" he bantered. His tone was that of apparent yielding to the whim of a petted child.

Grace Coston was too full of the ecstasy of the moment to pay heed to his raillery.

"Doesn't it give you a thrill, Vincent?" she cried. "That black immensity over there, outpost of a country big enough to pack several nations of continental Europe into, a country that's almost wholly unexplored jungle, occupied by thousands who have never seen the face of a white man."

They had been an engaged couple practically since leaving New York on this tour around the world, and the pride of possession was beginning to pall on Vincent Brady. Unconsciously he was drifting into the married man's pose and tolerantly humoring of his *fiancée's* fancies.

"To me," he replied with a judicial air, "it's not much unlike Tierra del Fuego. Or bits of the west coast of Ireland. Or Africa about Algiers."

The cape, in truth, did not have a particularly prepossessing appearance. A long spit of low-lying black rock, over which the Macassar strait swells, shredded themselves into boiling spray, projected like a huge tusk into the sea. Seafowl shrieked discordantly. Far inland there was a slight greenish tint on the horizon, suggestive of the inevitable coco-palm. No sign of human life existed anywhere.

"If you'll let me take those glasses, I may be able to decide the argument," a petulant voice sounded in Grace's ear.

"I beg your pardon, Vi." Grace surrendered the binoculars to her stepmother. Violet Coston accepted them with a languidly graceful movement of her arm that evoked gleams of admiration from others on the deck. She had deep brown eyes that rested upon you appealingly, an exquisitely modeled face, whose pallor was accentuated by her raven hair, and a slight, girlish figure. The latter was her chief charm and made her look even younger than the ruddy cheeked, healthily vital young woman who called her mother by a bit of legal fiction. As a matter of fact, Violet Coston vas the elder of the two by three full years—she was twenty-five to Grace's twenty-two.

The packet rushed headlong toward the black escarpment of rock. The huge rollers raised by the steady southeast monsoon accelerated its progress. The towering cliff gained height and awesomeness each moment and disclosed jagged fissures large enough to pocket the little vessel. At its foot the breakers roared, throwing their spume heavenward in futile wrath.

Some of the passengers gazed toward the bridge a little uncertainly. To drive the ship onward in this course seemed like tempting Providence.

On the port side a long, mangy tooth of shale suddenly thrust upward. The surf was boiling and foaming around it. A ship's length ahead, the breakers with a final lunge shoreward, blasted themselves in a salvo of thunders on the impenetrable wall of rock. The mauve of the straits flood became a sickly olive green flecked with lather.

A woman's shrill shriek of alarm rose from the waist where the second-class passengers, native and Chinese, were herded.

"My, God, we're on the rocks!" the Danish mining engineer exclaimed hoarsely. He half-rose from his chair and clung to it, his face chalky white.

Like a bird alarmed as it is about to alight the packet swung sharply to the right in answer to her helm. There was a moment of suspense, then she slid from the turmoil of foam and whirlpool into water as placid and blue as the heaven above.

The mining engineer fell heavily into his chair. "Damned recklessness!" he gasped weakly, mopping his brow. "Damned recklessness!"

Mrs. Derringer let go the armrests of her chair, which she had been holding in a tense grip, and breathed deeply. The Yankee trader, the most self-possessed member of the group, twinkled humorously as he watched his fellow voyagers.

"Get your goat?" he asked the Dane sympathetically.

"It is risking life!" the latter stormed angrily. "Another minute and we would have been on the rocks."

"They shave it pretty close," the trader agreed. "Got me too, the first time. You see why they do it, don't you?"

"No, why?"

"There's half a mile of sunken rock on the other side of us," the trader explained, nodding seaward. "The reef runs the deuce of a long way out and the coral keeps growing all the time. It costs coal to steam around it and the only way to dodge it is by this channel. Takes a good man at the wheel, though."

"What is an hour or two hours in comparison with life?" the engineer stormed. "I shall protest to the government."

"Oh, stow it, stow it," the trader advised good-humoredly. "If the poor beggars below can stand it without hollering, we can. The Zuyder Zee makes this trip every three weeks. I guess her navigator knows what he's about."

Further argument was prevented by a low ecstatic cry from Grace Coston.

"Look there!"

"There" was a cluster of Dyak huts set on stilts in the shade of a grove of cocopalms. Two full-grown mias squatted solemnly in front of them. They were chained to stakes and were engaged in breaking coconuts by the simple expedient of hammering them together until the shells cracked. They piled the broken coconuts in a little pyramid before them from whence they were taken by Dyak women who removed the meat from the shells and spread it on the mats to dry.

There was silence on the forward deck for several minutes. Each of the passengers was engrossed in drinking in the scene. Grace Coston stood a little apart from the others, next to the rail. She was alone, her stepmother and Vincent Brady had gone below in search of a steward. Her eyes glowed, her cheeks flushed, and her bosom rose and fell rhythmically. One hand tightly gripped the rail, betraying the emotion that filled her.

In a subconscious way she became aware that she was under observation. She turned swiftly. Two men were regarding her, a tall young giant who flushed slightly and turned away under her inquiring glance, and a rather elderly gentleman whose view she was undoubtedly interrupting.

"I beg your pardon," she said, addressing her apology to the elder of the two.

A pair of fine gray eyes were raised to meet her penitent blue ones.

"It really isn't necessary," he replied whimsically. With a droll smile he added: "You see, it's hardly so novel to me as it is to you. There's scarcely a day at this season I don't see the same thing from my own doorstep."

Grace noticed his face, a little seamed with lines, like those of most men who have passed the borderland of fifty, a little sunken, particularly about the cheekbones, and sallow, rather than healthily tanned. She recognized the marks of malaria. This man had evidently had a hard siege with the dread scourge of the tropics. He had been confined to his cabin since they left Surabaya. A sudden sympathy for him seized her, and she decided to be pleasant.

"The novelty should be wearing off for me," she replied. "We've done India—two months—Singapore and Java. But somehow it hasn't."

"Borneo makes a powerful appeal," he rejoined quietly.

"It is so terrifically primitive," Grace observed. "And it possesses so much that no other portion of the world has. Inaccessible inlands, unexplored jungles, savage tribes more shy than any in the heart of Africa, and a past evidenced by ruined temples and sunken cities, which is wholly unrevealed to us."

"Yes," the stranger assented, "Borneo is preeminently the land of mystery, the last outpost of heathendom. She will be harder to conquer for Christianity than Africa because in addition to the savagery of the Dark Continent she has the cunning of Asia and the fanaticism of Arabia."

"You are a missionary?" Grace asked.

He smiled. "At Sarawak, yes. My name is John Bright, of the Sarawak British Mission."

"And mine is Grace Coston, of New York," Grace responded, extending her hand in frank comradeship. John Bright belonged to a race of men she admired, men who carried the banner in far places. Her warm handclasp carried a touch of homage.

"Won't you sit down?" the missionary urged politely. He glanced about for a vacant chair. The young man at his right

who had gazed at Grace so ardently rose quickly and offered his. As their eyes met a faint flush of color came to his cheek. He turned and strode aft. Grace looked after him with a trace of amusement on her lips.

"I cannot tell you who he is," John Bright vouchsafed, guessing her thoughts. "He is sailing with us as the captain's guest."

"I'm dreadfully afraid I've frightened him away," Grace replied. "I hope I haven't interrupted."

"We were discussing Indian politics," John Bright replied with a smile. "He seems to be as much of an enthusiast about Borneo as you are. That is a remarkable statement to make about any white man who has spent a number of years here."

"Have you lived in Sarawak a long time?" Grace asked, undesirous of appearing curious about the stranger.

"Thirty-two years," the missionary replied. "Since I was twenty-four. It is a long, long time." He sighed. A strange look flitted across his face and transfigured it. It was as though a mantle of years had dropped off.

"My child," he declared earnestly, "I know just how you feel. Borneo held the same romantic fascination for me once when I was young. I asked for this field that I now have. But don't let your imagination get the better of your judgment. Borneo is beautiful, unthinkably beautiful, but that beauty conceals the most savage heart God ever gave human being. It is the striped beauty of the coral snake that strikes and kills without warning."

He paused and almost instantly his face assumed its customary cheerfulness.

"I sha'n't spoil your pleasant visit with my croakings," he declared. "You are going to Bulungan?"

"To see the *pasar*, the famous market that will be held there to-morrow," Grace acknowledged.

"Urge your friends to remain on the main-traveled streets," he advised lightly. "Things are a trifle unsettled there, I understand. I think the captain will explain before you land. Or perhaps you've been told already?" He glanced at her inquiringly.

"We have heard nothing," she replied.

"You're perfectly safe here, of course," the missionary assured. "I'll suggest to the captain that he speak to you before you land."

CHAPTER II.

THE SCOURGE OF THE SUNDAS.

THE same group was seated on the deck a few hours later. Night had fallen, a thick, heavy blanket of night that shut out the shore as effectually as though a solid wall intervened. Occasionally it was cut in twain as the ship's search-light stabbed the sable void with a ray that brought the mangrove-lined shore into sharp relief. Once it surprised a tiger stalking a big turtle, and the startled cat's hurried spring in the protecting shelter of the mangroves afforded those on board a hearty laugh.

The sky was heavily clouded. The moon was in its last quarter, pale and wan, its occasional appearances giving the ocean a ghostly and unreal aspect that made the Zuyder Zee's passengers grateful for its vanishing. "Bobbing in and out like a shy youngster when the company's come," is how Vincent Brady characterized it.

The deck was gaily alight, the white canvas roof above mildly reflecting the incandescent's glare. The Borneesche Industrie Maatschappij, under whose flag the packet sailed, was very careful of the comforts of those who traveled first-class on its ships.

Violet Coston and Grace Coston, with Mrs. Derringer seated between them, were discussing in low tones matters of purely feminine interest. All three were snugly wrapped in steamer blankets, for the night was typically tropic and chill. Vincent Brady and John Bright sat next each other on one side of the ladies, with the Yankee trader opposite. They chatted for a time until Vincent turned to the missionary with the remark:

"The captain's cautioned me against stopping at Bulungan. He advises we go on to Sarawak and see Borneo from the British side. Is there any danger?"

"There is always danger for a white man in East Borneo," John Bright replied tactfully. "It is the new frontier of the Orient."

"I'm aware of that. I was referring to late developments that made a visit to Bulungan inadvisable at this time. Have you heard anything?"

John Bright paused before replying.

"I don't want to alarm you unnecessarily," he responded in a low tone. "But the times are a little uncertain. There have been some ugly rumors afloat and the natives are restless. Borneo, you know, is volcanic in more senses than one."

Though he spoke cheerfully there was a note of gravity in his tones that compelled attention.

"In what way have the Dyaks been restless?" Brady asked. "Have there been any riots or uprisings?"

He took no pains to modulate his tones as the missionary had done. The murmur of voices ceased and every member of the group looked expectantly at John Bright. Grace's lovely eyes glowed like twin violet moons as she leaned forward with the frank eagerness of a child.

The missionary deliberated a perceptible moment.

"It is sometimes difficult for one to say why he believes certain things are true," he replied guardedly. "This is one of those occasions. I have heard it said that men who have spent their lives at sea can forecast a storm with the accuracy of a barometer. Nature has sharpened their perceptions beyond those of the average individual, they feel in the atmosphere the absence of certain conditions that indicate security and the presence of other conditions that presage violence. In the same way, I presume, those of us who have spent many years among the aborigines are able to feel unrest among them before it expresses itself in action. In my travels about the jungle I have come in contact with many tribes. They have treated me with uniform courtesy, even the Punans and the Long Wais who are reputed to be cannibals. But in the last few months I have felt an unrest stirring among them. Exactly why I feel this way, I cannot say. Certainly not because of any change in their attitude toward me. But I do feel that they are plotting mischief. When the storm comes, depend on it, it will come with the suddenness of a typhoon's blast."

There was a stubborn streak in Vincent Brady that never failed to be aroused by opposition. He did not like to be told that he must or must not. Brought up as the only son of moderately rich parents, he had had his own sweet way since babyhood and the license he had enjoyed had sharpened a naturally wilful and imperious disposition.

The misionary's tactful statement, designed to caution without creating alarm, had therefore an opposite effect from what the latter had intended.

"Of course, I don't want to take chances," Brady declared. His stubborn jaw asserted plainly that he would take them if he felt so disposed. "But I don't see why we'd be in any particular danger at Bulungan. There's a garrison there. To-morrow's their fair day and it looks to me as though they'd be precious careful not to do anything to frighten the traders away. We've taken this trip particularly to see the famous fair. I believe the captain's a little premature with his warning."

John Bright made no reply. He was too good a judge of men not to recognize the futility of argument. Grace's glance at her *fiancé* held a little flicker of amusement, for she remembered his almost obstinate refusal when she first suggested the trip to Bulungan. The trader, who was squinting at Brady from beneath lowered lids, felt it incumbent upon him to say a few words.

"Mr. Brady," he began sharply, "you know your business. I'm not going to interfere. I generally make it a point not to interfere. Jim Poggs's business is all I can tend to, Jim Poggs's being mine, sir, since Jim Poggs is me. But when I see a young chap coasting along reefs that he's unfamiliar with, and that young chap has with him two such sweet lookin' girls as are sailing with you, I take the liberty to give him a friendly hail. What 'm gettin' to is this.

"Mr. Bright is right! Eternally right! Bulungan isn't a healthy place for you these days. It wouldn't be healthy if you were alone. It's a doggone sight unhealthier since you've got ladies with you. Those Dyaks and Malays are cooking up a pot of mischief, just as Mr. Bright says. It's liable to boil over any day. Since they've got the notion in their head, to-morrow's just as good a day as any other to them. What do they care for trade when they can get loot? So if you want to avoid trouble, and something you may ever afterward wish to forget, stay on board."

The trader spoke bluntly, but the rugged simplicity and sincerity of his speech salved it from offense. Vincent bristled belligerently when Poggs referred to Grace and Mrs. Coston as "sweet-lookin' girls," but noticing the evident amusement of the others, saved himself from sharp language that could only have made him ridiculous.

"You've talked plainly, captain," he began quizzically.

"I aim to," Poggs grunted.

"I believe your advice is well meant and sound," Vincent continued. "Possibly it will be advisable for us to go on to Sarawak. But I think I'll slip ashore for an hour or two while we're taking on and discharging freight at Bulungan to-morrow, whether the rest of you elect to stay on board or not. There can't be much danger as long as there's trading going on."

Poggs gave an unintelligible grunt. Grace's eyes said as distinctly as though she had spoken that if Vincent went ashore she would go also. Violet, on the other hand, reclined lazily in her chair like a sleepy kitten and listened to the dialogue with a faint smile of cynical amusement that broadened when Vincent announced his intention of going ashore willynilly. John Bright, watching them both, became grave.

"Claws under the fur," he murmured to himself, looking fixedly at the sophisticated little widow. "She knows she can twist him the way she wants to."

A feeling of paternal tenderness came over him for the warm-hearted and impulsive girl who had given her promise to Vincent Brady.

"Sarawak's perfectly safe, I suppose?" Vincent asked in a tone that carried a hint of sarcasm. "That's British soil."

"As safe as Kew or Hyde Park," Bright replied. "Sarawak has been under the control of white men longer than Bulungan. Its people have accepted our rule."

"If that's the case we might hire a proa and run along the coast a bit," Vincent remarked, struck with a sudden idea. "What do you say, Grace? It would give you the first-hand acquaintance with Borneo you've wanted." There was a touch of banter in his tones.

The missionary's face became serious again. "I must advise you against that," he declared. "So long as you remain in Sarawak you are safe. But you wouldn't be safe at sea in a proa."

"Why not?" Vincent challenged.

"Pirates!" the trader interjected succintly. "No proa is safe anywhere these days."

"Merciful Heavens," Mrs. Derringer gasped.

Vincent turned toward the missionary with a short laugh. "I thought Britannia ruled the seas," he bantered. "Do you mean to say you harbor pirates in your well-regulated province?"

"I was referring to the Dordrechter affair, Mr. Bright," the trader explained.

"I haven't seen any official statement in regard to it," the missionary rejoined.

"The colonial office hasn't made any statement, so far as I know," Poggs acknowledged. "But everything points one way. It's Ah Sing's work. He's back again."

"Mercy!" Mrs. Derringer shrieked. Her hands gripped each other convulsively. Her face was a ghastly white in the glare of the incandescents.

Violet Coston sat up sharply. "What is it?" she demanded with a note of anxiety in her voice. "What is this Dordrechter affair and who is Ah Sing?"

John Bright cast a glance of stern rebuke at the trader. Poggs's eyes fell and he shuffled uncomfortably in his chair.

"Looks as though I've spilled the beans," he remarked apologetically.

The missionary spoke. "The Dordrechter affair that Mr. Poggs referred to, Mrs.

Coston, is the strange disappearance of a ship that carried passengers and freight in the coastwise trade from Batavia to Bandjermassin and Macassar. It was found derelict some time ago with passengers and crew missing. There are some who believe it was captured and looted by pirates. In fact, the report gained a wide circulation and general credence. But the authorities, I understand, do not hold this view. Personally I think there is good reason for doubt. If the vessel were taken by pirates, why didn't they sink it? Why should they permit evidence of their crime to float about the ocean? To me it appears more likely that the ship was caught in a hurricane that swept the Java sea about that time, sprung a leak, and was deserted by the passengers and crew. The same explanation would account for our failure to hear from those aboard her again, for it would be impossible for small boats to live in such a sea as raged while the storm was on. The Dordrechter when picked up, I am told, was wholly waterlogged and was only kept from sinking by the sandalwood in her hold."

"That sandalwood was all she had aboard, too," Poggs growled.

The missionary's glance was withering. Poggs hastily clamped his lips.

"It is more than probable that the wreck was stripped by natives before it was towed into port by the coaster that found it," Bright pointed out.

"Two years ago my sister wrote me from Manila that she was sailing on the Swansea to spend Christmas with us at Batavia," Mrs. Derringer murmured hoarsely, like one awakening from a horrid dream. "We waited for weeks. One day Mr. Derringer picked up a copy of the Batavia *Courant* and noticed the Swansea's name. He had a clerk translate the item. It stated that the Swansea had been found derelict and looted. Her deck was covered with headless corpses. I never saw my sister again. It was Ah Sing's work."

She shrunk into her chair, a huddled, abject figure, and wrung her hands. As the darting searchlight explored the vast wastes of the sea ahead she followed its course with frightened eyes, as though she fearfully expected to see a pirate ship materialize out of the darkness.

"Is Ah Sing still at large?" Mrs. Coston demanded in a high-pitched voice.

"I assure you, *madame*, he hasn't been heard of for two years," John Bright assured her earnestly. "Since Peter Gross, Resident of Bulungan, broke up the pirate confederacy at the battle of the Kwanga River there have been no pirate depredations."

"Why do people think he may be responsible for the accident that happened to this ship?" Mrs. Coston inquired. "Has he returned to this vicinity?"

"I'd like to hear the whole story," Vincent added.

Seeing that further evasion was impossible the missionary resigned himself to the unpleasant task of telling the pirate's history.

"I'll be happy to tell you the little I know about Ah Sing," he replied. "That little is probably more than half romance. I have never seen him personally, although there are many that have. I am told that he was for years a tavern-keeper at the Chinese kampong in Batavia and bore a reasonably good reputation for one of his trade, although suspected of shanghaiing sailors. In some way he became interested in piracy. He gradually gained an ascendancy over the wilder elements in these islands and eventually became the head of a crude sort of pirate confederation. Under his leadership it became a formidable power and a scourge to commerce. The natives were in great awe of him and esteemed him as a sort of Oriental Napoleon, a modern Genghis Khan. But it's not so difficult to acquire that sort of a reputation among them. They are a superstitious lot, and if a man does something a little out of the ordinary he is quickly reverenced as a sort of demigod."

Poggs grunted. He was smoking furiously and clamped his cigar between his teeth as though to emphasize that he did not intend to take any part in the discussion.

"Is he really a formidable leader, or is all this merely a mushroom reputation?" Grace asked.

"I didn't intend to belittle his ability,"

the missionary replied. "There is no question in my mind but that he was a really dangerous character for some years until, as I said, he was defeated by Peter Gross. If he has come back to these waters it will be a serious mater, for he possesses a remarkable talent for organizing the savage tribes and will not scruple to use it. I do not doubt that he was at one time the actual leader of practically all the free-booting marauders of Java, Celebes, Borneo, and the surrounding small islands. How far his control went I do not know but I do know that when big game was in sight the pirates hunted in packs, something that was never done before his time. They did a slave business among those tribes not leagued with them, and thus forced many of them to pay tribute and obey their orders. They were a ruthless lot and spared neither man, woman nor child. The sea Dyaks were their allies and it was generally understood that they made the many inlets of Bulungan Residency their headquarters. It is mostly jungle, you know, and to find them was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

"The British navy tried its hand at ridding the seas of them but they took refuge in the lagoons and creeks where the big ships could not follow. The British then served notice on the Dutch that they must be suppressed or Great Britain would take summary action. The Dutch were at their wit's end until one of your countrymen, Mrs. Coston, a sailor named Peter Gross, was named Resident of Bulungan. He accomplished wonders and wiped the pirates out in short order."

"Did he get Ah Sing?" Mrs. Coston asked.

"No, I regret to say that he did not," the missionary acknowledged. "The pirates were defeated and very nearly wiped out, but Ah Sing escaped. He has not been heard from since. The general opinion is that he fled north to China and hid himself in that immense yellow ocean of humanity."

"You can bet he's back all right," the trader growled, finding it impossible to keep silence longer.

"If he should be, we have nothing to fear on board the Zuyder Zee," the missionary declared firmly. "The ship is well armed."

"I wouldn't trust myself sailing around on any proa," the trader returned. He took the cigar from his mouth with a flourish and tilted back in his chair.

"I know Ah Sing," he declared. "Had many a drink at his pub at Batavia when I was still sailoring. Ah Sing was the shrewdest crimp between here and Frisco, and that's some compliment. Never saw him when he didn't have a man or two to sell to a needy skipper. And mighty few ships ever laid alongside Tanjong Priok without losing a man or two to him."

"I don't understand," Mrs. Coston remarked in a puzzled voice.

"This Ah Sing ran a pub, a *rumah makan* as the brownskins call it, a hotel for Chinks and natives in the Chinese kampong at Batavia. Sailors went there for their liquor, but mighty few went back to their own ships again. You see, *madame*, something would be mixed in their drinks and when they woke up their ships would be gone and they could look for another berth. Where Ah Sing would come in was in selling their services to the first needy skipper that put into port, and ships were always short-handed in those days. Maybe he'd sell two or three men to the very skipper he'd just robbed of other hands. Oh, he was a clever one! Fat as a Christmas duck, always sitting on the colonnaded porch of his *rumah makan* at the edge of the kampong smiling welcome at you, bland and innocent as your laundry boy. 'How are you, Ah Sing?' the boys from the English and American ships would carol as they came rolling in, singing their chanteys. 'Belly fine, boys,' he'd say, 'come and have a dlink.' He'd learned that down in Frisco where he once ran a hop joint. Mr. Sailor would drink and that would be the last he'd know till another ship hove in port. The boys knew it but it made no difference to them, the Chinaman fed them fair and treated them square and one skipper was as good or bad as another."

"How did he work his piracy, as a side line?" Vincent asked, frankly interested.

"Nobody ever knew he was interested

until Peter Gross got wise. How he learned it, I don't know. But he was appointed Resident to Bulungan, as Mr. Bright told you, and proceeded to round things up. Ah Sing nearly got him once but a gunboat turned up in time and then Peter Gross turned round and smashed the pirates in a big fight. Ah Sing got away. I've heard it said that the Chinaman has vowed he would put Peter Gross to the torture yet. I understand he's got a little glass tube nicely labeled and filed away, to hold Gross's finger and toe nails when he gets them. Those are the relics he keeps of the enemies he's put under the sod. Interesting practise, isn't it?"

Mrs. Derringer shuddered. The trader's conversation was a trifle too blunt to be pleasant, but Grace found herself unable to leave the deck. Her blood tingled with the romance of it, and she thrilled with a delicious creepy feeling as she stared into the darkness all around them.

"Who is Peter Gross?" she asked.

"I've never met him," the trader replied promptly. "Have you, Mr. Bright?"

"I have not had that fortune," the missionary responded quietly.

"Your information is hearsay then, like my own," Poggs declared. "All I can tell you about Peter Gross is that he's a Yankee like ourselves, straight as a string, a fighter, and the only man in these parts since Brooke's time who's known how to deal with Dyaks and Malays. Isn't that true, Mr. Bright?"

"He is a wonderful man!" the missionary acknowledged. "A man to fit the place and the time. God's own instrument to bring peace to this war-torn island. The Dutch were facing the problem of either commencing a war of extermination against the natives or giving up their province, when Peter Gross went to Bulungan and saved the Residency for them. He is there today, I trust, the one man in the entire Indies who can stave off the worst native uprisings since the Delhi Mutiny."

"Aye, the one man," the trader assented.

"What sort of an appearing man is he?" Mrs. Coston asked.

"I've never met him, consequently I cannot give you much of a description," John Bright replied. "I understand that he's a young man, not yet thirty, unmarried, and physically very large. One of the tallest and most powerful men in Borneo, I am told."

"Would it be possible for us to pay our respects to him to-morrow at Bulungan?" Grace asked. She smiled at the missionary. "He's our countryman, you know, and I feel very proud of him."

"He may be at the landing," John Bright replied, returning the smile. Her ardent youth made a powerful appeal to him. "It would be quite likely, the coming of a mail ship is quite an event at such an isolated post as Bulungan."

"If he isn't I shall be tempted to run ashore despite the captain's warning," Grace replied. "I must meet this American who is making such a wonderful name for himself so far from home."

"I do not think you will be disappointed," the missionary declared courteously. "He has that divine gift, vision." His eyes became dreamy. "Aye, he has the vision. I have heard tales of him and the manner he has won over the natives, sometimes by force, but more often by patience and persuasion. Even the wildest and most untamable tribes are beginning to perceive his stern sense of right and truth. 'The White Father' they are beginning to call him. And he is not yet thirty! Wonderful, isn't it? But that's because he knows Borneo, fetid, slimy, pestilential Borneo, the cesspool into which the dregs of humanity have been drained, the jungle and marsh that breeds poisonous insects and poisonous men, the last defense of the serpent in man. Aye, he knows it, knows its cruel, vindictive soul, its treacherous, unprincipled mind, its bestial appetite, its hands itching for murder and loot.

"But in spite of all these things he has been able to see some spark of the divine, some bit of God's beauty and goodness in these sordid Dyak souls, and has caused it to blossom. God's messenger, I call him, the hope of Borneo, the hope of all of us who work here."

Grace heaved a tremulous sigh. The spell of the missionary's eloquence was on her and she could not take her eyes from him

for a few moments. The shuffling of a foot on the bridge above roused her. She looked up quickly, catching just a glimpse of a tall form standing there and looking out to sea. She was quite sure she recognized the young man who had fled after offering her a chair a few hours before.

"Captain seems to be looking for pirates," Vincent remarked, glancing upward. The sally was received in silence.

"I have a headache," Violet Coston complained.

"Can't I help you, dear?" Grace asked sympathetically.

"It won't be necessary," Mrs. Coston replied with affected languidness. "If Vincent will take me to my room." She glanced toward him expectantly. He leaped forward and offered his arm.

"Good night, Grace," she murmured. "Good night, Mrs. Derringer. Good night, gentlemen—good night!"

There was a lingering fondness in the last word, thrown over her shoulder as she moved away with Vincent. John Bright's eyes narrowed grimly.

"Sit next to me, Miss Coston," Mrs. Derringer directed. "I want to talk to you."

CHAPTER III.

AH SING STRIKES.

A HALF-HOUR passed and Vincent did not return. The little packet steamed steadily on toward the still distant haven of Bulungan. On the group that had gathered on the forward deck but two remained, Mrs. Derringer and Grace. Whatever the latter's feelings may have been at her lover's delinquency, she concealed them well. She listened with admirable restraint to the dowager's tedious reminiscences and occasionally interposed a question or comment that indicated she was giving her attention. A shrewd observer might have deduced, however, that she was remaining on deck in order to escape the mortification of going below unaccompanied.

"Peter Gross ought not to be given the whole credit for chasing the pirates out of Bulungan," Mrs. Derringer sagely observed. "If it wasn't for the Argus Pheasant he wouldn't have done much."

The appellation caught Grace's fancy. "Who is the Argus Pheasant?" she inquired.

"You haven't heard?" Mrs. Derringer asked, in the rising voice of the gossip who has a spicy bit of news to impart. "Why, the Argus Pheasant, Koyala, is the most famous beauty in the whole of East India. She's priestess of the Dyaks, and she fairly worships the ground Peter Gross walks on."

"A native woman?" Grace inquired. She experienced a strange sinking of the heart. Was another idol to be shattered, she asked herself.

"Half white and half Dyak," Mrs. Derringer replied. "The daughter of a Frenchman and a Dyak woman. But you'd never guess it from seeing her. She's a wonderful beauty, and as fierce and wild as a tiger."

"Isn't the light deceiving!" Grace remarked hastily. "Three times now I would have sworn that I saw a boat drifting out yonder, and when I looked again there was nothing to be seen."

Mrs. Derringer, however, was not so easily diverted from a theme as entertaining as the one she had just launched herself upon.

"There's no question but what those two, Peter Gross and the Argus Pheasant are hand in glove together," she hinted darkly. "She got the Dyaks to side with him. She helped him drive out Ah Sing. The Chinaman wanted her himself, and some say she might have listened to him if Peter Gross hadn't come. John Bright talks with a lot of respect about Peter Gross, but it seems strange to me that this half-breed woman should cling to him the way she does."

Mrs. Derringer nodded her head sagely.

"There it is again—I'm sure it's a boat," Grace cried, rising excitedly and pointing over the bow toward an object rising and falling on the rolling sea. As if in answer to her cry, the search-light was focused upon it. As the object again rose within their circle of vision it became apparent

that it was a whaleboat. There were figures in it, lying in the bottom.

The packet veered, heading toward the craft. Several curt orders sounded, unintelligible to Grace because they were in the Dutch language. Some of the crew sprang toward a boat and lowered it. There was no noise or confusion, and few of the passengers were aware that anything had occurred to break the monotony of the voyage.

The screw began to revolve more slowly. The ship was edging in toward shore, due to the impulse of a strong current. As she began to lose headway a boat was dropped over the side. Half a dozen lusty sailors manned the oars and pulled toward the drifting whaleboat.

Leaning against the rail, Grace and Mrs. Derringer watched with bated breath as the two craft neared each other. A premonition of evil, a vague, undefined fear of she knew not what, came upon Grace. Her thoughts recurred to the conversation on the deck a few hours since, to Bright's warning, and to the reminiscences of the Yankee trader.

Was this floating object before them to reveal another of the terrible tragedies of these ruthless seas, she asked herself.

The two boats were only about ten feet apart when a curious thing occurred. One of the two apparently lifeless forms in the bottom of the derelict suddenly rose and dove over the side. The other followed. The crew in the other boat rested on their oars, seemingly mystified.

"They were shamming!" Grace exclaimed in amazement. "I wonder—"

The sentence was left incomplete. For from the other side of the ship at that moment came a weird, blood-curdling cry—a cry that froze the blood of all those on board who heard it. It was the war-cry of the Bajau marauders, the pirates of the Celebes Sea.

Hardly had the cry ceased when a response came from below, the shrieks of women, the hoarse shouts of men awakened suddenly to find themselves in the presence of death. Doors were flung open, vomiting humanity as the terror-stricken natives rushed on deck.

Grace saw the men in the packet-boat whirl their craft about and pull madly back to the ship. Out of the darkness behind her a volley sounded. Four of the six men at the oars collapsed in their seats and slid into the bottom of the boat. Another burst of shot and the others fell, one dropping overboard while he was in the act of diving for safety.

The boat swung broadside to. Grace saw the writhing bodies in the bottom of the frail shell and the splintered planking stained with blood—a never-to-be-forgotten picture. Then darkness swallowed them, the dying and the dead, as the shaft of light swung shoreward.

Directly to port was a rocky cove, not more than five hundred yards distant. Proas were darting out of this like angry bees out of a hive. Each proa was filled with husky, dark-skinned warriors who were urging it toward the ship with every ounce of strength in their bodies. Between the packet and the shore the sea was dotted with other native craft loaded to the gunwale with Malay and Dyak fighting men, hideous, nearly nude creatures with rings through their nostrils and ears. They carried long rifles, pistols, spears, and sumpitans, and every man had his favorite kris or padang. Their swollen, distorted features, animated with lust for slaughter and loot, were made doubly repulsive by the violent pigments they had used to make their appearance more fearful, yellow ocher and blue clay, flaring vermilion and dark blue, with cross-bars of flaming scarlet.

At the sight of that terrible crew Mrs. Derringer uttered a piercing scream and fell to the deck in a faint. Overcome by the horror of the moment, Grace was unconscious of the elder woman's condition until she stepped forward blindly, with stiffened limbs, and stumbled against Mrs. Derringer's recumbent form. Even then she was hardly able to tear her eyes from the scene before her, which held her in the grip of a terrible fascination. Bending down, she began mechanically to unfasten Mrs. Derringer's waist with fingers that trembled so that she was scarcely able to direct them.

The attack was delivered against the

stern of the ship. Above the wild yells of the natives and the agonized cries of the passengers rose the crack of pistols. Evidently some resistance was being made. While Grace was fumbling with the fastenings at Mrs. Derringer's throat two of the Dutch contingent of the crew sprang by her toward the quick-firer, mounted at the bow. It was the work of only a few moments to swing it into position, enter a charge, and fire, yet to Grace it seemed hours. As the steel-clad messengers of death hurtled forward Grace saw three proas in the line of fire crumple up. A fierce thrill of exultation seized her as hope flared in her breast.

A hoarse shout sounded from the darkness aft. It had hardly died away when there was the simultaneous sound of a volley and breaking glass. The beam of light that had been revealing their enemies to those on board went out.

Grace heard an oath, deep and fervent, from one of the members of the gun-crew. The words were still on his lips when he threw his head back queerly, thrust both hands into the pit of his stomach, crumpled, and fell a quivering corpse at her feet. His limbs twitched spasmodically and he lay still.

"Gerrit?" his companion cried fiercely and questioningly. It was his last word. As he sprang forward to aid his stricken friend he fell over the latter's recumbent body with a gaping bullet-wound in his forehead.

That she did not scream or swoon or give way in some manner was ever thereafter a source of wonder to Grace. Strangest of all, it seemed to her later, was the fact that she was not afraid. She left Mrs. Derringer and examined the bodies of both men, satisfying herself that they were beyond her or any other mortal aid. Then she returned to the dowager and proceeded with the task of resuscitating her.

All this had transpired in a comparatively few moments. The captain's first act, when he discovered the nature of the attack, was to signal for full speed ahead. There was some delay in the engine-room. Whatever caused it, it was fatal. The bells below jangled imploringly for speed as the pirates swept down like hawks and clambered on the deck. Finally the engineer responded. There was a moment of terrific strain as the mighty engines exerted their power, then the screw began to revolve furiously. A hiss of escaping steam sounded from below.

"Good God!" the captain gasped. His face went white as a polar field. He knew what had occurred—the pirates, by some infernal device, had sheared the blades off the propeller, and there was no time to put on the extra one, held in reserve for such emergencies. The Zuyder Zee was like a hamstrung hind in the midst of a pack of wolves.

A wild and exultant yell come from the attackers at the success of their stratagem. They surged forward. Reenforcements kept streaming over the rail, pressing back the brave crew that had been maintaining their thin line and holding the marauders at bay.

A huge Malay swinging a gleaming parang sprang into the midst of the fray and brought his heavy blade down upon a sailor who was thrusting another foe back with a clubbed musket. The great sword cut between the clavicle and sternum, splitting the unfortunate sailor almost in two. With a fiendish yell of triumph the pirate chief burst through the breach his blade had made. His followers surged after him. The white line wavered a moment and crumpled into small groups waging a hopeless and despairing fight against circles of dark faces that hemmed them in.

Fascinated by the spectacle, and held numb in frozen horror, Grace bent motionless on the deck beside the recumbent form of Mrs. Derringer. Just as the fight was at its hottest, and before the sailors' front had been broken, Mrs. Derringer recovered from her faint and rose to a sitting posture. She gazed with bewildered eyes at the drama below. As recollection returned, her bewilderment gave way to panic. When the huge Malay swung his kris and cut the sailor in two, the accumulated train of horrors proved too great a burden for her overwrought brain, and reason snapped. She leaped to her feet with a maniacal cry, and before Grace real-

ized her intent or could make a motion to restrain her, she hurled herself headlong over the rail into the sea.

At that moment the lights went out.

With the drowning woman's insane shriek ringing in her ears, together with the triumphant yells of the savage Bajaus and their allies, and darkness absolute enveloping her like a great wet blanket, Grace cowered to the deck. Until now she had not experienced fear. She had been too stunned, the calamity had been too sudden and overwhelming, and events had passed too rapidly to enable her surfeited brain to experience the emotion of terror.

But now that she was alone in the darkness, with violence and strife all around her, with the moans of the dying mingled inextricably with the groans and prayers of the living and the savage yells of the conquerors dominant, her courage failed her.

"God have mercy on me," she prayed. "God have mercy on me."

The fierce desire of the hunted for refuge assailed her. But there was no refuge. Below were the savages, on both sides the sea. There was only one way of escape from a fate worse than death, Mrs. Derringer's way. She shrank from it; life had never before seemed so infinitely sweet and precious, so much to be cherished, as at this moment. The sea had never before appeared so cold and deep, so dark and sullen and cruel. But to stay on the ship was worse. The triumphant yells of the pirates told of their victory, the cries of the victims by now having ceased almost entirely.

"Vincent!" she gasped. "Violet!" If they might only cross the border together, she thought, death would not be so terrible.

She tried to rise, but her nerveless limbs refused to respond. It was as though all life had already gone from them, as if her nervous system had collapsed under the strain put upon it. Summoning a supreme effort of will, she pulled herself to her feet. She staggered toward the rail, lurching at the roll of the vessel, now swung broadside to the waves.

A powerful hand grasped her arm. A low grunt sounded in her face, a swinish grunt of satisfaction. In the light of the pale moon just appearing from behind a cloud she saw the grinning, sinister features of a huge savage, a flat-nosed creature like a chimpanzee. He had heavy brass rings through his nostrils and his head was covered with a thick cluster of coarse black hair. He had been in the act of climbing over the rail, apparently from a proa below, as she approached.

The shock of the surprise was so great that Grace could not utter a cry. Her vocal cords seemed paralyzed. But as the savage gave another delighted grunt at the beauty of his prize and pulled her shrinking form toward him, a despairing shriek rose from her throat.

"Vincent!" she cried.

A footfall sounded beside her, a light footfall, silent as a woods creature's. The savage uttered a guttural exclamation and released her to seize his kris. But the lightning struck him first. A heavy bar crashed into his face, a bar that flattened his ugly features and cracked his skull like an eggshell. Without a groan he toppled into the dark waters below.

There was a simultaneous yell of execration from several voices below. Grace felt a strong arm sweep about her waist. A voice whispered in her ear: "Keep quiet, don't make a sound." She felt herself carried swiftly across the deck. She was lifted across the rail and swung perilously out from the ship in the arm of the man who had rescued her.

Grace acknowledged afterward that she had no other thought at this moment but that she was going to her death. She believed that he who had saved her from the savage had no other purpose in mind than to offer death as a more welcome fate than captivity. Her only emotion was one of gratitude. Face to face for a moment with the greater evil, death, formerly so terrible, was now a welcome relief. It was only the horror of dying alone that had held her back.

"Good-by, Vincent; good-by, Violet," she whispered in a voice that only the angels heard. The stranger paused a moment, scanned the dark waters rolling below them, and as the ship leaned over under a

receding wave, tightened his grip on her and dropped swiftly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HUT IN THE JUNGLE.

THOSE who have gone down into the depths and have been brought back from the brink of the hereafter tell strange tales of the unique sensation of drowning. They tell us of a gradual lapsing into unconsciousness to the tintinnabulation of bells swelling to orchestral choruses as the soul struggles to rise from its corporeal habitation. They picture to us a marvelous sense of freedom and elation, a sense of floating in an ethereal vastness that knows neither height nor breath, a halcyon bliss transcending mortality's sublimest moment.

The experience of Grace Coston was otherwise. As the sea boiled over her she felt herself drawn into a vortex that swept her irresistibly down in dizzy spirals. There was a tremendous roaring in her ears, a roaring comparable only to the grinding of huge bergs of ice impelled by contrary currents. She felt herself borne at an incredible speed to fathomless depths. Her lungs filled despite her effort not to breathe, her heart seemed nigh to bursting, and consciousness was dulling when the waters parted. She gasped for breath.

The man who had leaped off the deck of the Zuyder Zee with her held her with one arm while he cautiously used the other to keep them both afloat.

"Can you swim?" he asked in a low tone.

"Not very far—in these clothes," she replied.

"It's only a little way to shore," he stated. "Try to remove your slippers and that heavy coat. But don't discard them. Give them to me. I'll keep you above."

A moment before she had been quite ready for death. But the shock of contact with the sea and the awful sense of suffocation she had experienced as they went down into the sable depths had altered her desire. The instinct for self-preservation, ever strong in youth, was dominant, and impelled her to make a fight for life. With womanly dependence on male strength and leadership in moments of peril and stress, she obediently did as she had been instructed.

"We must swim quietly," her mysterious companion declared in a subdued voice after she had divested herself of her heavier clothing. She indicated her assent by action instead of by words, husbanding her breath and strength. Cleaving the water with the long, clean strokes that mark the proficient swimmer, she headed toward the thin line of white breakers some distance ahead, where the surf of the long Macassar Straits boomed against a rock-bound shore. The man swam beside her, moderating his pace to hers.

Somewhere to the left a faint cry for help arose. It was a man's voice. She thought instantly of Vincent, and impulsively altered her course. But with two swift strokes the man beside her intercepted her and forced her back to her original course.

"We can't do him any good; he's done for," he whispered in a low voice. "We'll be lucky to reach shore ourselves. We've got to keep out of sight of these proas; if any of them sight us we're done for. Can you swim under water?"

"A little," Grace said.

"When I say 'Duck,' take a long breath and catch hold of me," the stranger directed. "Don't struggle and don't interfere with my movements. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she whispered. A little catch of fear seized her heart. She had not thought of this danger. But as they rose on the surge and she looked anxiously about, she perceived the long, slim forms of several native craft silhouetted against the horizon. They were darting toward the ship like vultures on the scent of carrion. A few of them boldly carried lights, for there was no longer need for concealment since all opposition on the ship had ceased.

"They'll be too anxious to get their share of the loot to pay any attention to us," the man remarked in guarded tones. "But at the same time it won't do to take chances."

They swam along in silence. As they sank into the hollow of a great roller, a big proa, loaded toward the gunwale with

warriors who were impelling it forward with every ounce of strength in their sturdy bodies, suddenly rose on the crest of the wave ahead. Grace felt the man's arm close about her and pull her down. She came up half strangled and coughing, but her companion instantly stifled her struggles by clamping a hand over her mouth. In the next few moments she underwent all the agonies of drowning for a second time that night.

"I beg your pardon, but it was necessary," an apologetic voice whispered in her ear a few moments later, when they were a safe distance away. "I'm afraid, at that, they saw us. Some of them were looking back."

Resentful at being used so roughly, Grace disdained making a reply, and struck out viciously toward the now nearing line of breakers. Her companion made no remonstrance, but kept pace with her, swimming easily and without effort about a foot behind.

After a few minutes of such violent motion Grace began to feel the drain on her powers. Clad for the water, she could swim a mile or more, and had often accomplished the feat. But swimming in a placid fresh-water lake when attired for it was a vastly different proposition from swimming in a tumultuous, heaving ocean under the burden of heavy clothing, she found. Fortunately the water was warm. Otherwise her strength must have failed her.

Her companion evidently noticed that she was weakening, for he advised:

"Better save your strength until we get into the surf. We are fairly safe now."

Still piqued at his rough treatment of her, Grace chose to read into his words a reflection on her ability to take care of herself. Her chin rose defiantly from the water and she struck out desperately, pulling ahead a few strokes. A rude hand clasped her arm and a stern voice hissed into her ear:

"Miss Coston, you will do as I direct. There are more lives than our own two dependent on it."

Her momentary vexation vanished. The stranger's words held a promise.

"Do you think some of them may escape?" she cried eagerly, between gasps. "Can we help them?"

"Wait till we get ashore," he replied curtly. "Be silent now—"

Ahead of them the breakers loomed. They boiled over a broad barrier of sharp-toothed rocks that rose ugly as sharks' fins from the sable waters. Interspersed were tall obelisks of black shale. The huge, swelling surges rose in solid walls of foaming sea and battered themselves to destruction against the gaunt guardians of the Bornean coast. The thin, frothy line of gray scud that had looked so ephemeral from the deck of the Zuyder Zee was now revealed as a boiling caldron. That a human being could pass through such a vortex and live seemed incredible. A numb despair gripped Grace's heart. Her courage failed her and she clutched weakly at her companion.

As if expecting such an attempt on her part, he slipped out of her grasp.

"Keep cool now, and maintain your stroke," he counseled cheerfully. "We're almost ashore."

Swimming slowly, in a course parallel to the beach, he kept himself and her warily out of reach of the jealous fangs of rock that bobbed up unexpectedly in their path. All her self-assertiveness gone, Grace obeyed dumbly, conserving her rapidly ebbing strength.

Ten rods or more of this swimming had brought them steadily nearer the line of breakers, when the man was suddenly galvanized into activity. "Now!" he cried shrilly, catching hold of her. "Swim for your life!"

With a gasping intake of breath, Grace exerted all the strength she had left. At the same instant she felt herself pulled irresistibly forward. The great surges boiled over her, filling her nostrils and lungs with water, obscuring everything. Swifter and swifter she was drawn ahead in the very vortex of the writhing seas.

A huge black bulk of rock loomed before them. The giant rollers split upon it and churned in a mad frenzy. A mighty comber lifted them and hurled them through the spindrift at the jagged edge of shale as though they were feathers.

Just as it seemed that they must inevitably be cut in two, a cross-current caught them and carried them swiftly in its millrace past the rock into a pool of quiet water behind. They spun out of this into a placid eddy.

Grasping for breath, Grace struck out erratically, but her companion retained his hold.

"If you'll lie on your back and float I'll have both of us ashore in a few minutes," he remarked in a low voice close to her ear.

She smiled back courageously. Unfortunately the smile was wasted on the darkness.

"I think I can swim," she replied, "if you'll permit me, please!"

He released her without a word. She breathed deeply once or twice and cleaved the water. But there was no strength in her limbs. She was tired, very tired, and the shore seemed a long distance away. It was difficult to keep her head above, she found, and she did not seem to be making any progress. Too proud to ask for help and vexed at her weakness, she struggled gamely on. She noticed that the man remained close to her, accommodating his pace to hers. His attitude of protection enraged her. She struggled frantically to tear away this fluid obstacle that slipped by her limbs without giving leverage. But her exhausted body could do no more. She felt herself sinking. An awful sense of helplessness and utter impotence came upon her. She uttered a despairing cry, the cry of the drowning, then the waters closed over her. As the world was blotted out once more, leaving her floating in a measureless void, she felt again the strong hand of the man who had brought her through the perils of the rocks into this quiet lagoon.

"Don't struggle; trust me," a calm, strong voice declared. Too weak to resist, she lay inertly on the surface, feeling the stranger's hand under her back and feeling the play of his powerful muscles as he swam shoreward with long, telling strokes. A few minutes later his feet touched bottom. He lifted her into his arms and strode shoreward. She struggled to release herself.

"I can walk," she remonstrated.

"Quiet!" was his stern whisper.

She yielded. Instinctively she felt that he would not have insisted had it not been necessary. He walked cautiously, a step at a time, his eyes striving to pierce the somber jungle shades, and his ears straining to catch every one of the multitudinous sounds of a tropic forest.

The arrant moon that had been playing hide and seek all night chose this moment to make another fitful appearance. Its rays fell directly upon the man's tense face. Grace, who was looking upward, caught her first glimpse of his features.

"I thought so," she said to herself, smiling. She had recognized her rescuer. It was the captain's guest, the mysterious young man who kept his identity concealed from the other first-class passengers on board the Zuyder Zee.

A feeling of security came upon her. She lay like a waxen image in his arms. The only dangers she feared now were those the forest might hide. The young man had a face that inspired confidence.

A nightbird whirred noisily out of the thicket ahead of them. The stranger stood stockstill, every muscle tense, every sense alert. Grace scarcely breathed. At last he stepped forward cautiously. At that moment an overripe coconut crashed to the ground some distance away, causing alarm among the jungle folk. There was a rustling in the cane that halted the man in his tracks and caused Grace's heart to cease beating for a moment.

At last they reached shore. Still holding her in his arms, he stepped out of the water, crossed the narrow strip of sandy beach, and clambered up the low bank to the shelter of a group of palms, where he stood and listened again with all the stealth of a savage. Satisfied at length, he bore his burden across a small clearing into the jungle itself. Not until then did he permit Grace to leave his arms.

"Your slippers," he said gravely, offering her her footgear.

The gloom was thick around them. When they were battling the waves she thought night could not be darker than the sable shroud that covered the waters, but here in the forest the curtain of night hung so heavily that it almost seemed to possess

substance. She felt a sense of oppression, as if the very air were weighted down with this intangible something that obscured the whole earth. Involuntarily she grasped her companion's arm and clung to it fearfully.

"I can't see anything," she complained in a low voice that had a suspicious quaver in it.

"My eyes are probably better than yours here," he whispered. "I'm used to this."

It was on the tip of her tongue to ask him if he could not produce a light. The utter ridiculousness of such a request occurred to her in time to stop utterance. This brought back the thought of the pirates again, and she nudged closer to him. As if in answer to her unspoken thought, he remarked:

"We can't build a fire here in the open. But if we are where I think we are, we'll have shelter soon. If you're not afraid to be left alone for a few moments, I'll scout around and get my bearings. Will you wait here for me?"

"Alone?" Grace gasped.

"I'm sorry. But I'm afraid it's necessary. I couldn't take you with me. There's a bit of swamp ahead, if I am not mistaken. I won't be gone more than ten minutes. If anything happens, shout. But," he added impressively, "don't make a sound unless it is absolutely necessary."

"I won't," she promised. "You may go; I'm not afraid." She tried to talk bravely, but her voice had a suspicious quaver. As he stepped away she reached out toward him, as if to hold him, but becoming conscious of her action, drew back her hands. In the darkness he did not notice her pitiful helplessness and dependence on him.

"You're sure you won't be too badly frightened?" he asked again.

Grace longed to reach out and hold him, to say to him that he must not leave her, that wherever he went she must go too. She was afraid, horribly afraid. The night was so dark and the gloom gathered so thickly under the mangroves and in the brush. Her imagination peopled it with a thousand terrors: tigers stalking in the grasses; orang-utangs, the great man-apes, watching them from the tree-tops; vipers underfoot and pythons on the lower branches, and savage Dyaks stealthily crawling through the undergrowth. As her mind conjured these visions, the blood seemed to congeal in her veins and her tongue refused utterance.

He took her silence for consent. With a low whisper: "I'll be back soon," he disappeared into the cane. The bonds that held her speechless broke, she opened her lips with a cry to call him back. But something restrained her. It was the superior courage of good blood, a heritage from a long line of ancestors who had faced the unknown smiling and unafraid and had gone forth to conquer it.

Motionless as a statue, every muscle tense, every nerve aquiver, and every sense alert to catch the slightest sound, she stood under the overhanging branches of the tree in whose shade the man had left her. Her heart was beating like a trip-hammer—it must be audible for rods, she thought—and she tried frantically to still its tumultuous pulsations by pressing both hands against her breast.

The minutes dragged along. Hours they seemed to her. All the myriad sounds of a tropic night: the gentle *lap-lap* of the wavelets on the shore of the lagoon; the scurrying rodents over the dry carpet of leaves; the gentle heaving of the huge fronds of the coco-palms as the breeze stirred them; the calls of the night-birds and the occasional whir of their wings, as some frightened feathered creature plunged into a thicket for concealment; and the monotonous rasping of the crickets, were indelibly impressed upon her memory. A gust of cool, damp land-air swept over her and she shivered. It made her conscious that her clothing were dripping wet. She picked up her dress fold by fold and wrung out the moisture. That done, she bethought herself of the water in her slippers. It made a queer, gurgling sound each time she removed her weight from one foot and placed it on the other. It occurred to her that this might betray her to some prowling savage, so she carefully removed her footgear, one at a time, and poured out the water.

These tasks allayed her fears somewhat

and made her less tense. Her eyes, too, began to become accustomed to the gloom. Or perhaps it was due to the fact that the clouds overhead were thinning, permitting the starlight to seep through and cast a vague and uncertain illumination on the waters of the lagoon. Her senses were no less alert, but she no longer started at every sound. Some of the sounds became intelligible. When a small rodent scampered by she stood quite still and made no outcry, knowing it was not a snake.

As the minutes passed and her companion and guide did not return, she began to peer anxiously into the shades. Surely it was time for him to be back, she told herself. He had promised to be back in a few minutes. Nearly a half hour must have passed since he left her. She regretted the loss of her wrist-watch; it was one of the encumbrances she had removed while in the water.

As time continued to pass, her anxiety swelled to alarm. Something might have happened, she argued. He had mentioned a swamp—could he have become mired in the bog? A spasm of fear contracted her heart, nor for herself, but for him. It would be so terrible a death, alone in the darkness, with none to aid. Should she search for him? He had told her to wait. If she left they might lose each other in the darkness. But what if he were perishing?

Torn between these conflicting fears, she stepped in the direction he had gone, and then stepped back. She longed to call his name. But that he had expressly prohibited. It might bring a horde of savages down upon them.

She was not permitted to decide. In the distance she suddenly heard a quavering cry—a cry like that of a child in mortal distress. Nearer and nearer it came, rushing toward her with incredible swiftness. It swelled to the shriek of a person in mortal agony. She thrust an arm over her face and sank to the ground, feeling that the end had come.

A strong hand clasped her arm and assisted her to her feet.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Coston," a low voice whispered in her ear.

She grasped him convulsively, sinking into his arms.

"What was it?" she gasped.

He chuckled. "The noisiest chap in all Borneo. A little beetle about the size of your fingernail. He's like some men I know, all voice and nothing else."

She tried to laugh bravely, but her best effort was an hysterical giggle. Unstrung by this climax to a night's experiences that would have overcome the average woman, she had no strength to go on. She leaned weakly upon him, her slender, graceful form resting in his arms, her fair face, beautiful beyond compare in the silver starlight, turned up to his, her bosom heaving tumultuously.

In that moment she was all his, as helpless as a babe, and he knew it.

It was a temptation surely; the tremulous lips, smiling faintly, ready for kissing; the frail, warm body that lay unresistingly in his arms. Perhaps his breath came a little more quickly, and perhaps his heart kept the same mad time with hers, but he held her without a contraction of the muscles, quite as impersonally as one holds a fragile, precious bit of porcelain. When the tide of blood resumed its course through her veins he released her gently and said:

"If you feel strong enough, Miss Coston, we'll walk to the hut I mentioned. It's only a short distance away."

"I'm fully able," she hastened to reply. "Wasn't it foolish of me to become so frightened at a beetle?" There was a plaintive note in her voice, like that of a child seeking contradiction.

"Not at all," he assured her earnestly. "I've seen soldiers on guard duty turn pale and shake like a Bajau's hut in flood-time on establishing their first acquaintanceship with Mynheer Beetle. You were quite brave. I was horribly afraid that you might have run away or done something else equally reckless."

"I almost did," she confessed.

"Because something frightened you?"

"No," she negatived. "Because—" She paused, acutely conscious that she could not tell him the reason.

"Because why?" he urged.

"Just because." she replied.

"A woman's reason."

"And therefore sufficient, I hope." Her eyes twinkled maliciously. It was quite safe to flirt this way despite the darkness—for this was a strange and most remarkably modest young man. He had not even tried to hold her more tightly than conventions would permit a few moments hence when she rested in his arms.

"I presume I must accept it as such—for the present," he replied.

Grace did not answer. She wondered what he meant by the phrase "for the present."

"Let us hurry," she suggested, "it is growing colder."

He parted the cane. They skirted the rim of a swampy depression. From the sounds below Grace surmised that it was full of animal life, and she accordingly remained close to him. Delicious shivers of fear ran up and down her spine, yet she walked along resolutely. They plunged into another thicket. The undergrowth was much heavier here, and he had to lift the overhanging creepers to enable her to pass. The path suddenly ran into a little clearing. In the center of it loomed the black, irregular rectangle of a small hut elevated on posts.

"The house I spoke of," the man explained simply. He walked across the clearing and opened the door, permitting Grace to precede him into the dwelling. Then he closed the door.

They were in absolute darkness. She could hear his labored breathing, for his exertions had begun to tell on him. She could hear him move about her, a few steps in one direction and then a few steps in another. He was apparently looking for something. A nameless fear came upon her. She had not felt this fear in the forest, but here in this abysmal darkness, with these four walls around them, the presence of a man afflicted her with a sort of nausea, a blind, sickening terror. He was near her now, almost touching her. Her breath came fast. She felt as if she must shriek, but held back the cry, biting her lips. Silently stepping back a pace she reached out her arms as if to ward him off.

A match flashed. In the brilliant light she saw him blinking at her. Gradually his gaze steadied. She saw his merry, almost boyish smile give way to a look of amazement. His face flamed red and his lips closed grimly into a thin white line. Without a word he crossed the room, took a pan containing grease and a wick from a crude cupboard, and lighted the cotton. He placed this on a rough table in the center of the room.

"I couldn't find the matches," he announced gruffly, as if in explanation. "I didn't dare leave a light in the house when I was here before, for fear some prowling Dyak might see it when we opened the door."

The red flamed in her cheeks also. It was the token of her humiliation. She realized how grossly she had wronged him, and how cruelly her suspicion had cut. She should have trusted him, for she knew that he was worthy of that trust. But she could find no word to assuage the pain of his hurt, and stood convicted by her very silence.

He pulled a huge slab of hollowed-out stone from beneath the cupboard. Pouring some oil into this and inserting several wicks, he started a blaze that threw out considerable heat.

"You'll be able to dry your clothing by this fire," he announced in a tone coldly impersonal. "It will be well for you to get such rest as you can to-night, for we have a long journey to make to-morrow." He indicated a cot on the side of the room.

He looked around to satisfy himself that everything was satisfactory within. Then he stepped to the door. At the threshold he paused.

"You can bar the door after I'm out with these bamboos," he declared, pointing to several stout sticks that stood against the wall. "If you need me, call. I won't be far away."

She looked at him steadily. There was a color in her cheeks that did not wholly originate from the warmth of the fire.

"How are you going to dry your clothing?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "A wetting or two makes no difference to a sailor," he replied indifferently.

"The night is damp," she replied. "There is malaria in these jungles. I cannot let you risk your health in this manner."

"I can walk myself dry in an hour," he declared coldly.

"Nonsense!" she replied spiritedly. "There is no need of that. You are in as great need of rest as I am."

Her glance swept the room uncertainly and fell upon a broad strip of bamboo matting rolled in a corner.

"We can divide this room in two by using this matting as a screen," she declared, unrolling it to examine it. "See, it is in good condition. Will you help me put it up?"

His eyes rested upon hers in stern inquiry. She met them tranquilly and frankly. Only her cheeks gave testimony of the rapid pulsing of her heart.

"If you prefer it," he replied noncommittally. Twisting a length of rattan he bound the matting to the bamboo beams.

"We'll place the light here," she declared, calmly indicating where she desired it. "If you'll move the table, please!"

He did as bidden.

"Before we retire," she announced, "there are a few questions I desire to ask."

CHAPTER V.

DISCLOSURES.

THE man smiled at her whimsically. He wore a pathetic air of dutiful submission. Tall and of fine physique, a magnificent specimen of manhood—six feet three, at least, and admirably proportioned. Grace decided he had difficulty in assuming a pose of humility. His strong, masterful chin, his steel-gray eyes, gleaming beneath bushy eyebrows, and the ridge of his finely chiseled nose declared more eloquently than words that he was a man accustomed to command.

"I'm ready to answer any question that you may ask," he declared humbly.

"In the first place, what of Vincent and Violet? What fate has overtaken them?"

Reassured by her rescuer that Ah Sing would hold but not kill them, she went on:

"In the next place, you might introduce yourself. You appear to have the advantage in knowing my name."

Her eyes lifted in time to catch his amused smile.

"My name was not included in the passenger list for reasons of state," he replied. "It is Peter Gross."

He looked at her curiously, as though wondering what effect his admission might have. The corners of her mouth twitched a trifle, but otherwise she gave no sign.

"I am very happy to make your acquaintanceship, Mynheer Gross," she replied with mock demureness.

His brow corrugated with a puzzled expression.

"You didn't realize that I had guessed who you were, Mr. Gross?" she inquired roguishly.

"I was under that impression," he replied. "Who told you?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Intuition, I suppose," she declared. "Mr. Bright described you to me. He mentioned your stature in particular. There are not many men in these parts that answer his description."

"My Brobdingnagian proportions!" Peter Gross exclaimed in mock dismay. "They are always betraying me. Does John Bright suspect also?"

"You heard what he said," she replied. "You were on the bridge." Her tone was wholly noncommittal, but there was no mistaking the implication. He was suspected of eavesdropping.

"Yes, I heard," he acknowledged frankly. "It was embarrassing to be forced to listen to such highly flattering remarks concerning oneself, as Mr. Bright made, but unfortunately there was no way out of it. I was taking the captain's trick on the bridge and could not leave until he returned. You mustn't pay any attention to what Mr. Bright said, however. I assure you that I am very ordinary clay."

"That explains it," Grace remarked with relief. "You know, I was quite sure, even before that, that you were Peter Gross. You carried yourself so like a sailor, and any one could see from the manner of the officers of the packet toward you that you

were a person of distinction. But I couldn't understand why you remained on the bridge when we were discussing you."

"I came on board under an assumed name, as a trader who had but recently come to the Sundas," Peter Gross explained. "The governor-general deemed it advisable, for certain reasons I am not at liberty to disclose. Of course the crew knew—most of them are personal acquaintances. They were warned to keep silence. But I am a difficult subject for disguise."

Grace looked relieved. The one unpleasant feature of his conduct, which she had been unable to understand, was now explained, and she felt thoroughly at her ease with him. He responded to her merry laughter with a smile and a steady glance that indicated his readiness to submit to her further inquisition.

Her face assumed a more serious expression. There was a note of anxiety in her voice as she asked:

"While we were out there, in the sea, you remarked that other lives than ours depended on our getting safely to shore. What did you mean by that statement?"

She waited breathlessly upon his reply. He smiled reassuringly.

"I meant that we may be able to help those who survive on the Zuyder Zee," he declared.

"Is there a chance?" she asked eagerly.

"Every chance in the world," he assured—"particularly for your friends. I left them in their cabins with the doors locked and bolted. I saw to that myself. That is why Mr. Brady did not come to your assistance."

"But why—" she asked, puzzled. Her brow contracted with a frown.

"You mustn't censure him or me," he declared. "I assure you I acted for the best. In fact I did the only thing that offered a possible chance for us all to escape. The pirates will harm no one who does not resist them. They will take those who are left on the ship captive, but will do them no harm. If I had permitted Mr. Brady to come to your aid he might have done any number of foolish things and gotten his skull split as a consequence. He could not possibly have swum to shore, for I recollect hearing him remark that he was an indifferent swimmer. So I bundled him into his stateroom and locked him in."

Peter Gross smiled whimsically. "He put up an awful fight, to be sure, but he wasn't quite big enough. These huge bones with which nature has endowed me are sometimes useful."

Grace could conceive the picture of the elegant and slightly built Brady in the hands of such a one as Peter Gross. She did not question the resident's statement that Vincent had fought—she knew he had plenty of courage—but in dealing with Peter Gross he was as helpless as a terrier against a mastiff. It was a comforting thought, nevertheless, that he had made an effort to reach her. His absence during those harrowing moments when the pirates were acquiring possession of the Zuyder Zee had given her many a fierce and silent pang during the hours that had followed. She knew his innate chivalry, she knew that he would not desert Violet with danger threatening, but she knew, too, the latter's wiles and clever artifices.

Violet Coston, she was aware, was one of that unfortunate type of women that demands adulation from every male who comes within the range of her eyes, in whom the desire for conquest never palls, and whose inordinate selfishness makes no allowance for the claims of any living creature, not even those bound to her by the closest ties of relationship. It was as natural for her to play the coquette with Vincent Brady as for a rose to open its petals to the sun. She had done it every hour of their leisurely voyage around the world. Vincent's betrothal to her stepdaughter was no obstacle to the accomplishment of her desire.

Serene in her confidence in Vincent's loyalty and his love for her, Grace had watched her stepmother's petty artifices with supreme indifference and occasional amusement. Of late, however, she was beginning to fear that Violet Coston's clever campaign was bearing fruit. There are few men able to withstand the continuous assault of a beautiful woman's blandishments.

Grace's thoughts recurred to the present outstanding fact—Vincent and Violet

prisoners of the Malay pirates. The lines of anxiety formed once more on her smooth, white brow.

"Why are you so positive that the pirates will do no harm to those who do not resist?" she asked.

"To explain that," he replied, "I must tell you a matter that, up to this time, has been held confidential by the colonial office. I must therefore caution you to say nothing of this when we reach Bulungan. I have just come from Batavia. I was called there to a conference by the *gouverneur-generaal*. His excellency, De Jonkeer Adriaan Adriaanszoon Van Schouten. It was in regard to this Dordrechter affair which Mr. Bright related to you."

"Yes?" she inquired.

"It is true that the Dordrechter was captured by pirates. I presume they took it in much the same manner that they surprised us. It is a clever stratagem, and worthy of so astute and cunning a leader as Ah Sing. He is a dangerous man, the most dangerous man in the entire East.

"Contrary to his previous policy, Ah Sing did not butcher his prisoners when he took the Dordrechter. He killed those who resisted and took the rest captive. He has hidden them in one of his strongholds, some rendezvous along this coast, whose whereabouts we do not know as yet. He demands a ransom for them, a large sum of money. He asks ransom, both from the government and from the relatives of those whom he has taken."

"Will the ransom be paid?" Grace asked.

"That is a state secret which I am unable to disclose," Peter Gross replied gravely.

"I beg your pardon!" Grace flushed. "You feel sure, however, that those on board the Zuyder Zee will be treated in the same manner?"

"I am positive."

Grace thought of the hideous-painted face that met hers at the rail of the vessel as she was about to spring overboard, and she shuddered. Vincent might be safe, but what of Violet, fragile, tender Violet, accustomed to every luxury? What would happen to her in the hands of these savages, and worse than savages—creatures who acknowledged no restraint on their bestial passions save superior force? The horror of it numbed her. Of course, Vincent would fight to defend Violet. He was no coward. But Peter Gross's assurance was a pitifully slender reed upon which to build hope for the life and safety of those she loved.

The resident looked at her fixedly. He saw her tense and drawn features and the white line of her lips, and he read her thoughts.

"Miss Coston, what I have told you may not appear very convincing," he stated gravely. "But there is one fact that you must consider. Your friends are not in the hands of Dyak, Bajau, or Malay pirates. They are in Ah Sing's hands. The Chinaman, I grant, is cruel and ruthless, devoid of all moral sense, and a veritable fiend in human form. He is almost all the evil that men say of him. But his vice is avarice. For the sake of gold he will do anything. Place the fairest woman in the world beside a stack of gold pieces, and let him choose, and he will select the gold instantly.

"Furthermore, his will is absolute law to these savages. They would sooner think of cutting their own throats than of disobeying him. They fear him with a fear that is more than mortal. They know that his vengeance never ceases, and follows those who have opposed him to the farthest ends of the earth." Peter Gross smiled. "In fact," he declared, "I think I owe much of my own wholly unwarranted reputation among the natives largely to the fact that I have thus far successfully escaped his solicitous efforts to put me under the sod."

"Ah!" It was a sigh of relief. "You feel certain that he will hold Mrs. Coston and Mr. Brady for ransom? We will pay anything within reason. I will cable our bankers as soon as we reach a cable station."

"I trust you will be guided by me in this matter, Miss Coston," Peter Gross requested.

"Do you think we should refuse to pay the ransom?" Grace asked anxiously.

"We can decide that question better when a demand for ransom is made upon us," Peter Gross evaded. He smiled. "We

are hardly out of the woods ourselves as yet."

"I shall surely consult you, Mr. Gross," Grace replied demurely. "I'm sure you wouldn't permit me to do anything rash." A roguish twinkle lit her eyes.

Peter Gross's features remained inscrutable.

"Thank you, Miss Coston," he replied gravely.

"The inquisition is over for to-night," she said. "Good night."

"Good night."

Grace retired to dream dreams of a young giant who was having a dreadfully serious time offering chairs to young ladies and getting out of their sight before they had an opportunity of thanking him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GARRISON AT FORT WILHELMINA.

PATRICK ROUSE, secretary to his excellency, Mynheer Peter Gross, resident, came to Bulungan with no misguided notions on the nature and disposition of its brown-skinned inhabitants. After living there two years he had less—which may sound Irish but is the exact truth.

Two years had wrought a marvelous change in the irresponsible, fiery shocked and fiery tempered youth who had accompanied Peter Gross on the latter's mission of pacification. The imminence of death, and the constant contact with savages who were conquered but not subdued, had sobered him. His merry blue eyes held a knowledge and keen perception they had not possessed before. He had not gained weight, the work had been too hard for that, but a certain plumpness of youth that he had brought with him from Java had been replaced by the rough corrugations of steel-cord muscles. In short, responsibility had made a man of Paddy.

His particular function was the reduction of verbose reports of the Dutch *controlleurs*, as well as those of the various native potentates, kjais, rajas, datus, gustis, and dessa headmen to their small content of fact. It goes without saying that his mill ground more chaff than wheat.

The *controlleurs* under the new régime were faithful clerks, whatever their other deficiencies. They turned in accounts of their monthly activities which vied in length and prolixity with the *Congressional Record*. As specimens of the leisurely style of Dutch writing they were unexcelled. But to an exuberant young man of twenty-one, whose thoughts ran on potting tigers and crocodiles, they were a nightmare and a torture.

The volume of petitions and protests from the native chieftains was appalling. When civilization came to Bulungan a far-sighted raja conceived the idea of hiring a stranded Dutchman to act as his clerk. His example was promptly imitated by the lesser dignitaries. A kjai without an *orang bland*, a grand vizier, became as uncommon as a kjai without breeches. To the credit of these poor derelicts it must be said that they went to work with the indefatigable industry characteristic of the race, and kept the civil authorities busy replying to their correspondence.

On the morning Peter Gross was expected to return to Bulungan, Paddy was hopelessly mired in a lengthy epistle from the Raja of Pah Patang, whose domains had been invaded by rattan-hunters from the neighboring principality of Kutei. The raja did not complain particularly about the theft of his rattan—he had his own methods of securing redress. But he did protest in language prolix that revealed no small measure of irritation that the thieves had crossed the small stream which marked the boundaries of his domain without making the customary gift to the *hantu token*, the guardian spirits of its waters. As a consequence, the raja alleged, the spirits had been offended and had sent a visitation upon him in the shape of a big bull crocodile which had eaten up his favorite wife.

Paddy read thus far and laid the letter aside with a tired sigh. Digging into the mass of correspondence that blanketed the old, quaintly carved rosewood desk, he located a silver gong which he struck sharply with the heel of his hand. As the silvery accents tinkled through the building he leaned back in his chair and gazed at the portrait of a fierce old gentleman in doublet

and hose, with a thin, pinched face and sharply pointed Vandyke beard, who frowned down upon him.

"We think we're colonizers," he remarked, addressing the portrait. "But, after all, we've got to take off our hats to you. You came into this country when it was absolutely raw, and you built an empire. I'm beginning to think that, after all, your system is right: One white life is worth a thousand native."

A finely formed Malay lad, whose face was stamped with the fierce pride of his race, glided within.

"I want you to run over to the fort with a message for Captain Carver, Ali," Paddy announced.

"*Als je blieft, mynheer,*" the lad remarked deprecatingly, "Captain Carver is not yet here. The soldiers have been on the march. I hear them coming now."

The tramp of military feet was borne faintly along the silent air and floated into the darkened room through the blinds. Paddy rose from his chair and stepped to the window.

They were coming—the army of Bulungan. Twenty-three white men, soldiers of fortune, twenty-three of the tiny army Peter Gross had taken with him when he left Java to conquer Bulungan by righteousness and fair dealing. Twenty-three to win an empire. Cortez and his conquistadores had not set out on a more fantastic enterprise. Yet the miracle had been achieved.

The crunch of their feet on the coral-shell highway that wound upward from the level tableland of the *plein* to the elevation on which the fort stood came clearly now to Paddy's ears. They were marching slowly and wearily, like men utterly exhausted. As he looked out between the trees and heavy shrubbery of the gardens for a glimpse of the column, the terrific glare of the near-zenith sun blinded him for a moment. A gust of hot, dusty air beat his face. He felt a sense of suffocation and unconsciously loosened his collar.

A screen of matonia palms with nipahs between, and a hedge of tall-growing rhododendrons beyond, along the border of the highway, shut off Paddy's view of the approaching troops. It was not until they were nearly opposite the house that he caught a fair glimpse of them. They were toiling doggedly along, their faces streaked with perspiration and glowing like hot coals. Some of them winced as their blistered feet came in contact with the scorching highway. They had marched twenty miles that morning under a Bornean sun with scarcely a breath of air stirring—an achievement that would have killed any unacclimated troops. Their faces bore the look of men who had suffered and knew how to suffer without flinching. Paddy's heart bled for them.

"Damn Carver!" he exploded. "There's no limit to what he asks of a man."

A company of Javanese colonials in gray uniforms—a hundred strong—marched back of the white men. It was evident that they, too, were near the limit of their powers, although a tropic origin gave them greater powers of resistance.

Paddy watched the column round the curve in the road and proceed to the fort, a quarter of a mile distant. His eyes turned toward the bleak drill-ground or *plein*, northwest of the residency building, lying drab and verdureless under the sun's pitiless glare. Here and there a lone tamarind threw a bit of grateful shade.

A bit of errant breeze romped in from Bulungan bay and scurried across the expanse. It lifted a great cloud of orange-brown dust, thick as a fog. As the breeze died away the dust settled slowly back upon the parched *plein* that blinked placatingly at the offended heavens.

"It's hell!" Paddy exclaimed bitterly. "If it wasn't for Peter Gross I'd leave this damned country in a minute."

"Don't you owe hell an apology?" a dry voice asked. Paddy turned swiftly.

"I beg your pardon, captain!" he remarked stiffly. "I didn't notice you come in."

Captain Carver sank wearily into a broad-seated rocker of bamboo and rattan. His features were gaunt to asceticism. His cheeks burned hectically under their coat of tan. The tired look, habitual to white men who are fighting a losing fight with jungle fever, was in his eyes. But his thin, firm chin and compressed white lips be-

spoke an indomitable will and an unconquerable spirit that yielded to no odds.

"Your boy informed me as we were going by that you wished to see me," he explained.

The captain's exhausted appearance caused a certain relenting in Paddy's heart. "You'll want some refreshment," he observed. He reached for the gong.

"No, thanks—not just now." The captain's gesture stayed Paddy.

A wisp of vagrant breeze, scented with the salts of ocean and the sweet smells of Celebes sandalwood, drifted in through the open blinds and rustled the hangings. Captain Carver mopped his brow and breathed deeply.

"You're a lucky dog, Paddy!" he exclaimed enviously. "This is the coolest spot in Bulungan."

Paddy grunted non-committally.

"Been busy this morning?" Carver asked, glancing at the rosewood desk cluttered with papers.

"Passably," Paddy replied curtly.

"Anything new?"

"Nothing in particular."

Captain Carver glanced at him quizzically. The lad was evidently in a surly mood. Something was wrong, for Paddy was the last man in the world to carry a grouch—in fact he was the life of the camp. Captain Carver knew him too well to ask questions, for Paddy had a quick temper and resented intrusion into his private affairs. Given time, however, he generally relieved his mind. The captain wisely, therefore, attempted to divert the conversation.

"You haven't heard whether Koyala has come in from the mountains?" he asked.

"I haven't. Have you heard anything?" The lad's tone indicated awakening interest.

Captain Carver shook his head. His gaze wandered through the open window and thoughtfully surveyed the panorama without.

"It's a month since she's been here," he observed. "I don't like it—under present conditions."

"Peter Gross is away to Batavia," Paddy remarked.

"I don't recall that she's ever cut us dead before when he was absent," Carver rebuked.

"She's probably priestessing up in the hills," Paddy replied with the air of one to whom the subject is not of much interest.

Carver brushed a hand over his fevered brow. "I wish she were here," he ejaculated fervently.

"Are the *bruinevels* kicking up?" Paddy inquired with sudden access of interest.

"Everything's quiet so far. But to-morrow's pasar day. We'll have the riffraff of the whole residency here, and all the scum of the five seas. I'd feel safer if she were here to keep us advised."

"Peter Gross will be back to-morrow," Paddy replied. "He's coming on the Zuyder Zee."

"I hope to Heaven he is!" Carver exclaimed fervently.

"I don't," Paddy acknowledged frankly. "Things are in the deuce of a mess with me. I've got stuff here that will keep me going for a week steady. These datos and rajas and their confounded Dutch clerks are getting into more squabbles every day. They've asked me for enough improvements to bankrupt the whole Dutch government. I'm tempted to burn the whole batch of litter."

A look of concern came upon the commander's features. "Don't let tiger and rhinoceros-hunting interfere too much with business, Paddy," he suggested gently. "Some of this stuff appears trivial to us. We haven't much sympathy with their superstitions. But indifference to their complaints, or a careless word, can stir up a fire that five thousand men couldn't put out."

"They had an experience two years ago that they won't forget in a hurry," Paddy replied cock-surely. "We're not going to have much trouble in this locality."

Captain Carver looked at Paddy with eyes that combined the affection of an indulgent father who knows only too well the shortcomings of his child, and the sternness of the soldier.

"Paddy," he warned, "don't crow too loudly. Trouble is a lot nearer us than either of us have imagined. Things are stirring down below, and God knows when

the lightning will strike! I learned a few things this morning while we were hiking to Sibau. I wish we'd known them weeks ago, before Peter Gross left.

"Ah Sing is back. He was at the bottom of the Dordrechter disappearance. He's trying to line up the Dyaks—and they're wavering. They hold a *bitchara* at the pasar to-morrow. If they decide on war, God knows what will become of us, for the Chinaman has artillery!"

He paused impressively and studied Paddy's face. The lad was staring at the carpet, varying emotions flitting over his features. He raised his head abruptly.

"Why in thunder did you take the boys to Sibau on a day like this?" he demanded indignantly. "They're nearly dead!"

Carver gazed at him steadily. The outburst was typical of the lad. It was wholly natural for him to forget the grave, common danger in order to resent a fancied injury to his friends. Sensing the warm heart back of it, the captain readily forgave him. At the same time he felt the necessity for a stern rebuke.

"Are you asking the question as the resident's secretary, or purely personally?" the captain inquired softly.

Paddy's face fell. "I know I had no business speaking that way," he admitted shamefacedly. "But it isn't right, captain, with the mercury at a hundred and seventeen."

Captain Carver's glance strayed toward the littered desk. Paddy saw him contemplate it and flushed guiltily.

"Do you know, Paddy," the captain remarked softly, "we've had an easy time of it the past two years. Some of this tropic languidness is getting into our blood. We're becoming soft. We're becoming lazy. Twenty miles a day was nothing to us at one time. But now we're blown if we do it. What will happen to us if we are called upon to beat the jungle again?"

He permitted the question to sink in. Paddy offered no reply. His dissatisfaction found vent in the passionate exclamation:

"Curse the country! I wish I'd never seen it! It's a compound of jungle-fever and hell, and not worth one of the good men we've buried here!"

Carver rose and caught the young man's shoulders in his two strong hands. His glance bored deeply into the rebellious eyes turned upward to meet his. Though his face was stern, it was mellowed with a peculiar wistful expression, for he dearly loved the hot-tempered, impulsive lad.

"Paddy, don't talk like that," he pleaded earnestly. "You're too young to be counting costs. There's an empire here and we're winning it—winning it in spite of all the powers of savagery arrayed against us. You are one of us, Paddy—one of the handful of us that is winning this empire. It's a narrow, rocky road with dizzy drops on both sides, but we can't afford to look aside. We've got to look ahead. And you're young, Paddy—you'll have most of your life ahead of you when we get through conquering the country. Lord, what wouldn't I give to be your age again!"

The captain's hands dropped to his side, and he turned away with lowered head. Walking slowly toward the window he placed his elbow on the sill and, head in hand, gazed long and earnestly at the shimmering *plein*.

Paddy ran his fingers through his fiery shock of curly red hair and blinked. He gazed at the captain with a puzzled frown and blinked again. Carver's tremendous earnestness had somehow dispelled his sense of injury and exalted their joint suffering. Even though the concept was not quite clear to him, he felt himself thrilled, and wondered why.

His glance happened to fall upon the clutter of papers littering his desk. As he gazed a grin of comprehension overspread his features.

"Empire-builders," he snorted *sotto voce*. "An empire of mud and fleas!"

Pulling his chair forward he began rummaging through the pile of accumulated correspondence. Finding the letter he wanted he began the laborious task of its translation. It was the complaint of the raja who had lost a favorite wife to a crocodile because a neighbor's rattan-hunters had failed to appease the guardian spirits of the boundary stream.

Captain Carver glanced over his shoulder at the lad and smiled.

"Youth, youth," he murmured under his breath. "So quickly fired with enthusiasm, so passionate of its ideals. The lad meant well—a little awkward in expressing himself, that's all. If I were twenty years younger—"

He sighed wistfully. His glance trailed pensively toward the *plein*, where the heat was rising in great, shimmering waves. A moist gathered in his eyes and his lips quivered with an involuntary contraction of pain. Clenching his fist he fought back the tears and the secret sorrows that gave birth to them.

A shadow projected itself beyond a nearby clump of shrubbery. The captain turned sharply and gazed intently in that direction. The next moment his eyebrows lifted and a look of pleasure illuminated his face.

"As I live, Koyala!" he exclaimed.

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.

Wings

by

Achmed Abdullah

A "DIFFERENT" STORY

THAT Saturday night at the height of the London season when Martab Singh, Maharaja of Oneypore, made his initial bow to Belgravia in the salon of the Dowager Duchess of Shropshire, properly introduced and vouched for by Sir James Spottiswoode of the India Office, there wasn't a man in the great scarlet and purple room, nor woman either, who did not look up quite automatically when the big, bearded, turbaned figure crossed the threshold and bent over the wrinkled, perfumed old hand of her grace.

There wasn't a person in that room—and people of all classes crowded the gossipy old duchess's Saturday night at homes, from recently knighted, pouchy, sharp-voiced barristers to gentlemen of the bench who hid their baldness and their forensic wisdom under tremendous, dusty wigs, from the latest East African explorer returned from a six-months' unnecessary slaughter, to the stolidest novelist of mid-Victorian respectability; from the most Parisianized Londoner to the most Anglified Parisian; from the latest shouting evangelist out of the State of Wisconsin to the ungodly Yorkshire peer who had varied the monotony of last year's marriage to, and divorce from, a Sussex dairymaid by this year's elopement with a Gaiety chorus-girl; from Mayfair Dives to Soho Lazarus—there wasn't a person in all that mixed assembly who did not feel a shiver of expectation as the raja entered.

Expectation of something.

Waiting, tensely, dramatically, silently, for something.

"Not waiting for something to happen," Charlie Thorneycroft put it. "Rather waiting for something that had already happened, you know. Which of course is infernal rot and asinine drivel. For how in the name of my canonized great-grandaunt can you wait for the future of the past tense? But—there you are!"

And Thorneycroft, of London, Calcutta, Peshawar, Melbourne, Capetown, and the British Empire in general, vaguely attached to some mythical diplomatic bureau in some unknown diplomatic capacity, would drop his monocle and look up with a sharp, challenging stare of his ironic gray eyes, as if expecting you to contradict him.

It was not that the presence of a raja, or any other East Indian potentate or near-potentate was an unusual occurrence in London. Rajas are more common there than Nevada plutocrats at a Florida resort, or black-cocks on a Yorkshire moor. London is the capital of a motley and picturesque empire, and pink turbans soften the foggy, sulfurous drab of Fleet Street; lavender turbans bob up and down the human eddy of the Burlington arcades; green and red and white turbans blotch the sober, workaday atmosphere of East Croydon and Pimlico.

Nor was it anything in Martab Singh's appearance or reputation.

For, as to the first, he was good-looking in rather a heavy, simple, bovine fashion, with two hundred pounds of flesh and brawn carried by his six foot two of height, his great, staring, thick-fringed, opaque eyes, his melancholy smile, and his magnificent beard, dyed red with henna, which was split from the chin down the center and then curled up on either side of his face so that the points, which touched his ridiculously small ears, looked like the horns of a combative ram.

And as to his reputation and standing, Sir James Spottiswoode had vouched for it.

There was also Charlie Thorneycroft's drawling, slightly saturnine corroboration.

"Tremendously swanky beggar in his own country," he said to pretty, violet-eyed Victoria de Rensen. "Descendant of the flame on his father's side, and related to the moon on the bally distaff. Cousin to Visnu, Shiva, Doorgha, and what-not, and college chum to all the assorted and hideous divinities of the Hindu heaven. His principality is small, barren, poor. A mixture of rocks and flies and hairy and murderous natives. But he is the very biggest among the bigwigs of India. To two hundred million benighted Hindus he *is* the deity—Brahm, what?—all the gods rolled into one and topped by a jolly, crimson caste-mark. He's the gods' earthly representative, you know, Vic darling. Not only that. For"—he dropped his voice to a flat whisper—"this is the first time in the history of the world—hang it, before the history of the world—that a Maharaja of Oneypore has left his native soil."

"Why shouldn't he?"

"Because by leaving India he pollutes his soul, he loses caste. And that's just why I wonder—"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing!"

Quite suddenly he looked up, and his long, white fingers gripped the girl's arm nervously.

"Did you feel—*it?*" he whispered.

There was no need for an answer. Nor, really, had there been need for the question in the first place.

For, as the raja, arm in arm with Sir James Spottiswoode, stepped away from the door and farther into the room, *it* came.

Nobody heard it. Nobody saw it or smelt it. Nobody even felt it, either consciously or subconsciously.

But again, through the mixed company that crowded the duchess's salon, there passed a shiver. A terrible, silent, hopeless shiver.

Then noises: human noises, and the relief that goes with them. A distinct sound of breath sucked in quickly, of tea-cups clacking as hands trembled, of feet shuffling uneasily on the thick Turkish carpet, of the very servants, placidly, stolidly English, stopping in their rounds of hospitable duties, standing stock-still, silver trays gripped in white-gloved fingers, and staring, breathless, like pointers at bay.

"Something—like great wings, rushing, rushing!" murmured Charlie Thorneycroft, dropping his usual slang like a cloak.

"Like—wings—" echoed Victoria de Rensen with a little sob.

Yet there was nothing formidable or sinister in the raja's progress through the room, by the side of Sir James, who played guide, philosopher, and friend. A charming, childlike smile was on his lips. His great, opaque eyes beamed with honest, kindly pleasure. He bowed here to a lady, shook the hands of barrister and judge and artist, mumbled friendly words in soft, halting English, accepted a cup of tea from a servant who had regained his composure, and dropped into a low Windsor chair, looking at the people with the same melancholy, childlike expression.

Very gradually the huge, voiceless excitement died. Once more servants pussy-footed through the salon with food and drink; once more the Paris cubist tore the artistic theories of the white-bearded Royal Academician into shreds; once more the Wisconsin evangelist bent to the ear of the Mayfair débutante and implored her to hit the trail of salvation; once more lion growled at lion.

But Charlie Thorneycroft could not shake off the strange impression which he had received. He was still aware of the thing, whatever it was, and of the great rushing of wings. It came out of the East, from far across the sea, and it was very portentous, very terrible, very tragic.

"I didn't hear the wings!" he exclaimed later on. "Nor did I feel them. If I had felt or heard I wouldn't have minded so, you know. I felt *with* them—and I was sorry for them, awfully, awfully sorry. No sense to that? Of course not. There wasn't a bally ounce of sense to the whole wretched thing from beginning to end—and that's the worst of it!"

II.

Such was the entrée of the Maharaja of Oneypore into London society; and for three weeks, to a day, an hour, a minute—"Hang it! To a bally second!" Charlie Thorneycroft commented—the impression which had accompanied him into the salon of Her Grace of Shropshire clung to him.

Not that people feared or mistrusted him. There was nothing personal about it, and indeed the man was kindness itself. He could not pass by beggar, by effusive, tail-wagging street cur, or by mewing, rubbing, dusty, ash-bin cat, without giving what he thought was demanded of him—money or caress or soft word.

Nor was it because he was too foreign. For he improved his English rapidly, and, well-bred, a gentleman, it did not take him long to master European social customs, including the prejudices. He tried his best to become Western, in every sense of the word, and to that end he abandoned his Hindu dress, his turban, his magnificent jewels. He even shaved off his split, henna-stained beard, and there remained nothing about him reminiscent of his native land except the expression in his eyes—melancholy, ancient, tired; more the eyes of a race than those of an individual—and the vivid, crimson caste-mark painted on his forehead.

It seemed rather incongruous, topping, as it did, his correct English clothes tailored by a Sackville Street craftsman.

Then, at the end of three weeks, the aura of suspense, the aura of waiting for something that had already happened which hovered about him, disappeared quite as suddenly, and quite as terribly at it had come.

It was on the occasion of a ball given at Marlborough House, and the rooms were gay with fluffy chiffon and stately brocades, with glittering uniforms, and the sharp contrast of black and white evening dress. The orchestra, hidden behind a palm screen, sobbed a lascivious Brazilian tango. Paired off, the young danced and flirted and laughed. So did the middle-aged and the old. In the buffet-room the majordomo was busy with the preparation of the famous Marlborough champagne-punch.

At half past eleven the raja entered, together with Charlie Thorneycroft, who had attached himself to him, and at once the usual enormous shiver brushed through the assembly, like a wedge of ferocious, superhuman evil, with a hidden thunder of unguessed-at immensity. People stopped still in the middle of a dance-step. The music broke off with a jarring discord as a

B-string snapped. The Marchioness of Liancourt swooned against a priceless Sèvres vase and sent it splintering to the waxed floor. The majordomo dropped his mixing-ladle into the silver punch-bowl.

Remote, gigantic, extended, the impression of voiceless fear gathered speed. It gathered breath-clogging terror. It stabbed the regions of subliminal consciousness.

Strident yet unheard, huge yet unseen, torrential yet non-existent, it swelled to a draft of sound—"sound beyond the meaning of the word—words are so inadequate—sound which you could not hear!" Thorneycroft put it—that sucked through the rooms with the strength of sky and sea and stars, with the speed of splintering lances thrown by giants' hands, with a passionate, tragic leaping and yearning, that was as the ancient call of Creation itself. It flashed outward with a wrenching, tameless glory and savagery that fused all these London molecules of humanity into one shivering whole.

Two minutes it lasted, and at exactly twenty-eight minutes to twelve Thorneycroft, obeying a peculiar impulse, looked at his watch, and he never lived to forget the time nor the date: the 15th of January, 1913—the nameless impression passed into the limbo of unremembered things.

It passed as enormously—by contrast—as it had come. It passed with an all-pervading sense of sweetness and peace: of intimate sweetness, too intimate peace. It passed with a wafting of jasmine and marigold perfume, a soft tinkling of far-away bells, and the muffled sobs of women coming from across immeasurable distances.

The raja smiled.

He raised a high-veined hand in salutation. Then he trembled. He gave a low sigh that changed rapidly into a rattling gurgle. His eyes became staring and glassy. His knees gave way, and he fell straight back, dead, white-faced, the crimson caste-mark on his forehead looking like some evil thing, mocking, sardonic, triumphant.

"God!" Thorneycroft bent over the rigid form, feeling the heart that had ceased beating. He spoke a quick word, and servants came and carried out the body.

But the people who crowded the rooms seemed quite unaware that death had stalked among them. Suddenly a wild wave of gaiety surged through the house. They laughed. They chattered. They jested. They clinked glasses. The orchestra led away with a Paris waltz that was as light as foam.

That night champagne flowed like water. Half a dozen love-affairs were finished, another half-dozen begun. Scandal was winked at and condoned. Gaiety, the madness of Bacchanalian gaiety, invaded every nook and cranny of Marlborough House, invading the very servants' hall, where the majordomo balanced the third up-stairs parlor-maid on his knees and spoke to her of love in thickly dignified terms.

Two days later Martab Singh, Maharaja of Oneypore, descendant of the many gods, was buried in state, with twenty file of Horse Guards flanking the coffin, and all the purple-faced gentry of the India Office rolling behind in carriages, dressed in pompous black broadcloth and smoking surreptitious cigars.

On the same day Charlie Thorneycroft called on Victoria de Rensen, kissed her pouting lips, and told her in his vague manner that he was off to India.

III.

INDIA came to Charlie Thorneycroft as it had come to him a dozen times: with a sudden rush of splendor, flaming red, golden tipped, shot through with purple and emerald-green, and hardly cloaking the thick, stinking layer of cruelty and superstition and ignorance that stewed and oozed beneath the colorful surface. He knew it all, from the Rajput gentleman's stately widow who gives herself to the burning pyre in spite of British laws to the meanest half-caste money-lender who devils the souls of sporting subalterns amid the flowering peepul-trees of Fort William barracks; and so he yawned his way from the moment when the big P. and O. liner nosed kittenishly through the sucking sand-banks of the Hoogly to the Hotel Semiramis.

There he had a lengthy and whispered conversation with a deputy commissioner

recently returned from Rajputana, who bowed low and spoke softly in spite of the fact that Thorneycroft was his junior by twenty years and seemed to have no especial diplomatic rank or emoluments.

All the next morning he yawned away the hours that creep to the sweating west, took a late train for the north, and continued his bored progress through twelve hundred miles of varied scenery.

He had no eye for the checker-board landscape of neat Bengal, nor for the purple and orange tints of the Indian sky that changed the far hills into glowing heaps of topaz, the scorched ridges into carved masses of amethyst and rose-red. Rajputana, gold and heliotrope, sad with the dead centuries, the dead glory, interested him not.

His thoughts were far in the north, near the border, where Rajput and Afghan wait for a renewal of the old, bitter fight for supremacy when Britain shall have departed; and still, waking and sleeping, he could feel—he could feel *with*—the silent whirring of immense wings—"like the wings of a tortured soul trying to escape the cage of the dust-created body," he put it with a lyric soaring that clashed incongruously with his usual horsy slang.

The whirring of wings!

And there was some accent in it of secret dread, of terrible, secret melancholy, deeper than his soul could perceive, his brain could classify. The terror of a mighty struggle was behind it: a mighty struggle awfully remote from individual existence and individual ambition and life, individual death even. It partook of India itself: the land, the ancient races, the very gods.

The farther north he traveled the more strongly grew the shapeless, voiceless impression. At times, suddenly, a light flashed down the hidden tunnels of his inner consciousness, and made visible for one fleeting second something which he seemed too slow to comprehend.

A whisper came to him from beyond the rationally knowable.

And so, two days later, he dropped from the train at a small up-land station that consisted of a chaotic whirlwind of stabbing sand, seven red-necked vultures squatting on a low wall and making unseemly noises, a tumble-down Vishnative shrine, and a fat, patent leather-slippered babu, who bowed before Charlie Thorneycroft even lower than the deputy commissioner had done, called him Protector of the Pitiful, and otherwise did him great honor.

"All right, all right!" came Thorneycroft's impatient rejoinder. "I see that you got my cable. Is the bullock-cart ready?"

"Yes, heaven-born!" And the babu pointed at the tonga, the bullock-cart, that came ghostlike out of the whirling sandstorm.

"Good enough." He swung himself up. "Ready. Chuck the bedding and the ice in the back. Let her go!" he said to the driver, who had his jaws bandaged after the manner of desertmen, and the tonga started off, dipping and plunging across the ridges like a small boat in a short sea.

The babu squatted by Thorneycroft's side, talking softly, and again the Englishman yawned. But this time there was a slight affectation in his yawn, and affectation, too, as of one weaving close to the loom of lies, in his words:

"Yes, yes. I fancy it is the old story. Some jealous wildcat of a hill woman—"

"No, heaven-born!" cut in the babu. He winked his heavy-lidden eyes slowly as if to tell the other that he was "on." "This time it is different. This time there is no woman's jealousy brewing unclean abominations behind the curtains of the zenana. This time it is—"

"Priestcraft?"

"You have said it, sahib!" came the babu's reply in a flat, frightened whisper.

"All right!" Thorneycroft gave a short, unpleasant laugh. "Let's go to Deolibad first and call on my friend Youssef Ali." And a few words of direction to the driver, who grunted a reply, jerked the heads of the trotting animals away from the north and toward the northwest, and plied their fat sides with the knotted end of his whip.

All night they drove. They rested near a shallow river. But they did not tarry long. They watered the team, rubbed them down with sand, and were off again.

It was a long, hot drive. The silence, the insolent nakedness of the land, the great, burning sun lay on Thorneycroft's soul like a heavy burden. Time and again he was conscious of the whirring of wings, and with each league it seemed to lay closer to the ears of his inner self. It seemed born somewhere in the heart of the purple, silver-nicked gloom that draped the hills of Rajputana.

The babu, too, was conscious of it. His teeth clicked. His body trembled, and he looked at the Englishman, who looked back at him.

Neither spoke. Something utterly overwhelming enfolded them. For the whirring was at once of enchanting peace and sweetness, and of a mournful, tragic, sobbing strength that was like the death of a soul.

Once the babu put it into words:

"Like the death of a soul—"

"Shut up!" Thorneycroft whispered, and then silence again but for the pattering hoofs of the bullocks.

There were few signs of life. At times a gecko slipped away through the scrub with a green, metallic glisten. Once in a while a kite poised high in the parched, blue sky. Another time they overtook a gigantic cotton-wain drawn by twenty bullocks about the size of Newfoundland dogs.

Then, late one night, they reached Deolibad. They passed through the tall southern gate, studded with sharp elephant-spikes, paid off their driver, walked through the mazes of the perfume-sellers' bazaar, and stopped in front of an old house.

Three times Thorneycroft knocked at the age-gangrened, cedarwood door, sharp, staccato, with a long pause between the second and third knocks, and then again three times in rapid succession.

It was as if the ramshackle old house were listening in its sleep, then slowly awakening. Came the scratch of a match, a thin, light ray drifting through the cracks in the shutters, a shuffling of slippered feet, and the door opened.

A man stood there, old, immensely tall, immensely fat, an Afghan judging from his black silk robe and his oiled locks, holding a candle in his right.

He peered at the two figures in front of him. Then he broke into high-pitched laughter and gurgling words of greeting.

"Thorneycroft! Thorneycroft, by the Prophet! Young heart of my old heart!"

And in his excitement he dropped the candle clattering to the ground and hugged the Englishman to his breast. The latter returned the embrace; but, as the Afghan was about to renew his flowery salutations, cut them short with:

"I need your help, Youssef Ali."

"Anything, anything, child! I will give you any help you ask. I will grant you anything except sorrow. Ahi! These are like the old days, when you, with your mother's milk not yet dry on your lips, rode by my side to throw the dragnet of the British Raj's law around the lying priests of this stinking land. Heathen priests of Shiva and Vishnu, worshiping a monkey and a flower! *Aughrrr!*" He spat.

Thorneycroft laughed.

"Still the old, intolerant Youssef, aren't you? All right. But I don't need much. Simply this—and that—" He crossed the threshold side by side with the Afghan and followed by the babu. He said a few words, adding: "I hear that you are a much-married man, besides being an amateur of *tuwaifs*, of dancing-girls. So I'm sure you will be able to help me out. I could have gone to the bazaar and bought the stuff. But there are leaky tongues there—"

It was Youssef's turn to laugh.

"A love affair, child? Perhaps with the daughter of some hill raja?"

"No. Not love. But life—and death. And perhaps—" He was silent. There was again the giant whirring of wings. Then he went on: "Perhaps again life! Who knows?"

"Allah knows!" piously mumbled Youssef. "He is the One, the All-Knowing. Come with me, child," he went on, lifting a brown-striped curtain that shut off the zenana. "Sitt Kumar will help you—a little dancing-girl whom"—he coughed apologetically—"I recently encountered, and whose feet are just now very busy crushing my fat, foolish old heart. Wait here, O babu-jee!" he said to the babu, while he and the Englishman disappeared behind the zenana curtain.

There was a moment's silence. Then a woman's light, tinkly laughter, a clacking of bracelets and anklets, a rapid swishing of linen and silk.

Again, the woman's light laughter. Her words:

"Keep quiet, sahib, lest the walnut-dye enter thy eye!" And ten minutes later the zenana curtains were drawn aside to admit once more the Afghan, arm in arm with a middle-aged, dignified Brahman priest, complete in every detail of outer sacerdotal craft, from the broidered skull-cap and the brilliant caste-mark on his forehead to the patent-leather pumps, the open-work white stockings, and the sacred volume bound in red Bokhara leather that he carried in his right hand.

"Nobody will recognize you," said Youssef.

"Good!" said the Brahman in Thorneycroft's voice. "And now—can you lend me a couple of horses?"

"Surely. I have a brace of Marwari stallions. Jewels, child! Pearls! Noble bits of horseflesh! Come!"

He led the way to the stable, which was on the other side of his house, and sheltered by a low wall. He lit an oil-lamp, opened the door, soothed the nervous, startled Marwaris with voice and knowing hand, and saddled them.

He led the horses out, and Thorneycroft and the babu mounted.

"Where to?" asked the Afghan.

Thorneycroft waved his hand in farewell.

"To Oneypore!" he replied. "To interview a dead raja's soul!" He turned to the babu. "We must hurry, O baju-jee! Every minute counts!"

And he was off at a gallop, closely followed by the other.

IV.

THE night was as black as pitch, but Thorneycroft rode hard.

He figured back.

The Maharaja of Oneypore had died on the fifteenth of January. To-day was the tenth of February. Twenty-five days had elapsed since the raja's death.

Would he be in time?

"Come on, babu-jee!" he cried, and rode harder than ever.

Once his stallion reared on end and landed stiffly on his forefeet, nearly throwing him. But that night he could not consider the feelings of a mere horse. He pressed on the curb with full strength and brought his fist down between the animal's ears; and, after a minute or two of similar reasoning, the Marwari stretched his splendid, muscled body and fell into a long, swinging fox-trot.

The road to Oneypore was as straight as a lance and fairly good. They rode their horses alternating between a fast walk and a short hand gallop.

Thorneycroft had not eaten since noon of the preceding day, and was tired and hungry. But he kept on. For there was something calling him, calling him, from the ragged hills that looped to the east in carved, sinister immensity; and through the velvety gloom of the night, through the gaunt shadows of the low, volcanic ridges that trooped back to Deolibad and danced like hobgoblins among the dwarf aloes, through the *click-clanketty-click* of the stallions' pattering feet, there came to him again the whirring—like a tragic message to hurry, hurry.

Morning blazed with the suddenness of the tropics. The sun had hardly risen, but already it was close and muggy. A jaundiced heat veiled the levels—foretaste of the killing, scorching heat of March and April—and the birds, true weather prophets, the parrots and the minas, the tiny, blue-winged doves and the pert, ubiquitous crows, were opening their beaks with a painful effort and gasping for air—another week, and they would be off for the cool deodars of the higher hills.

In the distance a dark mass was looming up: Oneypore—and the horses were about to give in. Their heads were bowed on their heaving, lathering chests, and they breathed with a deep, rattling noise.

Thorneycroft dismounted and stretched his cramped legs.

"Ride down there," he said to the babu, pointing at a narrow valley to the west,

black with trees and gnarled shrub, that cleft the land. "Wait until you hear from me. I fancy you'll find some brother babu in the valley fattening his pouch and increasing his bank-account at the expense of the Rajput villagers. He will give you food and drink and a roof over your head. Tell him anything you wish as long as you don't tell him the truth."

"Of course I shall not tell him the truth," replied the babu, slightly hurt. "Am I a fool or—"

"An Englishman?" Thorneycroft completed the sentence. "Never mind. I am English. But I learned the art of deceit in Kashmere, the home of lies, and Youssef Ali, too, gave me some invaluable lessons."

And while the babu rode off to the valley, leading the other horse, Thorneycroft set off at a good clip toward Oneypore, which was becoming more distinct every minute as the morning mists rolled up and away like torn gauze veils. It was seven o'clock when he reached the western gate, an ancient marble structure, incrusted with symbolistic figures and archaic terra-cotta medallions, and topped by a lacy, fretted lotus-bud molding.

Beyond, the city stretched like a flower of stone petals.

Oneypore!

The sacred city of Hindustan! The holy soil where the living descendants of the gods had ruled for over five thousand years —and one of them dead, on unclean, foreign soil—buried in unclean, foreign soil!

An outcast! He, the descendant of Rama, an outcast!

Oneypore! And it was a fascinating town, with crooked streets and low, white houses, cool gardens ablaze with mangoes and mellingtonia and flowering peepul-trees and, in the distance, a gigantic palace, built out of a granite hillside, and descending into the dip of the valley with an avalanche of bold masonry.

Toward it, without hesitation, Thorneycroft set his face.

He had to cross the Oneypore River, only second in holiness to the palace: the river which, for centuries, had been the last resting-place of thousands of Afghans and Rajputs massacred in the narrow streets of the city or slain in fierce combats outside its brown, bastioned walls. Sorrowing widows, in accordance with the marriage vows of their caste, had sought the solace of oblivion beneath its placid surface. Faithless wives and dancing girls had been hurled into the waters from the convenient battlements and windows of the palace.

The river's sinister reputation, in spite of its holiness, was such that though the natives bathed in its limpid depth they never, knowingly, allowed a drop of it to pass their lips. River of grim tragedies—and its hour of grim glory came when a Maharaja of Oneypore died, and when his corpse, attired in its most magnificent costume, the arms encircled by jeweled bracelets, shimmering necklaces of pearls and moonstones and diamonds descending to the waist, and a huge, carved emerald falling like a drop of green fire from the twisted, yellow Rajput turban, was carried out of the palace, through the streets of the town, sitting bolt upright on a chair of state, and back to the banks of the Oneypore River, where the body was burnt and its ashes thrown into the waters—while the women wailed and beat their breasts, while white-robed priests chanted long-winded litanies, while the conches brayed from the temples, and while the smoke from many ceremonial fires ascended to the sky in thick, wispy streams and hung in a ruddy, bloodshot cloud above the glare of the funeral pyre that lit up the palace and told to all the world that another one of the divine race of Oneypore had gone to join Brahm, his kinsman.

Brahm, his kinsman!

And Martab Singh had mingled the bones of his dead body with those of the *mlechhas*, the foreigners, the barbarians, the Christians—on foreign, Christian soil!

Something like a shudder of apprehension passed over Thorneycroft, but he kept sturdily on his way, returning the salutations with which the hook-nosed, saber-rattling, swaggering Rajputs greeted him because of his Brahman garb. He went up a steep ascent that led to the *chowk*, the outer courtyard of the palace, and the soldiers salaamed and stepped aside:

"Enter, O holy one!"

Like a man sure of his way, he passed through a low gate, through another courtyard crammed with human life, and into still another, which was lifeless except for the whir and coo of hundreds of blue-winged pigeons and for the figure of a very old priest, squatting on a goat's-skin rug and deep in the perusal of a massive Sanskrit tome.

V.

THE old priest looked up when Thorneycroft approached, and the latter gave an involuntary start, though rapidly suppressed.

In former years, pursuing his vague, mysterious diplomatic career in different parts of that immense block of real estate called the British Empire, but a good half of the time in India, he had heard about this priest, the Swami Pel Krishna Srina. He knew that the man was the prime minister, that before him his father held the same position, before his father his grandfather, and thus back for many generations. For the Brahmans of the house of Pel Srina were cousins in blood and caste to the reigning house of Oneypore, and like them descendants of the gods.

Neither the maharaja nor his prime minister had ever taken much interest in the muddy, coiling politics of India. It was indifferent to them what particular foreign barbarian—English or Afghan or Mogul or Persian—was overlord of the great peninsula. They seemed satisfied with ruling the little rocky, barren principality, with the faded glory of the dead centuries, and with the decidedly theological and just as decidedly unworldly fact that the Oneypores were considered the living representatives of the gods by the vast majority of Hindus.

Thus Thorneycroft had never taken the trouble of meeting Swami Pel Srina, and now, seeing him for the first time, he was startled out of his customary English calm.

Nor was it a psychic impression. Here, in this sheltered courtyard—and for the first time since that day when the Maharaja of Oneypore had made his appearance in the salon of the Duchess of Shropshire—he was unaware, quite unaware of the silent, gigantic whirring of wings.

What made him suck in his breath was the face of the swami.

"I wish I could picture it to you as I saw it," he said afterward. "It would take the hand of some mad cubist sculptor to clout the meaning of it. The features? No, no. Nothing extraordinary about them. Just those of an elderly, dignified, rather conceited Brahman. But the expression of the thin, compressed lips, the great staring, gray eyes! Gad! I am an Englishman, a Christian—*and* a public school product. Thus I'm a jolly good Episcopalian, take me all round. But when I saw those eyes—oh—the whole cursed thing seemed suddenly rational, possible—inevitable even! Right then—Christian, Englishman, and public school product—I believed the absurd claim of the rajas and prime ministers of Oneypore that they were the descendants of Rama and Vishnu. It was all in those eyes that were staring at me. They looked—oh—unearthly—that's the word!"

Perhaps the whole sensation, the whole flash of superstitious emotions lasted only a moment. Perhaps it was contained in the short time it took the swami to look up, to drop his book, and to raise a thin, high-veined hand with the words:

"Greetings, brother priest!"

At all events Thorneycroft was himself again. He bowed over the withered old hand and said—he had thought it all out carefully beforehand—that he had come to Oneypore to hear with his own ears, to see with his own eyes, the great miracle which the swami had performed.

"Ah!" breathed the swami, and he did not altogether hide a faint accent of nervousness—"then—it has been talked about—in the south?"

"No!" Thorneycroft replied quickly. "Not talked about. I do not even know what it is. But a voice came to me in the night—whispering, whispering; it was like the whirring of wings, and I followed, followed, followed! Straight on I followed until I came here, to Oneypore, to the palace, the courtyard, your presence, O swami! And now"—he really spoke the truth there, and he used to say afterward that it was doubtless the fact of his speaking the truth which made him so utterly convincing—

"now the whirring of wings has stopped. Now there is sweetness and peace as there was"—he shot the words out suddenly—"that day, a few weeks back, on the 15th of January!"

"At what hour?" as suddenly asked the priest.

"At twenty-eight minutes to midnight!" replied Thorneycroft, who had never forgotten the day nor the hour when the Raja of Oneypore had died in the salon of Her Grace of Shropshire.

"Good!" said the swami, rising slowly and leading the way to a massive door.

He drew a foot-long, skewerlike key from his waist-shawl, opened the door, and motioned Thorneycroft to enter.

The gate clicked behind them.

"Good!" he said again, stopped, and faced the other squarely. "You have wondered," he went on, "as to the why and wherefore—you, to whom the voice of the miracle came in the night?"

"Yes," replied Thorneycroft in low accents, his heart beating like a trip-hammer. "I have wondered indeed. I knew the thing—was done. I heard the whirring of wings. I knew the raja died—"

"But did he die, brother Brahman?" The swami looked at the Englishman, deep, brooding melancholia in his gray eyes. "Ahi! Did he die?" And he made a hopeless gesture and led on again through empty suits of rooms supported by double rows of pillars, past balconies which clung like birds' nests to the sheer side of the palace, again through more rooms and up and down steep steps. Once in a while they encountered liveried, turbaned officials. But always the latter would salaam deeply and step aside.

Finally he stopped in front of a door which was a great slab of tulip-wood inlaid with nacre and lac. He lifted his hand, and Thorneycroft noticed that it was trembling violently.

"Brother Brahman," he said, "Martab Singh was my kinsman, my friend, my king. He was cousin to me, and cousin to the gods. I loved him greatly, and for years, with me by his side, he stepped in the footsteps of his ancestors, in the way of salvation, the way of the many gods. Then one day—shall I ever forget it?—madness came to him. He, the Maharaja of Oneypore, he, the incarnation of Rama and Vishnu and Brahm himself, declared that the desire was in his nostrils to leave India. To leave the sacred soil! To go traveling in the far lands and see the unclean witchcraft of the foreigners, the Christians, the English, the *mlechhas!* Gently I spoke to him as I might to a child. This and that I told him, quoting the sacred books, the words of Brahm, our blessed Lord. 'This is lust,' I quoted, 'born of the quality of rajas. Know this to be a great devourer, great sin, and the enemy on earth. As by smoke fire is enveloped, and the looking-glass by rust, as the womb envelops the unborn child, so by this it is enveloped. By this—the eternal enemy of the wise man, desire-formed, hard to be filled, insatiate—discrimination is enveloped. The senses and organs, the thinking faculty, as well as the faculty of judgment, are said to be its seat. It—enveloping the discriminative faculty with these—deludes the lord of the body!' Thus I spoke to him, often, gently!"

"And he? Martab Singh?"

"Would laugh in his beard. He would say that, if Vishnu was his kinsman, so was Indra—and Indra was the god of travel. And so—"

"He traveled? He went to England?"

"*No!*"

"No?" echoed Thorneycroft. He felt his hair rise as if drawn by a shivery wind. His thought swirled back, and he remembered how the maharaja had entered the salon of the Duchess of Shropshire, how he had bowed over the withered old hand, how Sir James Spottiswoode, of the India Office, had vouched for him, how—

"No?" he said again, stupidly.

"No, by Shiva!" came the swami's hushed voice. "He did not travel. He did not leave the sacred soil of India. He is—*in here!*" At the same time opening the door, drawing Thorneycroft inside, and shutting the door behind him.

VI.

For a moment the Englishman was utterly lost, utterly confounded. He had thought.

He had imagined. He had conferred with the babu and had spoken to him of priestcraft. But this—this—

The whirring of wings, which he had not heard since he had entered the inner courtyard, was once more, suddenly, upon him with terrific force, with the strength of sun and sea and the stars. He felt himself caught in a huge, invisible net of silent sound that swept out of the womb of creation, toward death, and back toward throbbing life. The whirring rose, steadily, terribly, until it filled the whole room from floor to ceiling, pressing in with ever-deepening strength. It was like the trembling of air in a belfry where bells have been ringing ceaselessly for days—but bells without sound, bells with only the ghost of sound—

He feared it.

It seemed to strike, not at his life, but at the meaning, the plausibility, the saneness of life.

It took possession of his body and his soul, and forged them into something partaking of neither the physical nor the spiritual, yet at the same moment partaking of both—something that was beyond the power of analysis, of guessing, of shivering dread even.

Quite suddenly it stopped, as caught in an air-pocket, and he became conscious of the swami's pointing finger, and his low words:

"Look there, Brother Brahman!"

And, stretched on a bed of state in the far corner of the room, he saw the figure of Martab Singh, Maharaja of Oneypore, as he had seen him that first day in London, with his large, opaque eyes, the melancholy, childlike smile, the split, curled beard, the crimson caste mark.

The figure was rigid. There wasn't a breath of life. It was like a marvelously painted, lifelike statue—yet Thorneycroft knew that it was *not* a statue. He knew that it was the maharaja—the same maharaja whom, on the 15th of January, he had seen die in Marlborough House, whom he had seen buried in an English cemetery, with twenty files of Horse Guards flanking the coffin and all the gentry of the India Office rolling behind in comfortable carriages.

"But—what—"

He stammered. His voice seemed dead and smothered. He began to shake all over, feverishly; and again the whirring of wings rushed upon him, and again, a minute, an hour, a day, a week, an eternity later, he became conscious of the swami's low, sibilant voice:

"He wanted to travel. Nor could I dissuade him, and I—I loved him. Thus I said to him: 'You yourself cannot leave the sacred soil of India. It would bring pollution unthinkable on yourself, on Hindustan, on the blessed gods themselves. But I am a master of white magic. I shall take your astral body from the envelope of your living body, and I shall breathe a spell upon it so that it shall be even as your living body, feeling, hearing, seeing, touching. Your astral self shall go to the land of the *mlechhas*—the land of the infidels—while your body, rigid as in death, shall await its return.'"

"And—" whispered Thorneycroft.

"So it was done. But I gave him warning that the spell would only last a certain number of days. On the 15th of January his astral self must be back, here, in the palace of Oneypore. On the 15th of January! Three times I gave him warning! And he promised—and—"

"He broke the promise!"

"Yes. His astral self was caught in the eddy of foreign life, foreign desires, foreign vices—perhaps"—he smiled with sudden kindliness—"foreign virtues. I waited. Day after day I waited. Came the 15th of January—and he did not return. For—"

"His astral self died—in England. It was buried in foreign soil," Thorneycroft interjected.

"You have said it, Brother Brahman. And now"—he raised his hands in a gesture of supplication—"though I have prayed to Vishnu, who is my cousin, to Shiva, to Doorgha, to Brahm himself, though I have offered the slaughter of my own soul for the homeless soul of him whom I loved, the evil is done. He is neither dead, nor is he alive. His soul is a fluttering, harrowed thing, whirling about on the outer rim of creation, cursed by the gods, his kinsmen. His physical body is here—on this couch—

and the spiritual self, his astral body is in foreign soil—sullied, sullied!"

"And—there is no hope?"

"Yes!" Again the swami smiled with sudden kindliness. "There is hope—the shadow of hope. Perhaps some day the great wrong shall be forgiven by the gods. Perhaps some day they will cause the two parts of his body, his physical and his astral, to blend into one. Perhaps some day they will permit him to regain caste—and to die! Daily I pray for it"—and, with utter simplicity, as he opened the door—"will you pray, too, brother priest?"

Thorneycroft inclined his head. He was an Englishman, a Christian—and a public school product.

But he inclined his head.

"Yes, swami," he replied. "I will pray. Every day shall I pray!"

And the door shut behind him with a little dry click of finality.

IN MEMORIAM

BY OLIN LYMAN

(To American youth dying on French soil in the war for world's freedom)

SOMEWHERE beyond the graves in France,
The countersigns of dying breath
Sigh, and the hosts of youth advance
By the grim sentry men call Death:
And scroll of earthly days is rolled
For them who never shall be old.

From fields that stretch between the stars
Eyes search contending tides below;
Ears hear mad yammerings of Mars
While humming winds of hatred blow,
And echoed hate for armored wrong,
Strength to be broken by the strong.

"The bourn from which no man returns"
It has been called; but now we know
How blind we were! The fire that burns,
The flames of sacrifice that glow,
The light of hope forevermore—
These stream from souls that went before.

"Ye are the dead?" O hosts of youth,
You know the beaded wine of life;
In star-gemmed plains you war for truth;
Your thrilling messages in strife,
Your deathless urge, shall rend in twain
The dripping altars reared by Cain.

The eyes that dimmed in passing dark
Ope to the glory of the scheme;
The hands we last saw folded stark
Fashion the fabric of the dream
That thrills the world beneath the rod;
The dream of man; the dream of God!

The Brute-Breaker

by Johnston McCulley

Author of "The Jungle Trail," "Captain Fly-By-Night," "Thirst," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A CRIPPLE'S HOPE.

HE was whimpering like a friendless and frightened cur, now, and the tears of rage were streaming down his cheeks; and still he tried to run, attempted to dodge, endeavored to escape the pestering evil that followed at his heels.

There was no real fear in his heart, for Jean the Cripple was well aware that Baptiste Navet, the bully, would do him no actual harm. Nor was it pain that made him weep, for he was inured to cuffs and blows from strong men.

His bent and twisted leg hampered him, of course, and it was mere folly to think that he could outdistance his pursuer. At any time it pleased him, Baptiste Navet could make a quick spring forward and give him a cuff alongside the head.

Yet Jean the Cripple deemed it more the manlike part to attempt to evade the blows. He could have crouched on the ground, arms held over his head, and received them, knowing that Baptiste Navet would not dare give many, yet he felt called upon to do his best to avoid the indignity.

Baptiste Navet had made sport of him for years. Always, it seemed, Navet had been the bully of this camp, where the dense forest came down to the bend of the roaring river, and always he had kicked and cuffed Jean the Cripple in a way of amusement.

Nor was that all. Baptiste cuffed and kicked what men he willed, it appeared, else stood up to them stripped to the waist and gave and received sledgelike blows, and always emerged from a fray the victor. Jean the Cripple prayed that some fine day a real man would come down the river—a man who would conquer and humble Baptiste Navet and drive him away.

Now he tried to dodge again, and Navet sprang forward like a panther and hurled him heels over head in the tangled grass, to laugh raucously when Jean stumbled, in an attempt to get upon his feet. And half a hundred other men laughed, for this was a feast day and an afternoon of celebration, and all the crews were in from the woods. Presently the superintendent, Jacques Bossuet, would appear and preside at the rough games, and until he came the men amused themselves watching this torture of the crippled boy at the hands of Baptiste, the bully.

Navet seized his victim by the neck of the shirt now, and held him out at arm's length, where he dangled like a puppy. Jean kicked and tried to squirm and shrieked imprecations, at which the men laughed the more. Their loud shouts rang through the woods and mocked the roaring of the stream; and the brant flying overhead honked in quick alarm and swerved from their true course.

And then, without warning, big Baptiste Navet dropped Jean to the ground as if he had been a live coal, and took off his cap

to twirl it in an embarrassed manner with the fingers of his two hands. Jean the Cripple glanced up from the ground and beheld the reason.

Annette Bossuet, the superintendent's daughter, stood there before them. A little thing she was, weighing not more than a hundred pounds. No bigger than the great thigh of Baptiste Navet, yet charged with vivacity and the pure love of living, with black eyes that could snap in a show of anger and dimples that could flash when she was pleased—that was Annette Bossuet!

Her eyes were flashing now and seemed to send forth little flakes of fire, and her tiny fists were planted on her hips, and she bent her head back that she might look up straight into the eyes of Baptiste Navet and see the shame written there.

For a moment there was quiet; all the men stood still, waiting for her words; they could see that she was breathing quickly and heavily, as though she had run some distance. Her pretty red lips were made ugly for the time with sternness, and the dimples did not show, and anger seemed to radiate from her.

"So!" she cried, in a voice that thrilled them all. "The camp bully tortures boys who cannot strike back!"

There was a continued silence for a moment, and then the men behind her laughed again because of Navet's discomfiture, and she whirled around to face them.

"You are no better than he!" she exclaimed. "You watched — and laughed! Shame! Is this the sport for strong men? What will those of the other camps say when word goes down the river that Bossuet's bullies mistreat boys and call it fun? They'll be sending their cooks to meet you, when next a wrestling-match is held!"

They hung their heads for shame, and Baptiste Navet made bold to speak.

"The boy was not hurt, *ma'm'selle.*"

"Perhaps not in body. But he is human and has feelings, *m'sieu'!* Often have I seen you mistreat him, and the time has come for an end to such things in the Bossuet camp. You have displeased me, Baptiste Navet! And you have wished to dance with me this night!"

"Surely this—" Navet began. He gulped hard in an attempt to overcome his embarrassment, and choked in the effort.

"This means that I do not dance with you!" she cried. "Does Annette Bossuet dance with a maltreater of boys? Can a woman trust herself in the arms of a man who attacks the helpless? Would my father's daughter smile into the face of a bully who had made a crippled boy's heart sore? Go about your games! My father comes soon to judge them. But rather shall I lead the dance with Jean the Cripple, Baptiste Navet, before I do it with you!"

She turned her back upon him then, as if he had been quite nothing at all, and ran to where Jean was crouched in the tangled grass. She went down on her knees beside him, and threw an arm around his shoulders, and looked back at the bullies for all the world like a mother protecting her young.

And the men faced toward the river and started walking in that direction, some of them boldly and with swaggering step, others on the tips of their boot-toes as if they had been leaving a sick-room.

Jean the Cripple choked a little as Annette's arm pressed him closer. He loved the pretty daughter of the superintendent, and would have faced death for her if the need arose, yet he felt that there were some things that a woman did not understand. It was pleasant for her to take his part, and yet it made him appear as a child.

And Jean the Cripple wanted to be a man! In years he would be soon, but not in body. A falling tree had broken him when he was but ten; and so he always would be called boy because of his size, though a beard grew upon his face. He longed to do a man's work and fight a man's battles, to engage in the rough sports and feats of strength of which real men made boast around the fires. He wanted to be able to strike back when bullies tormented him. He asked only the God-given right of taking his own part.

A fine man he was, when a woman had to protect him! Down in his heart he sobbed at the ignominy of it, but into Annette Bossuet's ear he purred a sentence

of thanks, and then tried to slip away. The men would torment him no more this day, he knew; even now Jacques Bossuet was down beside the river and a space was being cleared for the games.

But Annette held him close beside her and forced him to walk so. She spoke no word, for anger was still flashing from her eyes and was turbulent in her heart, and she wanted the words she spoke to be those of kindness.

She led him near the edge of the water, and there they sat down on a fallen log to watch the men lifting weights; and Jean snarled when Baptiste Navet put the others to shame.

"Some day a man will come down the river!" he breathed.

That was the hope he lived—that some day a real man would come down the river and drive Baptiste Navet away. It was not only because Baptiste tormented him, but also because he did not relish the look in the eyes of the bully, whenever he glanced at Annette Bossuet.

Jean knew that Navet was a big man in a way, and that Jacques Bossuet stood a little in fear of him. Might not the father strike a bargain with the bully regarding a visit with Annette to the priest? He could not imagine a thrush mating with a panther.

"Some day a man will come down the river!" he breathed again; and Annette's arm seemed to press him closer.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN ARRIVES.

ABOVE the bend of the river ran the rapids, a turbulent mass of seething water with here and there the black, ominous nose of a jagged rock, showing through. There was a carry around it, for even those men skilled with canoe and paddle, blanched in the face and turned quickly away when one spoke of running that maelstrom to the broad bosom of the deep river below.

In the old days it had been tried, generally by some foolhardy newcomer to the woods, or else by an Indian who had been drinking the forbidden spirits of the white man. And each attempt had netted a new victim for the rushing stream, so that now running the rapids never was mentioned, and men packed their canoes and goods around the length of them, sweating from the toil, and wondering why it had been necessary for Nature to build the rapids just there.

Even the fish hated that five hundred yards of seething water, the old Indians said, and they called the place after a French phrase that meant "deserted of God."

It seemed to Jean the Cripple that the rapids were alive, and that they spoke, could one but understand the language they used. Often he had spent hours sitting on the shore and listening to their roaring, and he knew that the tone of it changed now and then, and was not always the same.

Sometimes the rapids purred like a great cat, a sort of deceptive purr that spoke of hidden claws that could make a wound. Sometimes they raged in anger, and then the water roared, and the spray dashed higher, and the woods seemed silent in the face of such a display of temper. And then, at other times, they rippled, seeming to sing, and the sun danced on the broken surface, and gorgeous rainbows showed against the cool green of the forest on the other shore.

This afternoon the rapids roared, and Jean the Cripple, turning away from the games because he was sick of watching Baptiste Navet win them all, looked up their savage length and wondered at their anger. And so it was that Jean, first of all, saw a black speck bobbing on the water in the far distance—a black speck that went out of sight at times and then came into view again, and always came closer.

Jean thought nothing of it at first, for he supposed the men at some camp above had thrown a giant stump into the stream, as they did often. There were times when the stump swept through and into the quiet water before Bossuet's, but generally it was splintered and torn, indicating what would happen to a canoe that made the journey, or to the body of a man.

Jean gave it no more than a passing

glance, and then forced himself to turn toward the cleared space, where the men were stripping to the waist for the wrestling. Back against the edge of the forest a score of Indians sat, huddled in their blankets, and wondered why the white men made fools of themselves by exerting their strength when it was not at all necessary.

They understood the passing of money, however, and nodded their heads when they saw it change hands, for gambling was nothing new to them, though they themselves generally wagered goods instead of coins. Blankets, ponies, and now and then a squaw—there was nothing wonderful in wagering those things. They seldom possessed money.

They chattered among themselves when big Baptiste Navet stood forth and challenged all comers to the wrestling mat, and grinned when no man responded; and then they settled themselves to watch more equal contests between pairs of men who could not hope to cope successfully with Baptiste Navet.

Now that Baptiste was not in it, Jean the Cripple exhibited some enthusiasm himself, and would have wagered on the outcome of one match, except that he had nothing to wager. He watched a man take two straight falls, and then turned away again in huge disgust when Baptiste Navet once more issued his challenge.

He remembered the stump in the rapids, and wished that it might have been Navet's giant body whirling to destruction. And so he turned to look for the stump again, wondering whether it yet had been splintered and torn by the jagged rocks.

He still could see it! It was a stanch and proper stump then. It was no more than a couple of hundred yards away now, and bobbing from side to side like a thing possessed.

And then Jean rubbed his eyes and pulled away from Annette's encircling arm, and ran a little way up the shore, and peered intently across the boiling water.

"A man! A man!" he screeched. "A man comes down the river! A man runs the rapids deserted of God."

The games stopped as if the men had been struck dead, and Jacques Bossuet broke off a sentence in its middle, and there was deep silence to greet the cripple's announcement. And then some unbeliever laughed his skepticism and turned toward the wrestling-mat again without even glancing at the river, and the others started to follow him.

But Annette Bossuet had run to Jean's side, and had shaded her eyes with her hands and looked over the boiling water, and now she raised her voice with his.

"A man! It is a man!" she cried. "A man comes down the river!"

Her eyes met those of Jean as she spoke, and in the mind of each was the same thought—that perhaps this was the man for whose coming the lad had prayed—the man who was to drive Baptiste Navet away.

The men came running, led by Jacques Bossuet himself, and they formed a group about the cripple and Annette, and Jean pointed with a crooked finger to indicate the black speck that bobbed far up the rapids.

"*Mon Dieu!* But it is a man!" Bossuet gasped.

"A dead man!" Baptiste Navet added. "Some Indian who has been drinking spirits, else some fool who thinks to succeed where better men have failed!"

"He's down!" Bossuet cried.

But he was not down. For an instant canoe and man were out of sight, and then they came into view again on the crest of a boiling wave, missing a jagged rock by a fraction of an inch, it appeared, and rushing onward.

Now it seemed that the man was doomed, for the current drove him toward the frowning, rocky shore; and they saw him standing in the canoe and striving with all his strength to drive it back into the middle of the stream. How he succeeded they could not guess, but he did. The water seized the frail craft and tossed it, and twice it was hurled around as though it had been in a whirlpool — which did not speak for the man's seamanship—and then was whirled forward, as if to be passed on to the next demon of the rapids.

Now the man was on his knees again, and bending forward. His paddle flashed from side to side. He turned from rocks

at just the right instant. He skirted the edges of pools that might have sucked him down. They heard his shout, and it sounded like one of elation instead of fear as it rang over the water.

"*Mon Dieu!* A man!" Bossuet gasped. Those around him were breathless because of the scene, and not a man of them expected to see the canoeist win through alive. Only Jean the Cripple, unnoticed by any, knelt behind them against a clump of brush, and prayed that the man might be spared. And when he opened his eyes and looked at the river again the canoe had passed a cluster of rocks that marked the danger-line, and was racing toward the broad bosom of the quieter stream.

"If he makes the last hundred yards—" Bossuet exclaimed.

"There is where he will die!" said Baptiste Navet.

Jean hated him the more for the words he spoke. Did Baptiste sense, he wondered, that this was the Heaven-sent man who was to humble him? The cripple ran down to the water's edge to see the better, and his action seemed to arouse Jacques Bossuet and make him alive to the needs of the moment.

"Ready to aid him!" he cried. "Spilled he may be in the last fifty yards of that devil's stream, and badly battered, yet his life may be saved if he is taken in time from the water! An extra day's pay to the man who brings him in!"

But the men hung back. That still water below the rapids looked as peaceful as a lake on the surface, but they knew that there were treacherous currents underneath that might draw a man down. Did not they walk half a mile down the stream when they wanted to bathe?

Only Baptiste Navet, muttering a curse as he saw that the man was to win through and do something no other man ever had done, dared to brave the stream. Already he was stripped to the waist for the wrestling-mat, and he had but to kick off his heavy boots, and he stood ready. He poised himself on the shore, and watched the advancing canoe. Again it bobbed like a cork on the water, again it missed a rock by a narrow margin, and on it came.

Baptiste Navet cursed again, and thought that with the extra day's pay he could buy a ribbon for Annette's hair, and so win her favor, and then took the plunge. Down he went, and up he came, his teeth chattering because of the icy water. He waved a hand to those on the shore and struck out.

Less than fifty yards away was the canoeist now. He was standing in his craft again, and again those waiting on the shore heard him shout. Before him was a treacherous place where the river narrowed, and between the two banks it raced like a mad thing eager to escape confinement. He grasped his paddle firmly and bent forward once more, and at just the right time he plunged the blade into the boiling water, and whirled the canoe to the right. Around it spun quickly, but its nose remained down-stream.

"The only way he could have done it!" Bossuet gasped.

And then the canoe floated on the safe, broad bosom of the wider space, and the man who had ridden the rapids "deserted of God" shaded his eyes with a hand and gazed at the shore.

"Ho! Bossuet's camp!" he cried. "A goodly place to look upon!"

Baptiste Navet had witnessed all this as he swam, and now he turned around, with black anger in his heart, and struck out for the shore. His great arms flayed the water and churned it into spray, for thus he gave way to his rage. And behind him came the canoe, the man in it paddling slowly.

Navet came from the river like some big dog, and shook himself much after the fashion of one, and then went aside to pull on his boots, a dark look on his face. Those on the shore could see the stranger well now, and the heart of Jean the Cripple sang for joy.

For this was a proper man that had come down the river. Tall he was, as tall as Baptiste Navet, and his shoulders were broad and his thighs lean. His heavy shirt was open at the throat, and the sleeves of it rolled up to show his massive arms. A broad-rimmed hat sat on the back of his head, and between the edge of it and his eyes there protruded dark, curly hair.

But it was the man's smile that Jean

noticed first—a rare smile that seemed like a small sun, so much radiance did it cast. He did not present the appearance of a man who had toyed with death and evaded it by a scant margin. Running the rapids might have been in the day's work with him.

The canoe touched the shore, and the man sprang out and pulled it from the water. Then he whirled toward those gathered there, and swept his hat from his head.

"Is the welcome of Bossuet so warm that you swim out to meet me?" he asked, laughing a bit, and glancing at Baptiste Navet struggling to pull a boot over a wet leg.

"We expected to bring you in a bruised and battered thing," Jacques Bossuet admitted. "Never before has man cruised the rapids deserted of God and lived to boast of it!"

"'Tis nothing of which to boast," the stranger said. "Danger to life and limb in such a game? Name of a name!"

"You felt no fear?" Annette asked, stepping forward and seeming to forget that she did not know this man.

"Not the slightest, *mademoiselle*," he replied, smiling down at her from his great height. "Had I known so pretty a flower as yourself were here, I could have cursed such a sluggish stream."

Annette retreated in confusion at that, for she was of the woods and not used to pretty speeches, and Jacques Bossuet forced himself forward and engaged the stranger in conversation again.

"May I ask your name and from whence you come?" he asked.

"I came down the river, *m'sieu'*, as all here can testify," came the answer. "As for a name, you may call me Louis Grantaire."

"And your business?" Bossuet demanded.

"I seek work."

"In the woods, *m'sieu'*?"

"Work—any sort of work, *m'sieu'!* You will give it me?"

He glanced at Annette again as he spoke, and the admiration he felt for her was in his eyes for all the world to read. Bossuet frowned a little at that, and the black looks on the face of Baptiste Navet increased.

"There always is work for a true man at the camp of Bossuet," said the superintendent. "But I must know the man I engage."

"Ah! You wish information concerning myself, *m'sieu'?* You have my name."

"That is not enough!" There was a certain gruffness in Bossuet's voice as he spoke.

"Perhaps," said the stranger, "you doubt I have the strength to endure a man's labor?"

He rolled back a sleeve and showed what muscle he had, then threw his arms wide and gave them a look at his broad shoulders, and laughed again as if at an excellent joke.

"I believe that there can be no doubt of your strength, *m'sieu'*," Jacques Bossuet said. "We have seen an exhibition of it, and of your general skill."

"Then what? Perhaps there may be some shadow cast upon me as to moral character? Perhaps some here may think I am a fugitive fleeing a crime? It may be that I am not the proper sort of person? Is there any man here present who dares face me and say such a thing?"

He turned and looked at them all, his eyes narrowed and his fists clenched at his sides, and more than one pair of eyes fell before his gaze. For an instant he clashed glances with Baptiste Navet, while the heart of Jean the Cripple seemed to stand still.

But Navet turned his head slowly and looked out across the river, and made no reply. And Louis Grantaire faced Bossuet again, and smiled as before.

"I give you my word that I am a proper person," he said. "I have come down the river seeking work, and my reasons and intentions are my own. If you take me, it must be with that information and no more. Do I stop here, or shall I continue to the camp below?"

There was silence while his eyes blazed into those of Jacques Bossuet and they appraised each other. It seemed that Bossuet never would make up his mind and speak, and Jean feared that Louis Grantaire would be sent on.

But what Bossuet saw in the newcomer's eyes must have pleased him, for suddenly he extended a gnarled hand for the other to

grasp, and his great voice boomed out above the river's roar.

"You stop here! I'll give you work!"

CHAPTER III.

ANNETTE DANCES.

AFTER this interlude the games went on, but Jean the Cripple no longer remained within Annette Bossuet's encircling arm and watched them from a distance. Where Louis Grantaire went, there went Jean, his face alight with expectation; for this was the man who had come down the river to humble Baptiste Navet, and the cripple expected him to consummate the task immediately.

Grantaire greeted the other men collectively, not taking the trouble to ascertain the name of each, and then he sat him down on a big rock at the edge of the clearing, not far from the Indians, and watched the sport, and applauded with the rest, giving each man his due for his skill. Jean the Cripple crouched at his feet and watched his face, feeling that the humbling of Navet was only a matter of a little time. The man had just ridden the rapids deserted of God. Was he not to have a few moments in which to regain his breath?

Once Grantaire's hand dropped and caressed the cripple's head, though the newcomer did not look at him, and Jean's heart glowed anew.

"*M'sieu'?*" he asked.

"Well, little one?"

"When is it to be done?" Jean asked.

"I know not your meaning."

"When are you to humble Baptiste Navet, *m'sieu'?* When are you to beat him and laugh at him, and send him away from Bossuet forever?"

"Navet? I know not the man. And why is he to be humbled?"

"You but jest with me, *m'sieu'*. For years, it seems, this Baptiste Navet has mistreated me, because I am a cripple and cannot fight back. Only to-day he was doing it, but Mlle. Annette Bossuet made him cease. He taunts me because of my crooked leg, and he cuffs and strikes and kicks me, and throws me about, and laughs when I cry. And for this long time, *m'sieu'*, I have prayed the good God to send a real man down the river—a man who would humble Baptiste Navet and force him to go away and leave us in peace here at Bossuet. Do not tell me, *m'sieu'*, that you are not the man!"

Grantaire looked at him quickly, and then at the throng of men in the clearing, and his brows were wrinkled for an instant. And then his hand gripped Jean's shoulder so that it almost hurt, and he spoke in a whisper that none other could hear.

"It is a little secret between ourselves. I am the man!"

"And when do you do it, *m'sieu'?*"

"That will come in good time, little one. We must not hasten things. And tell me, pray, which one is this Baptiste Navet?"

"The one with the brow like thunder, *m'sieu'*, who stands at the end of the row just now. The one who swam out to bring in your torn and battered body when you ran the rapids deserted of God."

Grantaire smiled at that, remembering what he had said of the camp's warm welcome, and glanced at Navet with increased interest. Once the bully met his eyes, but turned away quickly. And Grantaire patted Jean's shoulder again, and the Indians told one another that here was a good man because he protected the helpless.

Jacques Bossuet approached them.

"I suppose you do not care for the games this day," he said. "You are welcome to play, if it is your wish. But you may be tired after your journey, and you are new to us—"

He ceased speaking and looked a question-mark at Louis Grantaire, and the other men waited for his answer, some hoping that here was a man who could give them added sport, others wishing he would keep to himself.

"It is not that I am fatigued," Grantaire replied. "No, it is not that, *m'sieu'*. But, as you say, I am newly come among you, and it is scarcely proper that I indulge in games this first day. It pleases me to watch the others. When I have worked for you a time, and there is another day of feast and celebration, then will I add my poor part to the entertainment."

"As you please, *m'sieu'*," Bossuet said, and all wondered that he addressed the man in that courteous fashion, for generally he was gruff with the men he employed, believing that it made for discipline. "At least you can join in the dance this night."

"With pleasure," said Louis Grantaire, and glanced around for Annette, but could not see her.

"Dancing suits some men more than hardier sport," Baptiste Navet observed, to nobody in particular, but in a voice that all could hear.

Jean's heart began pounding at his ribs, for he supposed Grantaire would make use of this chance to humble the bully. But Grantaire merely gave another of his radiant smiles and made no reply. Instead, he addressed himself to Bossuet again.

"What already has been done in the way of games?" he asked. "How stand you here at Bossuet in these entertainments?"

"We have lifted the weights, for instance," Bossuet replied. "I have a man—Baptiste Navet, there—who always wins in such events. There are real men in this camp, *m'sieu'*."

"I do not doubt it, *m'sieu'*."

"You see that huge rock? Baptiste Navet lifted it free of the ground an hour ago. It was an effort, but he cleared the earth with it."

Louis Grantaire got up and walked over to the rock, and stood looking down at it for a moment. Not a glance did he give Navet.

"It is, indeed, a bit of a rock," he said. "It would take a strong man to lift it clear of the ground, eh?"

"That it would, *m'sieu'*."

Grantaire chuckled and bent forward. Before the others guessed his intention he had stooped and put his hands beneath it. He tugged, and one of the men laughed. And then he tugged again, and lifted the rock from the earth as if it had been a sack of meal, and not content with that he tossed it half a dozen paces away, and then stood up again and dusted his hands.

"Yes, it is quite a bit of a rock," he admitted, and went back to sit down again.

The men looked at him in amazement, and many swore out of pure admiration. Only Baptiste Navet scowled and cursed beneath his breath, because the newcomer had belittled his feat, and all there knew by this that Baptiste and Louis Grantaire would clash one day. It was as good as settled.

The heart of Jean thrilled as he crept close to Louis again, happy to have such a champion. The games went on, and Grantaire watched, never as much as glancing at Navet, which angered the latter the more. A man may suffer another to outdo him, but it troubles him greatly to be ignored.

And then the dusk came, and the great fires were lighted down by the river. The Indians hung around like so many hungry dogs, for Bossuet always was generous with them on feast days. From the cook's cabin came odors to please every nostril. Great, rough tables were spread at the forest's edge beneath the trees, and heaped high with food, and the laughing, shouting men began to fill their bellies, eating and talking at the same time.

Louis Grantaire had a place near the end of one of the tables, and Jean the Cripple sat beside him. It seemed that the man who had come down the river had little to say now, though he smiled a great deal and appeared to make himself at home. Now and then he patted Jean's shoulder, as if to tell him that he remembered, and there was a deal of courtesy in his manner when he answered the sallies of the others. Remembering how he had lifted and tossed the great rock, they forbore rough play. None had wished for broken bones.

Nor did Baptiste Navet speak much, but for quite a different reason. Rage at this newcomer consumed him. Also, he remembered that Annette had said she would not dance with him, because he had tormented Jean, and he wondered whether she had meant it.

"You seem to have made a friend of the cripple," Baptiste spoke directly to Louis Grantaire finally.

"'Tis appropriate that the weak and the strong should join forces," Grantaire replied.

The men laughed, and the face of Baptiste flushed darkly around the edges of his beard.

"'Tis appropriate," said Baptiste, "that he who rides the devil's rapids should attach himself to the devil's offspring."

"Do you mean that little Jean's father was not a proper man?" Louis Grantaire asked.

This was dangerous ground, for Jean's father was a memory respected by all at Bossuet, he having given his life in an effort to save other men; and Baptiste Navet knew better than to continue the conversation along that line, lest all there fall upon him and drive him away.

"Jean's father was a great man," he said, and the appeased throng resumed eating.

Louis Grantaire smiled into his plate, and glanced at Jean from the corners of his eyes. Baptiste choked on a bit of meat. He was fast storing up rage against this newcomer, but he knew better than to urge a combat now. There were rules about such things that should be observed. When the man had swung an ax for Jacques Bossuet, when he was in reality one of Bossuet's men, then he could be made to stand and answer. This night he was similar to a guest. To-night it could be only a clash of wits and words, at which Baptiste Navet heretofore had excelled.

"Did you hear the devil laugh and wish you well as you passed through the boiling water?" he asked.

"I found him swimming before Bossuet when I arrived," Grantaire replied.

The men laughed again, but Navet held in his anger. When the man once had swung an ax—

"You should have fetched a squaw with you," he tried again. "There is to be a dance. We are short of young women here, and you may lack for feminine partners."

"There seems to be no shortage of old women," Grantaire observed, looking at all of them, but his eyes resting the longest on Baptiste Navet.

"And all old women nurse the cripple," Baptiste said.

The men roared, and he knew that he had scored that time. Louis Grantaire smiled again, and chuckled a bit to himself as if enjoying it, and looked down at Jean once more.

"Jean may not always be a cripple," he remarked after a time.

"When his leg grows straight, then will I leave the woods never to return," Navet promised.

Grantaire looked across at him quickly.

"On your word?" he asked.

"On my word, *m'sieu'!*" Baptiste replied and laughed loudly.

"Legs have grown straight before now, *m'sieu'*. And men have grown crooked by forgetting their word."

"I have yet to forget mine," said Navet.

"The honor of some men shrinks with dampness, and you were in the river to-day."

"What mean you by that?" Baptiste cried, somewhat angrily.

"I was but making an attempt at pretty speech, *m'sieu'*. 'Tis a habit I have."

"A habit fit for women and weaklings! Your meaning, *m'sieu'!*"

"Suppose," said Louis Grantaire, "that you search until you find it."

The men began sitting back from the tables, for the feast was over. Baptiste glowered into Grantaire's smiles, and turned away. He promised himself several things regarding what he would do to this upstart when once he had swung an ax. What was the forest coming to when unknowns with clever tongues paraded through it and got jobs at honest camps? Was this a part of the régime of M. Pretot, the "big boss"?

M. Pretot was not exactly a myth, yet he was little more than a name in some ways. It was known only that he had inherited thousands of acres of timberland, and that hundreds of crews worked for him under their foremen and superintendents. None of these latter ever saw M. Pretot. He sat behind a big desk in an office in Montreal and transacted his business and took his profits, and his managers went into the woods.

That was all the men knew concerning M. Pretot. They did not see how business could be conducted in that manner. It was not natural for a man to remain away from his property. And surely things would not be right for long unless he came to supervise them. They could not complain, for

they got their money regularly, but they felt that there were many conditions that could be remedied if the "big boss" was on the ground.

"M. Pretot should be here and send this man on down the river," Baptiste Navet growled to himself.

The fires on the bank of the stream had been replenished and the flames were leaping high against the sky, sending their reflections out over the water. There was a fiddle in the camp, and one of the men seized it now and sat down on a log to put it into tune.

This was to be such a dance as débutante never saw. There would be no smooth floor, no orchestra, no banks of flowers, no scintillating lights. The leaping fires beside the river, the bright moon, the twinkling stars would furnish the illumination. The flowers were Nature's own, uncultivated by man. The orchestra was the cook with an old fiddle that squeaked and screeched; the floor was the sward.

Annette Bossuet represented the young femininity. The cook's fat wife was the only matron present, unless one took into consideration half a dozen squaws who were greasy and who believed a proper dance meant hopping on their toes and yipping at every other step. And so for the greater part, the men danced with one another, shouting and laughing as they did so, now clasping each other tightly, now separating and jigging in what manner pleased them.

The cook got his fiddle going, and the men crowded closer to the fires. Always at Bossuet, Annette opened the dance with one of the men. It was a great honor to be so chosen, and the girl played no favorites. It had been understood that she was to dance with Baptiste Navet first, this night.

But Baptiste remembered the scene earlier in the day, and doubted whether he was to be honored. The men remembered it, too, for they had heard her words.

"I dance with pretty Annette," he announced now, "else none dances with her. It is understood? The man who clasps her waist before she dances with me will feel the weight of my fist against his jaw."

They glowered at him, but made no reply. Louis Grantaire heard the words and turned away abruptly, looking to where Annette Bossuet stood with her father at one end of the clearing.

Out upon the sward they danced, the men two by two, their loud laughter ringing through the woods. Baptiste Navet crossed deliberately to where the girl was standing, and her father saw him coming and moved away, for this was a thing for Annette to settle herself.

The bully stopped before her with an attempted smile!

"We dance now?" he asked.

"I do not dance with a man who mistreats boys," she said.

"The boy came to no harm, *mam'selle.* I promise not to bother him again if you dance with me."

"I told you this afternoon, *m'sieu'*, that I would not be your partner. Are you so dense in the head that a girl must repeat her words?"

His face black as thunder, Baptiste Navet turned away. The girl remained where she stood, and gazed across at the fires, watching the laughing, shouting, dancing men. Her heart was a little sore, for she wanted to dance. Dances came only too infrequent at Bossuet, and were to be made the most of.

The cook was like a man inspired now. His old fiddle sang. Little Annette allowed her body to sway slightly with the rhythm, and one tiny foot patted the ground, as she wished that Baptiste Navet had not been such a bully and spoiled her evening.

And then, suddenly, she felt a strong arm around her; and a big hand grasped her little one and lifted it. She felt drawn against a broad breast and lifted to her toes. She glanced up, a little in alarm, fearing that Baptiste had so taken advantage of her, and looked into the smiling face of Louis Grantaire.

"Let—me go!" she gasped.

But Grantaire only laughed aloud and held her closer. In an instant they were out on the sward, swinging in the dance. Men stopped to watch them, and Baptiste Navet's face went white with fury, for he thought she danced willingly.

And Annette Bossuet felt her heart singing, and her feet seemed as light as feathers.

Never in her life before had she danced like this. She seemed to float on the music. She was like a fairy dancing in the moonlight. Louis Grantaire lifted her away from herself, it seemed, carried her for the moment into another world, gave to dancing a meaning it had never had before.

She heard the exclamations of wonder from the men they passed. And then the realization came to her.

This stranger had seized her waist without as much as asking her permission! This newcomer to Bossuet had presumed to imagine that she would dance with him willingly!

Fury came into her breast at the thought; and the song died out of her heart. She struggled to be free; but he only laughed and pressed her close again, and swept her feet from the ground and carried her down the line in a rush that left her almost breathless. The fiddle was still; they stopped at the clearing's edge.

She gasped for breath. She pulled away from him. Her eyes blazed up into his smiling face.

"*M'sieu'!* I—I hate you!" she hissed.

"Hatred is akin to love, *mademoiselle,*" he replied. "It may be love before we are done!"

And he stooped and kissed her hand before he would let her go.

CHAPTER IV.

A MAN AWAKE.

BAPTISTE NAVET had seen them dance, naturally, and his rage had increased until he seemed scarcely human. He hated Louis Grantaire because his arm had been around Annette's slim waist, and he hated Annette for a moment because he believed she had danced purposely with the newcomer to shame the bully before his comrades.

Behind a clump of brush Baptiste took many drinks out of a long black bottle, which would have moved Jacques Bossuet to expostulation had he known, for Bossuet disliked red liquor in his camp. Then, half intoxicated with the contents of the bottle, and wholly consumed with his rage, he sat for a time at the edge of the clearing and watched the scene of merry-making, a blot of gloom in an ocean of joy.

Annette pretended to be talking to some of the Indian women, and wondered why none of the other men approached her, cap in hand, and asked the honor of a dance. But the other men, remembering Baptiste Navet's warning, held back and would not ask her, and wondered meanwhile how the bully would punish this newcomer who had dared go against his orders.

Jacques Bossuet had seen, too, and after a time he managed to reach a place by Grantaire's side, and, disregarding the presence of Jean, spoke:

"Is it that you danced with my daughter against her will?" he demanded in a stern voice.

"I did not stop to consider that," Louis Grantaire replied. "The music struck into my blood, the scene is a romantic one, and your little daughter is rarely beautiful."

"Have you no sense of the fitness of things?"

"Ample sense of such," Grantaire said. "I overheard one of your men command that none dance with your daughter unless he danced with her first. She refused to dance with him. That put a proposition up to a man, *m'sieu'*. To refuse to dance with her then would be to admit fear of the man who commanded. And she was eager to dance, and the other men held back."

"I presume you mean Baptiste Navet?"

"The same, *m'sieu'!*"

"Beware of him, Louis Grantaire. He has been bully for years here. They say a blow from one of his fists is like the kick of a mule. Every man who works here, he conquers, in time."

"A pretty bully, indeed!"

"I have warned you, *m'sieu'*. I may mention, too, that Baptiste Navet is not nice when he has downed a man against whom he holds a mean grudge. He will not hesitate to use his boot-calks on a human face."

"You endure such a man?"

"He demands that I do so—and he is an excellent workman. He has strength enough for two."

"I fail to see the economy of it if his

prowess keeps some of your men in their bunks, injured, a part of the time."

"I have never looked upon it in that light, *m'sieu'*. But I have warned you. And, as to my daughter—"

"I am sorry if I have affronted her," Louis Grantaire interrupted. "You may be sure, *m'sieu'*, that I'll treat your daughter as a gentleman should treat a lady."

Bossuet walked away, and Louis Grantaire walked slowly down to the edge of the river and stooped to drink, Jean following close at his heels. He heard an ejaculation from the cripple, and sprang to his feet to find Baptiste Navet standing near him.

"A word with you, *m'sieu'!*" Navet said.

"Well?"

"Perhaps you did not hear me when I spoke, and so are not in error. I merely wish to make sure. I served notice that no man was to dance with Annette Bossuet until she had done me the honor of dancing with me."

"I heard," said Grantaire boldly.

"And yet you danced with her, *m'sieu'?*"

"As you saw."

"Perhaps it was a foolhardy thing to do, *m'sieu'*. Was it not an affront to me?"

"You are the best judge of that, I think."

Navet's face flushed darkly, and his hands twitched.

"You are a stranger among us, *m'sieu'*," he said. "You are our guest, in a way. But after you have done one day's work, then you'll be a Bossuet man. And then, *m'sieu'*, I may remember the affront!"

"I trust your memory is not proving faulty through age," Grantaire said.

"Beware, *m'sieu'!* You may go too far!"

"Let us hope, in that event, that I find pleasant faces at the end of my journey."

For an instant, Jean felt sure that Baptiste Navet would strike, and he noticed that most of the men had ceased dancing and were alert for trouble. But Navet conquered his rising anger and turned his back and walked away. Louis Grantaire laughed aloud, and went back to the clearing with Jean.

Behind the clump of brush, Baptiste Navet drank again and brooded over what he pleased to style his wrongs. The dancing continued, and there was more to eat, and the Indians, at Bossuet's order, continued to heap wood on the fires. And all this time Baptiste Navet considered the situation in his brain; and finally he called Jacques Bossuet aside and spoke a word into his ear.

"I do not like this newcomer," he said. "He is an upstart, an unknown who may not be a proper sort of person. You will send him on down the river."

"I have promised him work, and I am a man of my word," Bossuet replied.

"My wishes count for nothing in this matter then?" Navet asked angrily, stepping nearer the superintendent.

"Why should you object to the man?" Bossuet countered. "Is it that you fear him?"

"*M'sieu'!*" Navet cried.

"Your likes and dislikes should concern yourself and those who cause them," Bossuet went on. "I have enough difficulties of my own with which to contend."

"Does that mean that you leave this man to me?"

"I am his employer, and not his protector," Bossuet said. "I ask only that what you do be done with honor."

Then Baptiste Navet walked away and went back to the clump of brush again. Once more he drank and hurled the empty bottle from him. He walked the forest lanes, assembling his rage, kicking at such logs as came close to his feet, clenching his great fists and shaking them toward the sky.

Like a madman he became, forgetting his honor and the code of the woods. This man's subtle shafts of wit that stung, his free manner—he could not endure them.

He watched while the fires were allowed to die down, and noticed that Bossuet showed Louis Grantaire the bunk-house where the men slept when they were in camp, and assigned him to a bunk there. Baptiste Navet knew the bunk, for there was but one empty one.

Why do this man the honor, he asked himself, of stripping to the waist and standing up to him? Nobody knew from whence he had come, and none would question

where he had gone. The quick thrust of a knife in the dark, a body weighted and sunk in the river, a canoe sent floating down the stream—and every one would think that the stranger had decided to go on to another camp rather than work at Bossuet's. Moreover, some men might even think that he had gone because of his fear of punishment at the hands of Baptiste Navet because he had danced with Annette, which would enhance Baptiste's reputation in the eyes of men.

Navet strolled along the river until the fires were but ashes, and the moon had disappeared and heavy clouds that promised rain for the new day obscured the stars.

In the bunk-house there were no lights now, and it was the proper time for his deed. He knew that all the men there would be sleeping soundly, as was their custom, and that a pistol could be fired without one of them awaking. Yet what he intended doing must be done in silence, for all that.

He followed the edge of the clearing, and so came close to the bunk-house and stood beside an open window to listen. A chorus of snores greeted him; inside it was so dark that a man could not see half the length of his arm.

Baptiste Navet slipped around to the door. He had taken the precaution of removing his heavy boots. From his belt he took his long, sharp knife. He knew that he must do the work with a single blow, so that no more sound than a sigh would escape the stricken man.

He crossed the threshold, scarcely daring to breathe, and there he stood silent for a moment to locate the bunk he sought. Then he gripped the haft of his knife and crept forward on the tips of his toes.

Once more he stood still to listen, for should some of the men be awake and knowledge of his deed become public, he would be forced to take to the woods and remain fugitive, living with the Indians and always alert for white men. But naught reached his ears except the deep snores and heavy breathing, nothing to indicate that a man there was awake. On he went toward the bunk in the corner, which, he knew, had been assigned to Louis Grantaire.

He hesitated a moment just before he reached it, for some bit of conscience remained to him and tried to speak to him now, but liquor had dulled his sense of hearing.

Two more steps he took, and lifted the keen knife for the strike. He could hear the regular breathing of the man in the bunk, and he listened carefully so that he could judge where his heart must be.

The muscles in his arm grew taut; the knife was lifted higher. Baptiste Navet drew in his breath until his great chest seemed ready to burst, meaning to expel it in one gasp as he drove the knife home and tore his enemy's life from his body.

But suddenly he recoiled. A match had been struck. In its glow he saw the smiling face of Louis Grantaire looking up into his own, and he knew that Grantaire had seen the knife, too, and had guessed his purpose there. To his ears came Grantaire's soft voice.

"Ah! Baptiste Navet! You are late getting to bed, *m'sieu'*. Can it be that you have been lost in the woods? And I believe that your bunk is at the other end of the room!"

CHAPTER V.

THE WARNING.

BAPTISTE NAVET got his boots at the door and then went to his bunk, but not once during the remainder of the night did he close his eyes in sleep. Nor did he attempt to approach the bunk of Louis Grantaire again, for he felt sure the stranger was awake — wherein he erred. Knowing men, and realizing that Baptiste would feel just that, Louis Grantaire slept soundly, perhaps the more so because Jean was curled up at his feet, and was alert.

Navet had noticed Jean, too, in the flare of the match. And he knew that both the newcomer and the cripple were aware of the fact that he had attempted to do a murder and had failed. He wondered what would happen in the morning, whether Louis Grantaire or the boy would tell, and what manner of story he could present if either of them did.

The effects of the liquor he had consumed began to die away, and he found himself cold and despondent. He could scarcely understand the abiding hatred of the newcomer that he felt. And he felt something akin to dread, also, and could not understand that.

He decided that this Louis Grantaire was not an usual man, and that it would be well to take matters slowly. Between him and this stranger there was that which could be removed only by combat, of course, but there was no rush about coming to blows. If here was an adversary worthy of his best efforts, Baptiste Navet decided it would be the better part to spend some time in studying him before he offered battle.

He watched furtively in the morning when the crews were called to their breakfast, but Louis Grantaire gave him not so much as a glance. During the meal, Baptiste Navet was silent, at which many of the men wondered; but all of them, remembering the events of the evening before, expected Navet to give battle as soon as the stranger had swung an ax for Jacques Bossuet.

After they had eaten, they set out for the cutting, which was to be a new one and two miles away through the woods. They laughed and shouted as they went to their work, for while they labored so near they would eat and sleep at the home camp, which was good. Louis Grantaire was in the rear, as became a newcomer, with Jean the Cripple running along by his side, skipping queerly to keep pace. Jean did not intend missing the great event when it occurred.

As they began to work, Baptiste was across the creek from Grantaire, but he could watch him well, and every glance seemed to feed the fires of his wrath. He began telling himself that he was a fool for waiting, that he should strike the stranger at once. And he told himself, too, that this was not to be like other fights. Heretofore, he conquered a man, and afterward that man took his regular place in the Bossuet camp and went his way, so long as he did not cross the path of Baptiste Navet, nor deny his leadership.

But this man, Baptiste felt, would do no such thing, even if he was defeated. There was something about him that told Navet he would fight again and yet again, and never admit defeat. Besides, Navet did not wish him to remain at Bossuet. Some sense he could not explain warned him that the stranger's presence here boded ill for both the bully and his fondest desires.

If he only had not failed last night! He felt that Grantaire was laughing to himself even now when he thought of it. "Can it be that you have been lost in the woods?" Bah! Baptiste Navet could not endure such cleverness!

There might yet be an opportunity, he told himself. Many queer things can happen to a man in the woods, especially if he has an enemy. An ax can slip, and a tree can fall in a manner unexpected. Baptiste Navet had only to watch and wait.

The long morning's work came to an end, and Jacques Bossuet drove out from camp with the cook and the midday meal. Annette was with him, a bewildered Annette, who could not understand the feeling her heart had harbored since the stranger had danced with her. She told herself that she hated him and always would, yet her eyes seemed drawn to him now.

He had not yet stopped work. He was swinging an ax, and the girl watched as his broad shoulders rose and fell. The work seemed play to him, and when he threw the ax down and started for the food-wagon, he appeared as if he had not been at work at all; yet Annette heard the foreman telling her father that he was the best of them all.

If there is any time when true men of the woods forget their enemies, it is when food is before them. Baptiste Navet forgot the existence of Grantaire now as he wolfed down potatoes and bread and meat. He ate much as the others, seemingly with an effort to destroy what food was in sight more than to appease hunger.

And so he did not notice, nor did the other men, that Louis Grantaire ate only as much as he actually needed, and then washed his face and hands in the creek, and then wandered along the tiny path, following the direction Annette Bossuet had gone a moment before.

He came upon her at a bend in the creek, where she stood beneath a tree and "sassed" a squirrel, and when she whirled to meet his gaze the red flamed into her face.

"A fine day, *mademoiselle*," he observed, sweeping off his hat and smiling at her.

Annette shrugged her shoulders and turned away, pretended to sass the squirrel again, and then would have returned to the camp, except that she found him standing in the path before her.

"You will please stand aside and allow me to pass, *m'sieu'*," she said. She tried to draw herself up in dignity as she spoke, and it was a laughable spectacle, for she was such a little girl. Louis Grantaire laughed.

Therein he showed that he scarcely understood women; for what woman can endure to have a man laugh at her? He may scold, storm, be profane, profess indifference, and be forgiven quickly; but not so when he laughs.

Annette's eyes snapped with anger as she faced him, and she bit her lips to keep from saying angry things, as the priest had taught her, the while she waited for him to step out of the way.

"It grieves me, *mademoiselle*, that you are displeased because I danced with you against your will," he said, not moving a foot. "Cannot you be honest and admit that you liked the dance?"

"*M'sieu'!*"

"Are we not to be good friends?"

"I have no friendship for you, *m'sieu'!*" she said sharply.

"True; I had forgotten for the moment. They say friendship does not exist between persons who love."

"*M'sieu'!*"

"For I am convinced that it is to be love between us, *mademoiselle*. I felt it when first I set eyes upon you. I am sure that you felt it, too."

"The donkey is an animal who imagines that he can sing, I have heard it said, *m'sieu'*, although I never have seen a donkey and do not know as to the truth of the statement."

"Meaning that I have somewhat of a conceit?"

"I am glad my meaning is clear to you, *m'sieu'*."

"You are charming when you are angry, *mademoiselle*. I am tempted to anger you just to watch the effect."

"Shall I ask you again to stand aside?"

"Your wishes are commands, *mademoiselle*," he said, and stepped to one side of the path.

"Then let me say that I wish you never to speak to me again!"

Louis Grantaire's face went white for an instant, and when he next spoke his voice sounded peculiarly.

"You mean that, *mademoiselle?*" he asked.

"I do not speak idle words. It is my wish that you never speak to me again, unless I first should ask you to."

"It is a command, *mademoiselle*, and shall be obeyed," he said; and then, without another word to her, and without waiting for her to reply, he turned his back and plunged into the dense woods. Men have said that he attacked the big trees like a maniac that afternoon.

And perhaps it was fortunate for Baptiste Navet that he did not clash with Grantaire during the hour that followed. By the end of that time the newcomer to Bossuet had worked off a share of his anger. Jean, who had not approached near enough to hear their words when Grantaire was talking to Annette, wondered at the man's fury, and told himself that the camp bully was due to receive the beating of his life when the clash came.

For the remainder of the afternoon, Grantaire talked and joked with Jean as he worked, and paid little attention to any of the men, and now and then he whispered to the boy, and the others could see Jean's face shining with joy.

And when the sun dropped behind the edge of the forest and the day's work was done, the newcomer swung Jean to his shoulder and carried him so, with his ax beneath the other arm, and thus they followed the others of the crew along the path, through the woods to the Bossuet camp beside the river.

The evening meal was ready when they arrived, and after they had plunged their

heads into the rushing stream and dried them on rough towels, they sat down to table.

"'Tis an excellent camp," Louis Grantaire observed then to the men about him. "Yet there are peculiar things happen in the neighborhood of it."

"How mean you, *m'sieu'?*" one of them asked.

"Late in the afternoon I walked along a path at the edge of the cutting and stepped upon a branch. My mere step released a sapling that sprang into the air like a wild thing, oceans of strength behind it. Had it caught me beneath the chip my head would have been torn from my body. And it might have done that thing, except that I have seen such clumsy traps before, and stooped when I stepped on the branch."

He grinned into his plate, and the men looked at one another with questions in their eyes, and a few glanced toward Baptiste Navet, who pretended not to have heard.

"There also was a pit at the edge of the creek," Louis Grantaire went on. "It was deep, and there were some jagged stakes in it. Over its mouth dry brush had been piled. What easier, I ask you, than for a man to step upon it and be plunged down upon the sharp stakes? In such event he might sustain a bruised leg—or a stake might go through his vitals. Such traps are a nuisance about a cutting. I am sure you all agree with me. A man must keep his eyes open and observe that they are covered with dry brush. Honest ground, of course, would be covered with green at this time of the year."

Once more he grinned into his plate, and the men knew that there could be no mistake now, and they glanced at Baptiste Navet again, who had his eyes only upon his plate. But Navet's face was flushed with shame because he had used the dried brush.

"A man must get acquainted with the country," Grantaire went on to say. "For instance, it is my pleasure to light a pipe and take long walks in the evening after food. Often I go into the woods and listen to the Nature noises there. A man might run into wild beasts doing that in a country with which he is not acquainted. A panther might spring from a tree, and the man be found in the morning lacerated so that other men could not tell exactly how he came by his death. Yet in the face of such possibilities I cannot forego my walk. Naturally, I shall be alert at all times. And I am considered proficient with this."

He placed a pistol on the table before him, and many bent forward to look at it, for the most of them never had seen such a weapon. They had rifles and knew how to use them, and they had heard considerable about this short gun that could be used in close quarters. Baptiste Navet looked down the length of the table, and for an instant his eyes met Grantaire's, and something seemed to flash between them.

Immediately thereafter Grantaire went for his walk in the woods, and would not let even Jean accompany him, whereat the boy sulked about the bunk-house until the men drove him away.

The others went out to sit on the ground around the fire until it came time to go to their bunks.

"What manner of man is he?" one asked when Grantaire was so far away that he could not hear.

"There is something peculiar about him," another said.

"He is a boaster, a braggart, a good-for-nothing!" declared Baptiste Navet. "I have been studying how best to handle him."

"I would not be a panther and attempt to spring upon him," one advised.

"Dry brush in place of green!" said another, and though the men chuckled, Navet did not spring upon the speaker.

"It is this way," the bully said. "The man affronts all of us. Whence he came, we know not. Neither do we know his real object here, though he has said he came to work. He does not show the proper spirit of humility that would be expected of a newcomer. The time will come when he must be taught a lesson. I placed the traps in the woods—but it was only to ascertain whether he was green to the forest and its ways."

Baptiste Navet puffed at his pipe then, and all the men looked at one another and

told themselves that the bully lied. However, it was none of their business. Louis Grantaire had not affronted any of them, and until he did they would not concern themselves with him.

Beyond the light of the fire there was some small commotion at that moment, and an Indian runner appeared, breathing heavily. He glanced over the men, and then approached Baptiste Navet and handed him a folded piece of paper.

"From Pierre, on the river above," he said.

Baptiste motioned the runner to seat himself before the fire, and then stretched the bit of paper out. Pierre was a bully like himself, and dominated the next camp. Seldom did he write, except, at the close of the season, to know at what time Baptiste was going to journey to the distant town. And this was but the commencement of the season, so Baptiste was a little apprehensive as he looked at the letter.

He read the message slowly by the light of the fire, and the men who watched saw his pipe drop from between his lips, and his black brows contract.

"Here we have it, bullies!" he cried presently. "Here is your answer to all questions concerning this newcomer to Bossuet. He has but left Pierre's camp. Listen to what Pierre has to say!"

And then he read the letter:

"BAPTISTE NAVET (IN BOSSUET'S):

"Strange things are happening in the forests, and it is well for you to be put upon your guard. There has been a man going about the camps who calls himself the breaker of brutes. He is tall and strong and can fight like a wildcat. He makes it his business to get a job and search out the camp bully, and then he tries to conquer and cripple him. When asked his reasons, he says nothing except that bullies should be driven from the woods. It is right for a man to fight when he had a grievance, he says, but wrong for a bully to beat up men merely because they resent his leadership.

"This man has come from the head of the river, and the Indians say he has beaten all the best men and driven them away. I admit with shame that he conquered me yesterday. He humbled me before the men, and when you read this I shall be on my way out of the woods, for I am ashamed to remain.

"This man is going in your direction, and mayhap he will stop at Bossuet. Look to yourself. Conquer him, mark him well, and I am your friend for life, and whatever I have is yours. He calls himself Louis Grantaire."

Baptiste Navet finished reading the letter and looked up into the wondering faces of the men.

"So that is the way of it!" he cried. "This man hopes to whip all bullies that he may be the greatest bully of all himself. He has conquered my good friend, Pierre. Now, this man shall clash with me! On the morrow I shall stand up to him—I swear it! We shall see then of what stuff he is made!"

At that moment, Louis Grantaire stalked from the edge of the woods and walked toward the bunk-house. He did not look toward the fire, but all the men there knew that he had heard.

CHAPTER VI.

FLIGHT.

FOR a time Baptiste Navet sat and stared into the fire, speaking no further word, and then he arose, knocked the hot ashes from his pipe, and beckoned to the Indian runner.

With the native following at his heels, Baptiste led the way down to the river, and there he motioned for the runner to sit down again, since what he had to say would take some little time in the telling.

"You are ready to take several journeys for me, if the payment is satisfactory?" Baptiste Navet asked.

"Um!" the Indian grunted, which might have meant either an agreement or disagreement, whichever happened to be proper. Baptiste took it in this instance for agreement.

"You have heard tales of this brute-breaker?" he asked.

"Um!"

"Does that mean that you have?"

"Um!"

"I suppose you have, then. Is it true that he has made his way down the river from camp to camp, and that in each camp he has whipped the best man and shamed him and driven him from the woods?"

"Um!"

"Your mother should have taught you that a wise man does not let his tongue run away with him," said Baptiste, who had a small sense of humor at times. "Have you heard what became of the bullies this brute-breaker whipped?"

The Indian pulled his blanket closer about his shoulders, took a deep breath and straightened himself somewhat. He threw out one arm as if in gesture, and Baptiste Navet thought that now would words pour from the native's lips.

"No!" the Indian said, and composed himself again.

"If I send you back up the river can you get help, and in some manner find all of these beaten bullies and hand them a message from me?"

"Um!"

"Then pay close attention, and if you carry out my orders you will have such gorgeous blankets and new rifles and knives that every young squaw in the north country will make eyes at you and want to cook your food."

"Um!"

"You will start immediately and make all haste to the first camp up the river. Start there on the trail of my friend, Pierre, if he already has departed, and find him. Before you do that, send some blood-brother of yours on up the river, and have him send another, and so forth. All of these beaten bullies must be found, and to each of them must be given my message."

"Um!"

"On second thought, the message shall be by word of mouth, for a written one might be lost. And these words shall constitute the message, talkative one: 'The brute-breaker is at Bossuet's. Baptiste Navet asks you to come quickly and take your vengeance.' You understand that?"

"Um!"

"Repeat the message."

"Brute-breaker at Bossuet's — come quickly—take vengeance—um!"

"If that message is not delivered properly the woods will not prove wide enough to hide you from punishment. It is well that you understand that. If you do your work well, return to me here and take the honorable word of Baptiste Navet that you shall have blankets and tobacco, a new rifle and knife, and possibly—if you are careful—a flask of firewater. Go!"

"Um!" exclaimed the runner.

He stood up and lowered his blanket and bound it about his waist. He nodded to Baptiste Navet, swung his elbows into his sides, and flashed from view like a shadow, running evenly and swiftly up the river.

Baptiste waited a moment after the man had gone, and then made his way back to the fire, where the other men remained sitting. He took his place among them.

"This Louis Grantaire?" he asked.

"Remains in the bunk-house," one answered.

"I have thought of a better plan than standing up before him on the morrow and testing his mettle. This man has humbled certain friends of mine, and of yours, since they are loyal men of the woods. I have sent word by the Indian that the men he has beaten are to gather here, and when they have arrived we shall have some sport with this fellow who calls himself the brute-breaker."

"Then you do not fight him to-morrow?" asked a man who had hoped to see a battle.

"Not to-morrow. I owe it to my friends to await their arrival. You understand, and you will do your utmost to keep this man and me from coming to blows until the proper time. There are many ways in which you can prevent him coming in close contact with me. Do you understand? And let it be understood that this postponement is not because I fear the man! Does any one here believe that I fear him?"

No matter what they thought, none there would say as much, of course, since Baptiste Navet had thrashed all of them easily, and could do it again if occasion required.

"It is well," said Baptiste Navet; and he loaded his pipe again, and lighted it with a coal from the fire, and stretched himself on the ground to rest.

Some of the men repaired to the bunk-house after that, and later more of them went, and still more, until Navet was alone before the fire. Presently he knocked out his pipe and went to the bunk-house himself, and straight to his bunk in the corner of it. Already the men were snoring.

Break of day found them rolling from their blankets, a laughing, joking crew that raced to the river and plunged their heads into the ice-cold water, with thoughts of nothing save breakfast.

When they rushed upon the rough tables heaped high with food, Baptiste Navet was careful to get near one end, far from where Louis Grantaire would sit. He did not see the man when first he glanced around, and a moment later was attacking the food before him.

They ate like hungry wolves, these men of the woods, talking with their mouths filled with food with a fine disregard of table niceties. With them eating was the act of sustaining life, and meal-time was not the time for social intercourse.

It was only when they had finished and were getting ready to follow the trail into the forest that it was noticed Louis Grantaire was not one of them.

Now that it was mentioned, no man could be found who had seen him at the morning meal. One was sent to the bunk-house to call him to work, and returned with the intelligence that his bunk was bare of blankets, and that the man was gone.

There was a quick search conducted then. They found that the canoe of Louis Grantaire was gone also, and marks in the sand on the shore told plainly that it had been launched some time during the night.

Word of the matter was carried to Jacques Bossuet, who came and made an investigation himself. And then the camp was looked over generally, not that it was actually believed Louis Grantaire might be a thief who had taken things, but it was best to make sure. He was an unknown, when all was said.

Nothing of value was missing, however, except a small quantity of provisions.

"For some reason, the man has gone on down the river," Bossuet declared. "He came to us through the rapids deserted of God, had some sport, and worked for a day, and hurried on. How can we know his motives?"

"Perhaps fear caused him to leave," Baptiste Navet insinuated.

"Fear?"

"Here is a letter, *m'sieu'*, received by me last night from my friend, Pierre. After reading it, I made mention that to-day I would stand before this man and see of what stuff he was made. The others will bear witness that he overheard my words. Perhaps he slipped away in the night because he feared to clash with me."

"It is possible," Jacques Bossuet admitted, though he looked as though he doubted it considerably. "Well, let us go to our work! Must the getting out of logs cease because a stranger has come and tarried a while and gone?"

Annette had seen the men crowded around the bunk-house, and knew that something unusual had happened, and now she came down among them to hear the story. It was Annette who first thought of Jean, remembering that he had clung close to Louis Grantaire since his arrival.

She voiced her fears, and again a search was made, this time for the boy, while Jacques Bossuet cursed beneath his breath because it was keeping the men from their work. No trace of Jean could be found, and it was Annette who discovered that the blankets she had given him were gone.

An old Indian was called, and the matter explained to him, and he spent a time in silence on the bank of the river, looking at marks the other men could not see. And finally he made his report.

"Boy go with stranger man," he said. "Tracks show that. They go down river in canoe."

"But why should he take Jean the Cripple with him?" Annette asked; and no man there had answer for her.

"He was afraid, and he ran away!" Baptiste Navet boasted. "That shows what sort of a man he is! Brute-breaker he called himself, eh? Name of a name!"

He led the way into the woods, laughing his loudest, and Annette Bossuet stood near the shore of the river looking at the place where Louis Grantaire's canoe had been. She could not understand the feeling that took possession of her now. At first she was ashamed, because she felt that it was interest in the stranger, and then she told herself that it was because Jean the Cripple was gone.

She asked herself what interest a wanderer of the forest could have in a cripple boy, and could think of no appropriate answer. The stranger was most mysterious, she decided. And he had danced with her forcibly, and had kissed her hand, and had declared that some day there might be love between them.

"I hate him!" the girl told herself.

She wondered whether it was fear of Baptiste Navet that had driven him away. If that were true, then she would despise him so much that she could not even honor him with hatred.

And then another thought came to her. Had Louis Grantaire gone away because she had told him he was not to speak to her again unless she asked it? Being a woman, the thought pleased her at first, until she considered the possibility that he had taken Jean with him by the way of revenge. Perhaps he had guessed that Annette loved little Jean.

"I hate him!" she told herself again; and she wondered when she spoke whether that was a falsehood and she should tell the priest about it.

CHAPTER VII.

A BROKEN LEG.

BEFORE the noon meal, Baptiste Navet had impressed upon all of the crew that he had driven the brute-breaker away. It was necessary, while this was being accomplished, to beat up two men who expressed disbelief in their countenances, but Jacques Bossuet said nothing about it when he arrived with the cook and the food-wagon. It was right, according to the rules of the forest, that one man should show his superiority and dominate. Then, as long as the superintendent ruled the bully, discipline could be maintained. It also was true that a bully, to be a good one, should outdo the others at work as well as at fighting, all of which went to swell the season's cutting and impress the distant and somewhat mysterious M. Pretot with the superintendent's value.

Annette did not make the trip to the woods this day, for she was seeking at Bossuet's some clue as to why Louis Grantaire had taken Jean with him; and so Baptiste Navet looked for her in vain. He was eager to explain to her that he had frightened away the man who called himself the brute-breaker and had whipped some of the best men in the woods, and that, therefore, he must be considered quite superior even to other bullies.

It was after the men had finished eating and had gone to work again that Navet approached Jacques Bossuet.

"I would like a word, *m'sieu'*," he said.

"A score, Baptiste."

"It is concerning your daughter, Annette."

"Well?" Bossuet asked, looking away through the trees.

"Any man could have told this long time since, that I have been greatly interested in her. I have been with you several years, and you know what manner of man I am. Could you look with favor upon me as a son-in-law?"

"That is a broad question, *m'sieu'*," Bossuet replied. "Would it not be more to the point to ask whether my daughter would look upon you with favor as a husband?"

"Women are peculiar animals," Baptiste explained. "There are times when they believe they know their own minds and do not. There is a strain in them, I have understood, that calls for a lot of foolishness prior to mating. You have been a married man, and no doubt you know."

"And if it is true?"

"I cannot make pretty speeches, *m'sieu'*, but I can make a woman's living. Once wedded to me, your daughter no doubt would be content. It needs a strong man to tell her what she must do."

"Well?"

"You are a strong man, *m'sieu'*. Were you to tell her she must go to the priest with me, she would prepare instantly for the journey."

"In such a thing as this, I would rather my daughter had her own pleasure," Bossuet said.

"Then I may not have her for wife?"

"If you win her, *m'sieu'*. You cannot win a woman by fighting her with your fists and putting your boot-calks into her

pretty face. And each man, be he of the right sort, wins his own woman, *m'sieu'*. Only a weakling asks another man to aid him."

Baptiste Navet's face flushed darkly and his hands clenched at his sides. But he remembered that this was the superintendent before him, and were he to start an assault every man in the woods would turn upon him.

"Then I can expect no help from you?" he asked, bluntly.

"If you want her, you must win her," Bossuet said. "Let that be understood between us. And at all times you are to remember that she is my daughter and must be treated with the utmost respect."

Then Jacques Bossuet turned away abruptly without another word and told the cook to prepare for the return to the river.

Navet returned to the cutting, and his mood was so ugly that men remained away from his vicinity. He soon worked off his great anger, however, and when time came for the day's work to end, he had decided that Bossuet had spoken the truth. Perhaps it was true that every man must win his woman in his own way. He would have liked to have had the thing settled without botheration, looking upon the business of marriage as no more than that of cutting a tree, all in the day's work. But if a man must pay court, then he would do so, he decided, though it looked foolish to other men. One consolation he had—no man would dare laugh at him.

But a man may not change his character in an instant without becoming ridiculous to those who know him. For Baptiste Navet to be polite and ape the actions and words of a gentleman was for the world to come to an end. Yet he tried.

Being a woman, Annette Bossuet sensed the fact that the man was trying to give the impression that he had changed, and sensed also the reason. She choked back the laughter when Baptiste Navet attempted to talk in calm tones, and tried to handle himself with gentleness. Day followed day in this manner, and Baptiste felt that he was making small progress. Annette Bossuet weighed only a hundred pounds, and surely a big bully had no need to be afraid of her, yet Baptiste feared to ask the question that always was on the tip of his tongue and had to be swallowed and choked back repeatedly. He did not know what a psychological moment was, but he knew he had not encountered one.

At the end of a week, Pierre appeared. The Indian runner had followed swiftly at his heels and finally had overtaken him and urged him to return. Baptiste Navet met him with the news that the brute-breaker had run away, and insinuated that it was through fear of him. The implication was that Baptiste was a better man than Pierre, and the crew almost saw a wonderful fight.

At the end of ten days, two more defeated bullies arrived from up the river. They cursed roundly when they found that their intended prey had flown, and because they were too ashamed to return to their own camps and face the men, they remained at Bossuet's, and hired out, and went into the woods to work, which pleased Bossuet immensely, since all were choice workmen.

But four bullies cannot live in the same camp, unless they have a common object of hatred, without coming to blows sooner or later. There is the question of superiority that must be settled, for it is proper that a realm have only one king, though there may be many pretenders.

Besides Baptiste and Pierre, there were Edouard Norres and Roland Leblanc, each having been a king in his own camp, and it was no more than human that they should spit at one another. Jacques Bossuet knew the situation well, but held his tongue, for talking did no good in such matters.

Two more weeks passed, Louis Grantaire having been gone almost a month now and being only a mere hated memory. There was a deal of rain, which made the woods miserable. And on a certain night great logs were heaped on the fire down by the river, so that the men could dry out their clothing.

Nerves were on edge because of the bad weather; and the odor of steaming clothes is not conducive to peace and contentment. Leblanc, making his way around the fire, knocked Navet's coat into it.

It was an accident, of course, and at any other time and under different conditions would have amounted to nothing. But Baptiste Navet sprang to his feet with an oath on his lips, and rescued the garment from the flames, which Leblanc had failed to do, and hurled a curse after the man who had knocked it into the fire.

Leblanc turned with a snarl upon his lips.

"Such a great man, who chases away a brute-breaker, needs no coat," he said.

"At least the brute-breaker did not break me before he left," Navet replied. "I am not ashamed to face the men of my crew. There are others who cannot say the same."

"Do you refer to me, *m'sieu'?*" demanded Norres, before Leblanc could make a reply, he being slow of wit. The voice of Norres was like ice, and held a warning.

"I refer to any who please to think it so," Baptiste Navet declared. "I choose not my words to suit any newcomer to this camp."

"Words have been eaten before now," Norres told him.

"Not when you held the spoon, *m'sieu'!*" Navet exclaimed.

"Some words mean battle."

"Battle?" Baptiste sneered. "Who here cares to give me battle? Surely not rabbits who run from a so-called brute-breaker!"

It was the necessary phrase. Burning logs and hot ashes flew to the four quarters as Norres hurled himself across the fire. He was a bit quicker than Leblanc. His swinging fist caught Baptiste Navet on the shoulder, so that the man was whirled half-way around; and then they were in each other's arms.

In a flash of time, the crew had formed a great circle, with the two combatants in the middle of it. At first they were voiceless, for this was an unusual battle, and word often had come down the river of the great strength of Edouard Norres. They were loyal to their home camp, of course, and hoped that Baptiste Navet would win for the glory of Bossuet's, though many of them disliked him, yet they knew that the winning would be no easy task.

For a moment the two men strained their muscles, and then Navet threw his adversary from him, and they rushed forward and clashed again. But this time there was no attempt to clinch. Face to face they stood, and began the exchange of blows, their great fists hammering at each other, trying to break through a guard, endeavoring to smash against a sneering mouth.

Both men were marked in that first two minutes of fighting, yet so great was the endurance of each that the marks amounted to nothing. They hammered each other's heads, breasts, backs, and now and then they separated for an instant as if by mutual consent, only to rush forward again and continue the battle.

The blood flowed hot in the veins of the watchers now, and cries began to ring out on the night air. There were shrieks for Baptiste Navet to make an end of it, nor did Edouard Norres lack backers, for the two other bullies Navet had been baiting had small love for him now, not even his old friend Pierre.

Once Navet went down, but he was up before Norres could take advantage of his fall. Twice they fought across the fire, scattering the brands and embers, and not seeming to care that their boots were burned and the bottoms of their pantaloons on fire.

And then they were nearer the bunk-house, for Edouard Norres was giving ground. He had broken a fist, but the men did not know that, and every heavy blow he gave hurt him as much as it did the other man. And after a time he tripped and fell, and Baptiste Navet was upon him.

But he had no chance to appease his wrath by the use of his boot-calks, for Leblanc finally was in action, and he stepped over Norres's prostrate body and faced the victor.

"You answer to me now!" he cried. "You use no boots on the face of my friend. You are scarcely winded, and so we shall fight!"

Baptiste Navet accepted the challenge as quickly as it had been given. Leblanc, in his first great rush, drove him back as far as the fire, and Pierre roared his glee. The men were shrieking and shouting by now,

and the noise carried to the Bossuet cabin, and Jacques Bossuet heard. He got up from his supper-table quickly and hurried down to the fire.

He made no attempt to interfere in the business, of course, for it is the code of the woods that men be allowed to fight their battles to an end, but he watched closely, and questioned a man who stood near him.

Navet was in a rage now, and the stolid Leblanc was fighting carefully and with considerable cunning. Blows thudded against bruised flesh, breath was expelled in grunts. There was no science in this battle, only a display of brute force.

They clinched, and separated again, and for an instant Leblanc had the advantage. Baptiste Navet darted two paces to one side, where the footing was better and the light from the fire would not be in his eyes, and as one of Leblanc's fists crashed against his breast, he fell.

There came a roar of triumphant rage from Leblanc as he charged forward, but Jacques Bossuet was before him and waved him back. Bossuet had noticed the twinge of pain that had crossed Navet's face, and had guessed that all was not well.

"My leg," Navet said, as the superintendent looked down at him, holding Leblanc behind him. "The bone is broken, *m'sieu'*."

Bossuet's examination was swift and left no room for doubt.

"Navet's leg is broken," he said, turning to the others. "This is a delicate business. According to the rules, I should stand back and let the victor work his will with this injured man. But the injury did not come because of the victor's strength, and it is my judgment that the quarrel end now, and be renewed, if it is necessary, after the leg had healed."

"The judgment is good," Leblanc said, and turned away.

There was no doctor, of course, and there was small need for one. Baptiste Navet was carried to the bunk-house, and Jacques Bossuet set the leg and bound it in splints, and assigned one of the Indians to watch the patient for fever. And within the hour Navet was puffing at his pipe and laughing and talking with all of them, and promising what he should do to Leblanc and Edouard Norres and Pierre when his leg was healed.

And in the morning, after the crew had gone into the woods, the brute-breaker returned!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RETURN.

An old Indian, pottering around the huge piles of wood, saw him first, and grunted to himself by way of comment. Jacques Bossuet, walking across the clearing, saw him at almost the same instant.

Louis Grantaire was paddling slowly against the current, and his canoe was low in the water, as if he carried many provisions. He drove it near the shore, where the pull of the water was not so strong, and so came to the place where he had landed that day after his journey through the rapids.

He sprang to ground, and pulled the canoe from the water, and then stood up and glanced around the clearing and the camp.

"Good morning, *m'sieu'!*" he called, when he saw the superintendent.

"Why did you return?" Bossuet asked.

"Your camp pleases me."

"But perhaps your presence in it does not please me. Have you ever taken that into account, *m'sieu'?* You hire out to me as one of my crew, and then you slip away in the night, taking some of my provisions—"

"As to that, here is gold to more than doubly pay you for the provisions I took," Louis Grantaire replied. "It was necessary, I assure you, that I leave as I did. Let us say no more about it."

"No more about it!" sputtered Bossuet. "Do you think I am so lax in discipline? Do you imagine a man may come and go here as he fancies, work when he wills, and rest when he is of that mind? How could I ever get out the logs for M. Pretor?"

"It is a pity," Louis Grantaire observed. "Did not the bullies come, then? I had imagined two or three bullies could do as much work as I could do alone."

"Ah! So you did run away because you were afraid of Baptiste Navet and his friends!"

"Careful, *m'sieu'!* I am not in the habit of allowing the taint of cowardice to cling to my name."

"What else am I to think from your actions?"

"Think what you please, *m'sieu'*, so long as it is not that!"

"Do you care to say where you have been this month?"

"I do not, *m'sieu'*. My business is my own."

"And why have you returned?"

"I like the country."

"And what have you done with Jean the Cripple?" Bossuet demanded suddenly.

"Neither does that concern you, *m'sieu'*, if you force me to say it!"

"Does not concern me? The father of Jean was my close friend, and I knew his mother. Both have passed on now. I hold myself responsible for Jean."

"Were you holding yourself responsible for the boy when you allowed Baptiste Navet to make his life a sorrow? Did you ever wonder whether he had a tender heart? Did you not think him a nuisance at times because of his crooked leg?"

"You have not answered my question, *m'sieu'*. I asked what you have done with the boy."

"I cannot say at present, *m'sieu'*. But I give you my word of honor that he has come to no harm."

"Bah! Your word of honor!"

"I do not like your tone, Jacques Bossuet! Is my honor in question?"

"I must insist that you say what has become of Jean. My daughter grieved when he went away."

"For that, I am indeed sorry. You may say to Mlle. Bossuet for me that the boy is well and happy, and will return some day. I would tell her as much myself, but she has forbidden me to speak to her unless she requests me to do so."

"She is a sensible girl," Bossuet observed.

A serious look came into Louis Grantaire's face then, and he took a step nearer the superintendent.

"I want you to believe me," he said, "when I say that it was necessary for me to leave when I did, and that Jean is in no trouble. And I request, also, that you ask no questions at this time."

"I cannot make the arrangement," Bossuet said. "You must tell me what has become of the boy."

"If I refuse, *m'sieu'?*"

"I shall hold you to account."

"In what manner?"

"We shall see about that later. Because this is the woods, you cannot steal boys and escape the consequences."

Louis Grantaire threw back his head and allowed the laughter to roar from his throat, and Bossuet's face flushed with anger, for he felt sure Grantaire was laughing at him.

"Is it true that you call yourself the brute-breaker?" he asked, presently.

"Yes; it is, *m'sieu'*. I knew that Baptiste Navet had word of it the night I left."

"Is that why you left?"

"I have warned you once about such sentiments, *m'sieu'*. Do not presume too much on your age!" Grantaire thundered.

"And by what right do you go through the woods beating up honest men?"

"Is it not the rule of the woods that a man can fight whom he will to show his mastery? Do you stop brawls at Bossuet? Do you not allow your bully to beat up every newcomer, and is it not always the hope that the bully will be vanquished and a new champion rise in his stead?"

"But you have gone from camp to camp."

"I found only one worthy man in each, and they were not so very worthy. How many bullies are here now, by the way, waiting for a chance at me?"

"There are a few," Bossuet admitted.

"Do you expect me to stand still while they beat me?"

"I expect nothing of the sort, for you are not going to remain here and fight with them."

"How is that, *m'sieu'?*"

"I have no work for you."

"I have food and money, and the woods are broad. I do not need your work, *m'sieu'*."

"You cannot remain here."

"I can go a few feet away, and your authority ceases."

"The land and the timber belong to M. Pretot."

"And I shall leave when M. Pretot tells me to do so, and not before," Grantaire declared.

"Why should you wish to remain?"

"And that, *m'sieu'*, is my personal business."

"I warn you that you shall answer for the kidnaping of Jean the Cripple."

"Thanks for your warning. And I warn you, and your men, that I shall protect myself at all times. Convey that intelligence to Baptiste Navet."

"He lies in his bunk with a broken leg."

"Then there is all the more reason why I should remain near Bossuet. I cannot fight a crippled man."

Grantaire turned back to his canoe, launched it, and paddled on up the river, to turn toward the bank again when he had gone a matter of two hundred yards. There he landed, and began unloading his provisions. He sang as he worked, and Jacques Bossuet could hear him above the roaring of the stream.

Bossuet admitted to himself that he could not understand the man, and was troubled greatly because of Jean the Cripple. There appeared to be some mystery about this self-styled brute-breaker that could not be fathomed at present.

Bossuet walked slowly back across the clearing to his cabin, and the old Indian told other Indians what had happened. Thus it came to the ears of Baptiste Navet as he puffed at his pipe in his bunk and wished that his leg would mend more rapidly.

"Name of a name!" Navet cried. "He has returned, eh, and I am here with a broken leg! May Heaven grant that he remain in the vicinity until I am able to stand up to him! The bullies must keep their hands off; he belongs to me!"

Word of the arrival was carried through the woods to the crew, too, and that afternoon there was not the usual amount of work, because of so much talking. Norres and Pierre and Leblanc all had a score to settle with this man. Each knew he could not hope to settle it alone, and so they decided to join forces. There was no question of being fair—the man had to be punished, crippled, driven from the woods as an example of what happened when the will of bullies was disregarded. For this man to leave unscathed would mean that there was an end of the old order of things.

Jacques Bossuet did not keep the news from Annette, of course, and asked her why she had forbidden Louis Grantaire to speak to her, and was told that the man had been insolent, but not insolent enough to warrant punishment at the hands of her father and his men.

Annette listened with wonder while Jacques Bossuet recited the brute-breaker's words concerning Jean the Cripple, and felt a little fear for the boy.

After a time she went out into the clearing and looked up the boiling river. Louis Grantaire, she found, had built his camp not far back from the stream, and about two hundred yards away. His provisions were unpacked, and his fire was going, and his canoe was turned upside down a short distance from the river, which showed that he was settled for some little time.

Annette debated with herself for some minutes, but her anxiety for the welfare of Jean overcame all other feeling, and finally she walked rapidly along the edge of the woods toward the brute-breaker's camp, being sure that she could not be seen from the house, for she feared that her father would stop her.

Louis Grantaire was busy eating a fish when she appeared before him. She glanced around his camp quickly, and told herself that here was a man used to the woods and its ways: but she tried to have a sneer on her lips when she spoke.

"My father told me that you had returned. Will you let me know what you have done with Jean the Cripple?"

Louis Grantaire did not even look up, but continued eating his fish; and when he had finished he attacked another one.

"I can understand why you ran away," she said, "being afraid of Baptiste Navet, but I cannot understand why you have dared return."

She had the satisfaction of seeing his face flush at that remark, and he raised his head and looked at her straight, and then past her at the woods, and then went on eating his second fish.

"Have you a tongue in your head? Have you lost your wits?" she demanded now. "Is this a new sample of insolence?"

He seemed about to reply, but choked back the words. Annette Bossuet stamped a tiny foot and glared at him, and bit her lip because of her anger. She would have liked to have turned her back upon him and gone away, but she wanted to find out about Jean.

"What did you do with Jean?" she demanded angrily.

Still there was no reply. Louis Grantaire had finished eating the fish, and he got up and walked to the edge of the river and washed his cooking things, and dried them, and hung them up. He hummed as he worked, and acted as if no human being other than himself was within a thousand miles.

"Are you going to answer me?" she cried. "Do you not know that I hate you? Cannot you see that I despise you? Are you going to tell me what has become of Jean?"

One of the Indians came through the woods at that moment, and Louis Grantaire called to him.

"Do you wish some food?"

"Um!"

"Then do as I say. Stand here beside me, and tell this young lady that it grieves me I cannot reply to her questions, but that I am ordered by her not to speak unless she asks it direct."

The Indian gazed from one to the other of them in astonishment, not knowing what to make of it, and wondering why the man did not tell the young squaw so himself.

Annette Bossuet felt her face flushing, and her eyes snapped with anger as she gave Louis Grantaire one straight look, for she knew that he was struggling to keep back the laughter. She threw her head up haughtily and turned away, and without a single backward glance she hurried along the bank of the river toward the clearing. Grantaire and the native watched her go.

"Um!" the Indian said. "Squaw heap mad!"

Louis Grantaire laughed lightly.

"Something seems to tell me that you are right," he acknowledged.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BULLIES DEPART.

ATHIRST for vengeance, Pierre, Norres, and Leblanc came in from the cutting far ahead of the others, having walked swiftly all the way, and hurried to the bunk-house to get confirmation of the rumor of the brute-breaker's return from Baptiste Navet.

Though none would admit it to the others, the return of Louis Grantaire had sent a thrill of anxiety through them all. They were not in the same class as Baptiste Navet; they had met this man, and each one of them had gone down to defeat before him, and had listened to some words of wisdom from him besides.

They remembered, now, what he had told them about getting out of the country. At the time they had been enough fear-stricken to think of nothing else, had not Navet's message recalled them. The brute-breaker's absence had done much to make them forget their fear of him in the last three weeks, but now that he had presented himself on the scene again, they suffered some qualms.

But there was safety in numbers, they conjectured. Louis Grantaire would not be meeting but one of them now. He would be facing combat with at least three; and it would have been four were not Navet stretched in his bunk waiting for his leg to heal. Moreover, they felt no necessity for regarding the courtesies of combat. They were to do away with the brute-breaker—that was all.

It took them only a fraction of an instant to hear from Baptiste's own lips that Grantaire had indeed returned, and in addition he told them how the man had spoken to Jacques Bossuet, and that he was camping a short distance from the clearing, as good as daring any man to send him way.

"And you will not touch him, unless he attempts to leave," Navet ordered. "He is my man. Each of you has stood up to him and been conquered. It is no more than fair that I should have my chance. It is understood?"

"That depends upon how he carries himself," Leblanc growled in reply. "I am for having it over with at once."

"Do you hope to down him and get your boot-calks in his face?" Navet asked. "You did not do it before."

"Even with you in bed, there remain three of us," Norres said.

"What would you do?" Navet demanded.

"It is immaterial; the object is to remove this pest of a man from the woods. A shot from the darkness, a knife in the back—what you will."

"It is not according to the code," Navet said.

"Our future depends upon this man's defeat," Leblanc reminded him.

"Then I ask that you do not touch him now, but watch him. As long as he does not attempt to leave, keep hands off him. He is my man. And when I am upon my feet again I shall face him. If he conquers me, then we shall consider other means."

And so it was arranged, for they felt that Baptiste Navet had some rights in the matter, and the plan was whispered among the men, and arrangements made to watch the brute-breaker day and night, for fear he might take a notion to leave Bossuet.

After the evening meal, they scattered themselves around the fire as usual, and far up the river they saw the yellow pinpoint of the brute-breaker's fire, and knew that he was in camp. While the other men smoked their pipes, Leblanc, Pierre, and Norres explained what they would do to this man, if he downed Baptiste as he had the others, and hinted that they might grow tired of waiting and do it anyway.

It was at this juncture that one of the Indians grunted a warning, and they saw the brute-breaker striding straight toward the fire, coming from the shadows at the edge of the clearing. Breathless, they waited to see the object of his visit. He approached until he stood within the circle of bright light, and they saw that the smile was gone from his face, and that a look of grim determination was in its place. Moreover, the unusual pistol swung against his hip, and his right hand was dropped quite near the butt of it.

He swept the gathering with his eyes, and then spoke.

"Leblanc, come here!" he commanded.

A gasp came from the men nearest him, and there was some movement out of his way. Leblanc hung his head sullenly.

"Come!" the brute-breaker commanded again.

Leblanc raised his head, and they could see that his face was almost purple because of his fury and hatred. He got unsteadily to his feet, and shuffled forward until he was within ten feet of Louis Grantaire.

"Well, *m'sieu'?*" he growled.

"Closer!" Grantaire ordered.

Leblanc growled again, and shrugged his great shoulders, but he stepped closer. And then Louis Grantaire spoke to him in such a low tone that none of the others could hear.

"You will move with more speed after this when I order, or I shall teach you another lesson. What are you doing here at Bossuet?"

"I am at work."

"You came because Baptiste Navet sent word for you to hasten here and help conquer me, did you not? You hoped to set the calks of your boots in my face! Answer me!"

"Baptiste sent word—yes!"

"Leblanc, you should have had sense enough to know better. I met you in your own camp, and I thrashed you soundly, and then I let you go, when I could have crippled you for life without a man holding me to blame. And what did I tell you then, Leblanc?"

"*M'sieu'?*"

"I told you that you were whipped because I had heard of your cruelty to other men. It was your custom to pick upon those who could not defend themselves against you, and beat and cripple them. You used to laugh when they cried out in agony. You even slapped Indian women

and little girls. For that, I beat you. And then I told you to leave this part of the country, did I not? I said that you could not work in any of M. Pretot's camps, because I was not pleased to have you."

"What right have you—" Leblanc began.

"The right of a man who has beaten you, and so by your own code can order you about. If it is necessary for me to teach you another lesson, you'll walk like a crippled dog the remainder of your days. Now get your blankets—and get out!"

"*M'sieu'?*"

"You understood me. If you are not gone by morning, I'll handle you again, Leblanc. Is that understood? And all your bullying friends will not be able to help you. Do not stop to consider them, for you will stand alone. Remember what I did before—and go!"

Now their eyes clashed, for Leblanc had some spirit left, but he could not look into those of the brute-breaker without shivering. He seemed to tremble from head to foot, and he looked down at the ground again, and shuffled his feet. And then he turned slowly away and walked toward the bunk-house without speaking a word to any of the others.

There was some slight commotion near the fire, and Norres sprang to his feet, Pierre beside him. Louis Grantaire looked straight across at them for an instant, and his hand gripped the butt of the pistol that swung at his hip. Many men pretended to glance in another direction at that.

"Norres, come here!"

The brute-breaker's voice rang with anger, and Edouard Norres threw up his head and looked at the man with something of defiance in his manner, but he was trembling for all that, as those nearest him could see.

"Come here, Norres, or I shall come for you!"

Norres sneered openly, as if to show the others that he obeyed this man because it pleased him to do so, and not through any fear of him, and swaggered around the fire until he stood within a pace of the brute-breaker.

"Well, *m'sieu'?*" he asked, insolently.

"Did I not tell you that you were to work at no camp of M. Pretot? And I understand that you are working here!"

"You are not king of the woods," Norres said.

"Assuredly not, but I am your master. If you doubt it, we shall test my mastery now."

His words were loud enough for all to hear, and those about the fire expected Edouard Norres to reply with a blow from one of his great fists. But Norres seemed to shrink and shrivel before the gaze of the other, and made no violent move.

"I beat you once," said Louis Grantaire, "and for a very good reason. You maltreated an infirm man because he objected to your attentions to his daughter. That was unworthy of a woodsman, Norres, and so I taught you your lesson and bade you leave this part of the country. Yet here you are!"

"A man must work."

"You have a canoe, blankets, a rifle. You can travel to some other part of the country. The clean, pure woods shall not be sullied by the presence of such as you. Take your things, and go. If you are at this camp in the morning, I shall call you to account!"

Norres raised his head as if to reply, and his fists twitched at his sides, but after hesitating a moment he turned and walked away. The men scattered around the fire marveled at such a thing. Was the man's blood water, they asked one another? Was it possible a bully could endure an affront like that without giving a blow.

"Pierre!" Louis Grantaire's voice called out now.

"Well?" Pierre sneered.

"Come here!"

"Suppose I do not care to take the trouble?" Pierre said, giving the brute-breaker a black look.

Louis Grantaire was across the fire in one great leap, and he had Pierre by the collar of his shirt, and was shaking him as a terrier shakes a rat. His eyes blazed into those of the bully, who made not the slightest effort to strike.

"Must I teach you yet another lesson?" the brute-breaker asked. "I say to you as

I have said to the others—you must be gone in the morning. You pollute the clean woods while you remain in them. Why did I beat you down and shame you before the men in your own camp, not even giving you the doubtful honor of a calk-mark on the face? Because you ill-treated native men and were not a man where their women were concerned! I say to you, and to all these men here, as I have said to the other bullies — a great man's strength is God-given for good purposes. It should make him a protector of the weak, and not an assailant of them. And those who misuse their strength should be punished. That is my creed. That is why I break brutes."

Pierre crept back a few steps, and those about the fire stirred a bit and looked up at Louis Grantaire.

"It is not seemly that a man should make others call him master," he went on, "but it is necessary at times. When a man misuses his God-given strength he should be shown the error of his ways. Perhaps you wonder concerning my importance that I should take upon myself this lesson-giving. If so, you must wait until another time for your answer. You men would do well to see that these others quit Bossuet. They contaminate you with their presence, for you are honest and hard-working and true men of the woods."

Then Louis Grantaire turned his back, showing he felt not a particle of fear, and walked deep into the shadows, and so disappeared. There were few words spoken until they saw his distant fire flare up, and knew that he was at his camp again and had flung fresh fuel on the embers.

Even then little was said concerning his visit and what had transpired, but many a man sitting near the fire remarked to himself that the brute-breaker had certainly put the fear of the hereafter in the hearts of the bullies, and by that token must be somewhat of a man!

The members of the crew remained away from the bunk-house for the time being, for the bullies had gone there, and they were bad men to face now, when an ill-chosen word might bring forth a blow.

Inside the long, low cabin, three men were gathered around the bunk of Navet.

"You do not understand," Norres said.

"No, *m'sieu'*, and my good friend, you do not understand," added Pierre, shaking his head.

"Are you men?" Baptiste demanded. "Do you run and jump over a stick when this brute-breaker snaps his fingers? Do you roll up your blankets and quit good work and fine grub because he demands it? I certainly cannot understand that."

"The man is not human," Leblanc offered. "Have you ever heard of me refusing to face a man before?"

"Is this one so great, then?" Baptiste sneered.

"Listen, *m'sieu'*, and my very good friend," Pierre put in. "This man has a different way with him. You cannot understand the ignominy of it! It is not that he merely beats one's face and breast and hurls him to the ground; he breaks a man's spirit also. I know, *m'sieu'!* He had me down, and I waited to feel the calks in my face, but he did not grant me that honor. He pulled me upon my feet and made me fight again, and yet again he hurled me to the ground. Repeatedly, *m'sieu'*, he lifted me up and called me baby, and forced me to fight. He did that until I—I, Pierre, who never before turned from a man—was whimpering like a baby and begging him to let me go. And when he did I crept away like a cur and hid myself in the forest. It was the shame of it—the men watched! I could not hold up my head. To look into his eyes now, *m'sieu'*, is to remember the feeling I had then. The man is a devil, and you cannot stand up to him!"

"Pierre speaks the truth," Leblanc declared. "I feel ashamed when this man looks at me."

"And I tremble at sight of him," Norres admitted. "It is something that I cannot understand."

"Then you are going to leave?" sneered Baptiste Navet.

"Yes," they answered.

"By Heaven, I wish this leg of mine was healed. A curse on you, Leblanc, for causing its break! When I am whole again, I shall stand up to this brute-breaker and show him what a man can do. He will get no whimper out of me!"

"You do not understand," Norres said. "And you never will understand until he has broken you."

"He shall have the chance when my leg is healed. You are going to-night?"

"Within five minutes," Leblanc said. "We have arranged it. We cannot remain and face such misery again."

"Ah!" Baptiste gasped.

"So you may never be able, Navet, to stand up to this man. The fool sleeps beside a fire a short distance up the river."

"What is the plan?" Navet asked.

"It is not well for any one of us to know too much, then we will not be able to answer questions later if any are asked. One by one we shall leave the bunk-house. To-morrow morning we shall meet at the head of the rapids deserted of God. If anything happens between now and then, who shall say the name of the man that caused it?"

"It is an excellent plan," Baptiste Navet admitted. "But I would rather that you left this brute-breaker to me. In another week, say, I'll be able to walk."

"It will be another month, *m'sieu'*, and my very good friend, before you can put foot to the ground," Pierre told him. "And can we endure to let this Louis Grantaire exist that long?"

There was no more to be said then, for some of the men began approaching the bunk-house to retire for the night. Leblanc threw his blanket roll over one shoulder and slipped out into the shadows, and so was gone. Pierre waited a few minutes, then followed. Edouard Norres filled and lighted his pipe, puffed at it slowly a few times, gripped Baptiste Navet by the hand, and went the way of the other two. The darkness of the forest swallowed them up.

CHAPTER X.

EVENTS OF THE NIGHT.

LEBLANC plunged into the dense woods at the edge of the clearing and turned away from the river. He adjusted his pack so that it would not hamper him, and held his rifle in the crook of his right arm.

It had just occurred to Leblanc that Louis Grantaire had shamed him before all the men of Bossuet, and it did not soothe his troubled breast or ruffled feelings that he had shamed the other bullies also; he told himself that such a thing could be wiped out only in blood, and that his satisfaction would be greater if he did the thing alone.

It had been understood among them that each man was to have a certain amount of time, and Leblanc, being the first to leave the bunk-house, realized that he would have a couple of hours in which to do what he had planned. At the end of that time, if he had not been successful, Pierre would have a chance, and after Pierre, Norres. If all failed, then they would cease to think of self-protection from the law and would combine forces against the brute-breaker.

Leblanc made his way through the woods like a man who knows and understands the forest. Scarcely any noise did he make, though it was so dark that he could not see a pace before him. He seemed to be able to see at night like a wild beast.

When he was some distance from the river, he turned toward the north and traveled parallel to the stream, and so approached the neighborhood of Louis Grantaire's camp. Opposite it, he turned toward the roaring river again.

And as he journeyed his rage at the man increased, until the lust of open murder filled his soul. He no longer thought of fair play; he thought only of making the brute-breaker pay the price. To his mind there came remembrance of the day when Grantaire had beaten him before the men of his own camp and sent him away, an outcast. He did not trouble to tell himself that he deserved it; such men seldom do. It was not a question of the brute-breaker being in the right; it was only a question of conquering him.

Like a shadow he slipped through the dark woods, and finally came to where he could see the reflection of Grantaire's fire. He was more cautious now, for perhaps the brute-breaker knew the woods well, too, and could detect the presence of a human being even in the silence. He crept through the brush, his rifle held ready, stopping every few feet to listen, and after a time

he reached the crest of a little hillock from where he could see the brute-breaker's camp.

Leblanc wondered at Louis Grantaire for a fool. Did the man believe he was safe because he had shamed the bullies before the men of Bossuet? For he had heaped fuel on his fire until the flames danced feet high in the air and made it as light as day for some distance around his camp, and he was stretched on the ground before the blaze, a picture of peace and contentment.

Leblanc stretched himself on the crest of the hillock and estimated the range, which he took to be a hundred yards. He put the rifle in front of him, and glanced at the distant camp. He shivered a bit through fear, and tried to tell himself that it was not fear of the brute-breaker he felt, but some chagrin at so picking off a defenseless man.

He peered through the sights, but it seemed that his hands trembled and he could not hold the weapon still, and so he cursed softly to himself, and dug rests in the ground, and forced his forearm to be quiet. Once more he glanced through the sights, until the gun was trained on the man before the fire. But it seemed that he was unable to pull the trigger.

He cursed himself again for a weak fool, and tried to think of how the brute-breaker had shamed him, believing that his rage would increase so that he could do this unmanly thing. Once more he looked through the sights—and pulled the trigger.

It seemed to Leblanc that his rifle roared like a great cannon and shattered the silence of the nocturnal forest, sending a million echoes through the woods. It seemed to him that men of law and order in far-away Quebec and Montreal must have heard that shot.

He shivered, and glanced quickly around him into the dark. It was as if he expected an officer to reach out and put hand on his shoulder. But he had seen that body down by the fire jump a short distance from the ground, and he knew that his aim had not failed, and that his shot had gone home.

Fear and dread claimed him for a few minutes, and then he told himself that the brute-breaker was dead and would shame no more bullies, and that there was nothing of which to be afraid. There would be no trouble from the law. Men might make a guess, but they would remain silent. And who was this Louis Grantaire, anyway, but an unknown that perhaps did not have a friend in all the world, and concerning whose disappearance nobody would question?

Leblanc got up, put his pack over his shoulder again, and crept cautiously down the side of the hillock toward the fire. He had a feeling that he wanted to make sure the brute-breaker was dead. If he was, Leblanc wanted to sneer at the dead face contorted with the shock of sudden and unexpected dissolution; and perhaps the soul of Louis Grantaire, hanging about the body, would understand that sneer and Leblanc be avenged the more.

When he had come within fifty yards of the fire, Leblanc stopped. He could see no movement, but he held his rifle ready as he crept on, for he did not wish to find that Louis Grantaire had been playing dead and see him jump up and offer fight.

Seventy-five feet from the fire, he stopped again. For some time he watched, but could detect no move. He began to doubt the wisdom of going nearer. It was enough that the brute-breaker was dead. He would go on to the head of the rapids and wait there for the other bullies.

Having reached this decision, he turned to continue his journey—and looked into the eyes of Louis Grantaire!

Leblanc uttered a cry of fear and dropped rifle and pack. His knees knocked together, his arms trembled, it seemed as if his breath was choking him. He would have turned and fled, but his feet refused to obey the commands of his mind, and also Louis Grantaire put a hand forward and grasped him by the throat.

"So you have been shooting holes into the dummy I left by the fire, *m'sieu'?*" Grantaire asked, a cold threat in his voice.

Leblanc made no answer. He knew now, that it was not a ghost that confronted him, and realized what mistake he had made, and felt he would rather it had been a ghost than the brute-breaker in the flesh.

"Not only are you a bully who mistreats the helpless," said Louis Grantaire, "but also you are now a renegade and no true man of the woods, for you have attempted murder from a distance, without standing up to a man and giving him his chance. That means, also, that you are a coward. What punishment shall I give you?"

Leblanc, crazed with fear now, and remembering how this man had handled him before, tried to break away, but Louis Grantaire merely grasped his throat tighter and jerked him forward. Then he struck, with the palm of his hand, and his fingers cracked again Leblanc's cheek, and the bully went white at the ignominy of it.

"Do you wish to fight me as man to man?" Louis Grantaire demanded.

"N-no, *m'sieu'!*"

"If I let you go, you will hasten on through the forest and not loiter in the vicinity of Bossuet?"

"Yes, *m'sieu'!*"

"You realize that you are to leave this part of the country, that you are not to apply for work at any of the camps controlled by M. Pretot?"

"I understand, *m'sieu'!*"

"Then slink away, and use speed when once you are away from this spot. And to make you remember just what sort of a contemptible thing you are, take these along with you!"

And then Louis Grantaire let go Leblanc's throat, and slapped him first with one hand and then with the other, until Leblanc's head rocked.

"Of course, you will hate me for this," the brute-breaker said, "and I would not have it any other way. It is a compliment for a man to be hated by such as you. Go!"

Leblanc picked up pack and rifle, hung his head, and hurried on through the woods. He heard the brute-breaker's laughter ringing after he had gone.

Pierre heard it, too.

After leaving the bunk-house, Pierre had gone a short distance into the woods, and had stopped beside a creek to wait, according to the arrangement. The bullies had drawn lots to see which would leave first, and so have the first chance, and Pierre still was surly because he had drawn no better than second.

It was understood that he was to wait for the space of two hours, and so he made himself comfortable and allowed his rage against Louis Grantaire to boil. It seemed an age before he heard Leblanc's shot, and it brought him to his feet instantly, listening.

Leblanc had done the work, he supposed, and he could only glory in the fact that the brute-breaker was dead, and not because he had had any part in it. He swung his pack to his shoulders, picked up his rifle, and started on slowly through the dark woods, intending to reach the head of the rapids as soon as possible.

Then it came to him that it might be pleasant to approach Grantaire's camp and be sure that there was a dead body there. After all, he was not certain that the shot had been fired by Leblanc; perhaps it had been fired by the brute-breaker, and Leblanc now was dead because of it.

He hurried as much as he could without making any noise. He had come to within a hundred yards of Grantaire's fire when he heard the brute-breaker laugh.

Pierre knew that ringing laugh, for it was one of victory, of triumph, and he had heard it before. It seemed to freeze the blood in his veins; yet it meant that Leblanc had failed, and that there still was a possible chance for Pierre to have vengeance.

He went forward until he could see the leaping fire, and what he took to be Louis Grantaire stretched beside it. As Leblanc had done, he wondered at the foolhardiness of the man to keep so in the light. He lowered his rifle and glanced through the sights, and then decided that he wanted to get nearer, so that there would be no danger of missing. It had been whispered that Grantaire was swift and sure with the pistol that swung at his hip.

On he went through the woods, getting more toward the river so that the reflection of the flames would not be in his eyes. He knelt and aimed carefully, and his finger touched the trigger, ready to press it and send the bullet on its way.

But the shot never was fired. Two hands came out of the darkness, and one of them grasped the rifle and tore it away, and the other clasped Pierre's throat. He tried to spring to his feet, a sudden fit of fear upon him, but could not.

"So you, too, have turned murderer!" Louis Grantaire's voice came out of the dark.

Pierre struggled to get up, and a strong arm aided him. And then a fist crashed into his face, and he struck out wildly, but seeming to hit nothing except thin air. Repeatedly he felt blows on his face, and on his breast. Then came a severe, ringing slap.

The brute-breaker seized him and pulled him through the brush until they reached a spot where there was some light.

"So you would murder me?" he said.

"Did you not shoot Leblanc?"

"I did not. Leblanc shot at the dummy by the fire, and afterward I found him in the woods. I slapped his face and sent him on his way, as I shall slap yours. Do you want to stand up to me again as man to man?"

Pierre did not. Once before he had known the anguish of it, the deep misery of a broken and defeated man. And in his heart he knew that there was no possibility of beating Louis Grantaire. The man was too strong, and too clever with his fists; and this time Grantaire might not neglect to use his boot-calks.

"On your way!" the brute-breaker exclaimed. "Remember, I can see in the dark. Do not loiter around my camp, nor around Bossuet. Leave the clean woods, for you defile them. Go!"

And Pierre went, vowing vengeance in his heart and knowing at the same time that he did not have the courage to take it, nor the ability. He shouldered his pack, and once he sobbed, and then he found the path that led to the carry around the rapids, and rushed up it as if he had seen a ghost. He did not pretend to understand the feeling that possessed him; he knew only that, for the time being, he wanted to get as far from Louis Grantaire as possible.

Edouard Norres, of course, did not know these things. Crouched in the woods awaiting his turn, he, too, had heard Leblanc's shot, and afterward the brute-breaker's laughter. He puffed at his pipe and wondered whether Leblanc was dead, and whether Pierre, in his turn, had attacked and overcome the brute-breaker, and if he would have a chance himself to even accounts with the man.

When the proper time arrived, he left his place of seclusion and slipped quietly through the woods toward Louis Grantaire's fire. He, too, saw the dummy, and since it did not move, he believed it to be the dead body of Grantaire, and imagined that Pierre had succeeded with the knife where Leblanc had failed with a rifle.

Determined to make sure, he circled the fire, dropped his pack on the ground and approached, his rifle held in readiness. The dummy was in such a position that he could not see the face, and he began to feel sure that here was stretched a dead brute-breaker. He walked closer, until he was within the circle of light cast by the fire.

"Drop the gun!" said a voice behind him.

He whirled around, fear clutching his heart. Louis Grantaire stood within ten feet of him, and his right hand was perilously near the butt of the pistol. Edouard Norres would have liked to have thrown up the rifle and fired, but dared not risk the chance.

"It is an excellent dummy," Grantaire said, smiling a bit and nodding at the figure beside the fire. "You were about to gaze upon my tender remains, eh, *m'sieu'?*"

It came to Edouard Norres suddenly that this man had made away with both Leblanc and Pierre, and that he would be the next. Whereas fear had given Leblanc a momentary paralysis, it gave to Edouard Norres wings. He screeched and whirled around, and darted into the dark. Like a wild thing he ran, expecting to hear the foot-beats of Louis Grantaire behind him, expecting every instant to feel a great hand clutching him by the throat.

Far behind him, Louis Grantaire chuckled, threw more fuel on the fire and hurled the dummy into it, and went back a small

distance into the woods to remain on guard for further trouble.

"So much for that!" he told himself.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LONG WAIT.

BAPTISTE NAVET heard the men talking in the morning, of course, and so he discovered that Louis Grantaire still was at his camp a short distance from the clearing, and he knew that in some manner all the three bullies had failed.

After the men had gone into the woods to do their work, Navet raged to himself, cursed the broken leg that kept him in his bunk, and wondered what had happened to his friend Pierre, and Leblanc and Norres. He began to think that the three bullies were made of inferior stuff, for he could not understand their fear of the brute-breaker, and least of all could he understand their failure to get rid of him.

Bossuet visited him that morning, but the superintendent knew nothing beyond the fact that Louis Grantaire still maintained his camp near the river and certainly was alive, since the Indians had seen him catching fish. He knew nothing concerning the three missing bullies except that the brute-breaker had ordered them away and that they had gone, which angered Jacques Bossuet somewhat, since the bullies were good men in the woods and he was striving that season to make a record cutting.

Louis Grantaire spent the entire day in making his temporary camp a permanent one, erecting a rude shelter to protect him in case there was a high wind or it rained. He caught many fish, and salted some of them away to vary the diet of fresh ones. It was not the correct time of the year to shoot game. It appeared that the brute-breaker had salt meat and meal, tea and sugar, and so he must have gone as far as the nearest settlement during the month he had been away.

He did not approach the fire at Bossuet that night, and none of the men went near his camp. Whether the brute-breaker slept in it or went deep into the woods where he would have security from atttack, the men of Bossuet did not guess; the fact of the matter was that he slept, and soundly, inside his shelter, seeming to know that none of the bullies would approach and attack him.

On the second day, Baptiste Navet had Bossuet move him to an improvised bunk near a window, where he could look out across the clearing and up the river toward the rapids, and from where he could see the brute-breaker going about his camp. All day he raged at his broken leg that kept him from combat. The waiting was difficult for Baptiste Navet.

Early in the afternoon, before Bossuet and the cook returned from the woods with the empty food-wagon, Navet saw Louis Grantaire leave his camp and walk down the river toward the clearing.

He glanced toward Bossuet's cabin, but he continued toward the bunk-house, and Navet managed to get his rifle near him, where he could use it if he had need, yet knowing as he did so that Louis Grantaire would not attack an unarmed man.

The brute-breaker kept on until he stood inside the bunk-house door, blinking because he had come in out of the strong light. When he saw Baptiste Navet, he grinned.

"Do not move, *m'sieu'*, I beg of you," he said. "I was informed that you had broken a leg, and thought perhaps you remained in your bunk. I came to ease your mind concerning your friends. There are no lifeless bodies in the forest, as far as I know. I merely slapped their faces and sent them on their way."

"Were I able to stand on my two feet, *m'sieu'*, there would be one who would not run away," Baptiste said.

"I do not doubt it. You are courageous, *m'sieu'*. No cat fears the fire until he has had his paws burned. A man scoffs at the poisoned ivy until it once has blistered his face and hands. You catch my meaning?"

"It is easy to taunt a man who is on the flat of his back," said Baptiste Navet.

"Pardon, *m'sieu'*. I shall withhold my taunts until you are able to stand—and run."

"*M'sieu'!*"

"Do not grow angry, I beg of you. It

will cause a fever, which you would do well to avoid."

"It seems peculiar to me," said Baptiste, "that you ran away the night before the day I had promised myself to thrash you, and returned the morning after the night I broke my leg. It smacks of cowardice, *m'sieu'*."

"It is easy for a man on the flat of his back to taunt a well one, knowing the well one will not strike a cripple," Grantaire reminded him.

"Now I beg your pardon, *m'sieu*. We shall call it quits. Why are you here to pester me?"

"Because I have overheard certain of the men talking. I understand you are possessed by anxiety for fear I may disappear before you are healed, and so you will not have a chance to come to a clash with me. Anxiety is no fit emotion for a man with a broken leg. I am come to bring you the intelligence that I remain in my camp until you are well. In fact, that is one of my principal reasons for waiting here at Bossuet."

"You have other reasons?"

"Several of them, none of which concern you, *m'sieu'*. Rest easy, I beg of you. When you are healed, you will find me waiting."

With that, he bowed with much ceremony, and was gone before Baptiste Navet could think of a reply.

Navet watched him start across the clearing toward the river, and promised himself that there would be one great fight when his leg was healed. He did not know it, of course, but Louis Grantaire was grinning, and talking to himself.

"Not a bad fellow in some ways, that Navet," he said. "But he is a scoundrel for all that—he attacked a helpless cripple boy. And his heart is the heart of a bully, and I have promised myself to rid M. Pretot's camps of all such."

And then he glanced up and saw that Annette Bossuet had left her father's cabin and was walking so that she would intercept him. The smile left his face, but he could not keep the twinkle from his eyes as he watched her approach. A perfect picture she made, with her black hair and flashing eyes, her trim waist and ankles, her little, perfectly-moulded arms and shoulders. Louis Grantaire felt that he could have taken her into his embrace and crushed the very life out of her in love.

She stopped directly in his path, and he pretended to be glancing across the river.

"*M'sieu'*," she said.

He did not answer, of course, but continued walking along the path, though he wanted to take off his hat and bow, and tell her that he was hers to command.

"*M'sieu!*" she called, louder now, and taking a step toward him.

Still the brute-breaker remained silent, and when he came to her he turned aside a little, and so went around her and continued along the path.

"Wait, *m'sieu!* I wish you to speak to me."

"Ah!" Louis Grantaire whirled as swiftly as a man can and maintain his balance, and his face was wreathed in smiles, and he held his hat in his hand. "You have said it, *mademoiselle*—heaven be praised! 'Tis the sweetest music ever I have heard—your request that I speak with you. I had hoped you would regret your foolish order of some time since."

"It is only because I desire information," she said, trying hard to appear angry. "I wish to know what has become of Jean the Cripple, for I love the boy."

"Then he is, indeed, a fortunate youth, *mademoiselle*."

"You are not answering me."

"I give you my word of honor, *mademoiselle*, that he has come to no harm, and that he shall return one day. I told your father as much. More, I cannot tell you, or any one, at this time. There are certain reasons for it. But, believe me, when I say that you will not regret his absence when once you see him again."

"That is all you have to say, *m'sieu'?*"

"Regarding Jean the Cripple—yes. But there are other topics—"

"Of a truth! Why do you remain near our place when my father will not give you work?"

"I have promised Baptiste Navet to remain here until he is able to face me as man to man."

"So you may beat him? So you may cripple him forever?"

"*Mademoiselle,* I have beaten many strong men, but never have I crippled one yet," Louis Grantaire said, and there was a tone in his voice that made her seem ashamed.

"Pardon, *m'sieu',*" she said. "I have heard, indeed, that you never use the calks of your boots. But why should you take it upon yourself to beat men? Those three bullies — I have heard the story — you whipped them so that they hung their heads for shame. It wrecked their fair manhood, *m'sieu'.* And what do you gain by it?"

"*Mademoiselle,* they deserved what they got. One was a beater of helpless men. Another insulted and wronged Indian women. The third wrecked the fair manhood of natives who could not stand up to him. Such men do not belong in the clean woods, *mademoiselle.*"

"And Baptiste Navet?"

"He misused Jean, did he not? He made the boy's life miserable. He is not as bad as some of the others, *mademoiselle,* but he is of the type. The camp bully must go—I have said it! If two men have their little differences, let them come to blows and settle it in a man's way; but it is wrong for a man to beat up other men when the mood moves him just because it is so that he can. Strength is God-given, and should be used to protect the weak!"

"I think that I understand a little," she said.

"And can we not be friends now, *mademoiselle?* Have you not forgiven me that I danced with you against your will? Did you not, in truth, enjoy the dance?"

Annette Bossuet remembered that she had, and the red flamed into her face as she thought of it, and Grantaire smiled a little. All might have gone well then if Annette had not seen the smile. Was this brute-breaker a fool that he always smiled and laughed at the wrong time when speaking to women? Did Annette but know it, it demonstrated one thing that should have pleased her—it showed that he had been little around women.

But because of the smile she saw, anger flashed into her eyes again, and she gave him a look calculated to freeze the blood in his veins.

"I despise you!" she said.

Then she turned around and hurried back toward the cabin. Louis Grantaire chuckled as he watched her go. When she had disappeared through the door he went on to his camp to stretch himself on the bank of the river there and puff at his pipe and dream.

And so the long wait began, for, though Baptiste Navet's leg mended as swiftly as could be expected, still every day seemed an age with him. Now and then Louis Grantaire would go to the bunk-house at noon and ask Navet how soon he thought the battle could be staged, at which Navet cursed roundly. And frequently he met Mlle. Annette, and had the pleasure of seeing her turn up her little nose at him; and always he laughed.

And then there came a day when an Indian came down the river and had speech with Navet. He bore a message from Pierre, from Leblanc and Edouard Norres, and the gist of the message was that they were determined still to have revenge on the brute-breaker, and were waiting only for Navet's leg to heal so that he could share the sweetness of their revenge. On that same day Grantaire paid him a visit, and Baptiste Navet laughed in his face.

"There shall come a time!" he warned.

And on that same day Grantaire met Annette in the path again, and swept off his hat.

"A good day to you, *mademoiselle,*" he said politely.

"Good day to you, *m'sieu',*" she was fair enough to answer.

"You still are angry with me, *mademoiselle?*"

"Does one get angry at a loon?" she demanded, looking at him frankly, the dimples playing about her cheeks.

Grantaire took the dimples for peace-signs.

"I will try my best not to anger you, if you will give me the courtesy of your company for a short time," he said. "It grows lonesome in my camp. Sometimes at nights I creep to the edge of the clearing and listen to the talk of the men. It is not a pleasure,

I assure you, to be ignored. What have I done to deserve it?"

Annette repeated that question to herself, and replied that she could not think. If it came to that, this man had done nothing except beat bullies who had needed beating. Mlle. Annette could not explain to herself why she had flouted him. The little incident of the dance did not seem cause enough when she considered it now. And she knew what lonesomeness meant. She had not known until recently, but she had felt it now and then the past month.

"If you are very good," she said, "you may sit here on this rock and talk with me for a time—say half an hour."

They sat down side by side and spoke of many things, though she noticed at first that Louis Grantaire spoke little concerning himself. They discussed the forest and the birds and the river and the fish, saying many words that were meaningless in themselves, seemingly pleased and satisfied that they made some sort of a noise. The half-hour passed before they knew it, and another hour followed and passed, and still they talked. Annette Bossuet's face was a delicate glow now, and Louis Grantaire was smiling continually and bending very close to her.

Half a dozen times Annette felt that she should return to her father's cabin, and presently she forgot all about it. She told Louis Grantaire of her life in the woods, and of her dear mother's death, and of how good her father was to her.

From the window of the bunk-house Baptiste Navet witnessed all this, and when Bossuet returned with the food-wagon, Baptiste called to him. The pair down by the river did not hear.

Baptiste Navet made it a great deal worse than it was, naturally, hating the brute-breaker, and being jealous in the bargain. And so Annette and Louis Grantaire suddenly found Jacques Bossuet standing in front of them, his fists on his hips and a look of thunder in his face.

"Annette, go to the cabin!" he commanded. "And you, *m'sieu'*, I have some things to say to you!"

Grantaire got up and aided the girl to her feet, and thus they faced Bossuet. The smiles were gone from the brute-breaker's face, and in the girl's there was a look of wonder. And then she realized how long she had been talking to Grantaire, for she saw that the sun hung low over the river, and her face flamed again, and she turned and ran toward the cabin like a startled fawn.

"Well, *m'sieu'?*" Louis Grantaire said.

"What do you mean by sitting here with my daughter for hours?"

"We were but talking, *m'sieu'*."

"The wise man confounding an innocent girl with guileful phrases, *m'sieu'?*"

"I give your daughter credit for being a good and sweet woman, even though you, being her father, will not," said Louis Grantaire. "Besides, *m'sieu'*, there was nothing wrong in our talk."

"Do not attempt your guileful phrases on me," Bossuet replied. "I was not born yesterday. I have allowed you to camp on the shore of the river when you have no business here—"

"Allowed me! Do you, then, own all these broad acres? Are you *seignior* here?"

"I am the superintendent of this camp, and the broad acres belong to M. Pretot."

"Then let M. Pretot say whether I am welcome."

"As you very well know, M. Pretot is a smug gentleman who sits at his desk in Montreal and gathers in the dollars for which we work. He knows little of what goes on in this locality except as to the log-cutting. I stand in the case of his representative, and my word here is law."

"Indeed, *m'sieu'?* And what is the law?"

"That you pack up and get out, *m'sieu'*. Float your canoe and go down the river, or put it on your back and carry it around the rapids, and so go up the river; I care not in what direction, so long as you go—and to-night."

"Because I have talked to your daughter as a gentleman speaks to a lady?"

"You have my orders, *m'sieu'*, and it is not necessary for me to state my reasons. If you are not gone by sundown, I set my men upon you! I have two score bully boys; I scarcely think you will break all of them at once."

"That is your final word?" Grantaire asked.

"It is."

"Then let me say, *m'sieu'*, that your men will find me at my camp at any time after sunset."

Louis Grantaire whirled around on one heel and started up the narrow path, and he whistled as he went.

"There never was such a man!" Bossuet told himself; but he was determined to carry out his threat.

CHAPTER XII.

A LION UNCHAINED.

IN the cabin Bossuet faced his daughter again. Her face was still flushed, and there was anger in her father's.

"What is the meaning of your long conversation with the stranger?" he demanded.

"There was no special meaning, my father. We spoke of many things."

"Of love?"

"No," she said, her face flaming red, "though I should not have minded very much had he."

"Is this my daughter?" Bossuet cried. "Who is this man? He is a stranger, and his actions are mysterious. What has he done with little Jean? Why does he remain near Bossuet when I have no work for him?"

"I know none of those things, my father, and yet it seems to make little difference."

"If you are thinking of love and of mating, there is Baptiste Navet, a good and strong man who has been here with us for years."

"Baptiste Navet!" she stormed. "He is a bully. He uses his God-given strength to abuse the helpless instead of to protect the weak! I should die before I'd go to the priest with Baptiste Navet! Oh, my father, do not make me do so! By the memory of my mother, do not force me to do this thing!"

"And this Louis Grantaire?"

"I feel that I like him, my father. He is a man to be trusted, I am sure."

"There are many sad girls in the world who have trusted men."

"And many sad men, no doubt, who have trusted women," Annette replied.

"Let us have an end of it," her father said. "I have ordered him away. As for Baptiste Navet, you need not wed him unless it is in your heart."

He said no more then, but went about his business. Evening came, and the men were in from the woods waiting for the night meal, laughing and shouting to one another, and asking Baptiste Navet how the leg was getting.

The great fire was kindled even before they ate; and when they had finished eating, Jacques Bossuet went out into the clearing and looked up the river, to find that Louis Grantaire's fire was blazing, too, and that he was sitting before it. Bossuet went down to his men.

"Attention, bullies!" he said. "You see that man they call the brute-breaker? I have ordered him away—he was to have been gone by sunset. He has disobeyed my order. Go, you, and send him away. I care not how you make him go, so that you do it with your hands. There are to be no firearms used, and no knives, for I would not have a murder in M. Pretot's woods. Go!"

They greeted the command with a cheer, for they were eager to chase the brute-breaker away, not that they held any special animosity for him, but because they felt it would cast credit upon them. Baptiste Navet writhed and cursed in his bunk, thinking they would be successful and that he would not have his clash with this man.

Some of them carried firebrands as they started along the shore of the river. They shouted until the forest rang with the echoes, and boasted loudly, full two score of them sent out to drive one man away.

They saw his fire, and the man sitting before it puffing at his pipe. As they drew nearer they grew quiet, wondering how to approach him, each willing to be of the mob but afraid to lead it.

A hundred feet from him they were now —seventy-five—fifty! And suddenly Louis Grantaire stood to his feet and knocked the ashes out of his pipe deliberately, and faced them, his hands at his sides.

"What is it, children?" he asked.

One of them answered:

"M. Bossuet orders that you leave this part of the country. We have come to see his order carried out."

"How many are there of you? About forty; eh? It is not enough! Go back to your beds, my children."

"Are you going at once, and in peace, or must we force you to go?" their spokesman asked.

"I am not going at once, and you are not going to force me," he replied. "I wish you would run away. I was thinking and you bothered me. In all these broad woods cannot a man find a spot where he may think without annoyance?"

"You must go, *m'sieu'!* If you do not do so willingly, then we shall be forced to wreck your camp and smash your canoe, and perhaps mark your face a bit, and see you on your way."

"Who made that brave speech?" the brute-breaker asked. "I cannot see, for he remains behind in the dark. Let him step forward and say it to my face."

They gathered close together and held consultation for a time, trying to decide just how to do it. Louis Grantaire remained standing before them, watching them carefully.

They decided upon a sudden rush. They turned toward him, and one began to speak, and suddenly the forty hurled themselves forward through the brush.

Louis Grantaire did not await their arrival. His right hand whipped the pistol from the holster, and he fired three times, and rapidly, into the air. The charge stopped as suddenly as it had begun. And in that instant the brute-breaker was among them.

He seized the nearest man, held him above his head for a moment, and then hurled him into the midst of the throng. His pistol spoke again, and this time it kicked up the dirt at another man's feet. Some of those in the rear turned and ran. Those in front, fearful of being deserted and having to face the brute-breaker alone, hesitated one moment longer and then followed. A bullet whistled over their heads. Their speed increased.

Gasping, panting, they reached the clearing where Jacques Bossuet was waiting to receive them. He knew what had happened, and there was rage in his heart.

"Well?" he asked.

"He—would not go!" one of them replied.

It was futile to curse at them. Bossuet felt helpless. He gave them one look that seemed to stamp them cowards, and then he went back to his cabin.

And in the morning Louis Grantaire caught and cooked and ate his fish as though nothing whatever had happened. But he was alert, for all that. All Bossuet had turned against him now. He decided that it would be better, for the time being, to take what sleep he could in the daytime, and be on guard at night when the men were in from the woods.

Again the endless days began to pass. He did not see Annette except from a distance, for she was keeping close to her father's cabin by his order. And he knew that Baptiste Navet was on his feet at last, for he saw him walking with a crutch.

One afternoon he walked slowly along the river until he met Baptiste at the edge of the clearing.

"We have a score to settle, *m'sieu'*," Baptiste said, "and the date of settlement approaches."

"Do you not fear it?" Grantaire asked.

"When I was created they were forgetful, and left fear out of me," Baptiste boasted.

"And put in an overdose of meanness," said the brute-breaker. "It led you to abuse cripples."

"There will be another cripple soon!"

"I do not doubt it. How do you expect to make a living after you are crippled, *m'sieu'?*"

Baptiste spat at him, so great was his anger, and hobbled away on his crutch. For the next five days, while his leg grew strong, he spent his time in cursing the existence of the brute-breaker. He went to the Bossuet cabin often, and tried to speak to Annette, but she always evaded him.

For Annette was in no pleasant mood these days. She watched Louis Grantaire from a distance, and longed to speak to him again, and began to feel he had spoken cor-

rectly when he had said that it might come to love between them. And Baptiste Navet, watching her as closely as he could, sensed her mood and the cause of it and raged.

He began to fear that Annette would leave her father's house for the uncertain camp of the stranger, for he knew women are queer where love is concerned. He rejoiced that his leg was almost as good as new, and told himself that it would be in another week. He had thrown away his crutch, and his limp was gone. It had not been a very bad break.

One morning an Indian came to him out of the forest with the word that the bullies were encamped near the head of the rapids. And Baptiste Navet sent back word that he was healed, and that he would join them the next day but one. He had something to do first, he said.

When Jacques Bossuet returned with the food-wagon that afternoon he found Baptiste waiting.

"I have some things to say," Navet declared. "Some time since I told you that I wanted your daughter for my wife, and you put me off by saying that a man should win his woman. Now she pretends that she does not like me. I think it is because this stranger who calls himself the brute-breaker has turned her against me. There is but one thing to be done—send for the priest and see us married."

"My daughter does not wish it," Jacques Bossuet replied. "I have spoken to her concerning the subject, and she has declared that she will not have you for a husband."

"It is for her father to command!"

"And her father refuses, *m'sieu'*. I shall do nothing to wreck my little daughter's happiness."

"It is foolish to humor a mere woman so, *m'sieu'!* She does not know what is best for her. She will be happy once we are man and wife."

"She has said otherwise, and her decision is final in this matter. I will not urge her, Baptiste Navet."

"It has come to this," Baptiste said, lifting up his chest and trying to speak in an important manner, "that you send for the priest and marry your daughter to me, or I am man of yours no longer!"

"What is this?" Bossuet cried. "You speak so to me? You presume to tell me that I must do thus and so? I am your superintendent! And from this moment you are no man of mine! Get your blankets—and go! You are well. You have been a well man this past week, your leg as strong as ever it was. I think you have refused to admit it since Louis Grantaire still waits for you at the edge of the woods."

"*M'sieu'!*" Baptiste Navet cried in a voice of thunder, his face livid. "By the heaven above, but I shall show you! So I am turned off, am I?"

"For your insolence—yes!"

"Then I say that I shall have my revenge upon you as well as upon this brute-breaker! And I shall have your daughter! I swear it, *m'sieu'!* You have unchained a wild lion by turning me off!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A HUMAN DONKEY.

NOW it happened that the Indian who fetched news to Baptiste Navet that the bullies were camped at the head of the rapids was one of those beaten by Leblanc; and this Indian had seen Leblanc broken by Louis Grantaire, and he was grateful.

He loitered around Bossuet for a time, and soon after Baptiste Navet discovered that he was a man of Bossuet no longer the native appeared suddenly before the brute-breaker as he caught fish from the bank of the river.

For several minutes the Indian sat on a rock and watched the process of fish-catching, and then he grunted in a manner that indicated he wished to speak. Louis Grantaire glanced at him and put aside the fishing-rod. He could tell by that one glance that this was to be a matter of extreme Indian ceremony.

"What does my brother wish?" he asked.

"The strong white man does well to call me brother," the native replied, "for though I am not his brother in blood, yet I am in feeling. The strong white brother has beaten the man who wronged me often. It is true that by giving the beating he de-

heated my own plan to stick a knife in this man's back, yet I have a strong feeling in my breast for my white brother."

Louis Grantaire interpreted that to himself as it was spoken in the native's language, with which he was reasonably familiar.

"Say on!" he ordered.

"I have heard how my white brother went the length and breadth of the land and whipped other strong men who did those things known to be wrong, and I have rejoiced in his victories. My heart has sung at news of each beating. I have longed to smoke a pipe of friendship with my white brother."

"Oh! You want a smoke? Why didn't you say so some minutes ago?" Grantaire demanded.

He handed over a pipe he kept especially for Indians, and his tobacco-pouch, and he loaded his own pipe, and soon they were puffing together. But Grantaire did not pick up the fishing-rod again; he knew that the Indian had something yet to impart. And he knew, also, that the native would speak in his own good time, and after his own manner, and would not be quickened.

"My white brother has many foes," the native said after a time, grunting as he puffed at the pipe.

"Even so," said Grantaire, smiling a bit.

"They gather even now to work a mischief upon him."

"They do; eh? This is indeed news. But I suppose I could not find out just what they are doing."

The Indian took the pipe from his lips and looked at the brute-breaker in amazement.

"That is what I have come to tell my white brother," he said in some disgust. "I supposed my white brother knew that."

"Your white brother is dense at times," replied Grantaire, turning to glance up the river so the other would not see the twinkle in his eyes and take offense. "Say on!"

"Perhaps you speak truth. Often those who are strong in body are not quick in mind. And sometimes it is but the other way. It is so with me."

"I see; you have a nimble mind but are wanting in bodily strength. I understand. Say on!" Grantaire wondered whether the native ever would come to the point.

"At the head of the rapids deserted of God," the Indian said after a few more pulls at the pipe, "there is a small valley which has but one entrance."

"I know the place."

"There is a creek of sparkling water, and many fish, and wood for fires. It is an excellent place for a camp."

"It is," said Grantaire.

"Men are camped there now, white brother. One of them is Pierre, who used to beat me and annoy my women. Another is the giant called Norres. Still another is named Leblanc. They have been camped there for many days. And to-day they sent me with a message to Baptiste Navet here at Bossuet."

"What was the message?"

"That they were ready now to strike at the brute-breaker. This Baptiste Navet sends me back with word that he will join them to-morrow and aid them in doing you a mischief. But I think he will go before."

"How so?"

"He has had certain words with Jacques Bossuet. It appears that this Baptiste Navet wishes the daughter of Bossuet for a squaw, and he demanded her of her father. This Bossuet told him that such a thing could not be. I know not the reason—perhaps because Baptiste Navet has neither ponies nor is a great hunter. However, they had a quarrel, and Jacques Bossuet ordered Baptiste Navet away, saying that he was no longer man of his."

"He went?" Grantaire asked, his heart pounding at his ribs.

"Less than an hour ago he went. He had his blankets and his rifle. I heard him have speech with this Jacques Bossuet, and he said that after the brute-breaker had been broken he would return and take the girl, whether the father wished it or not. That is all, white brother. I have spoken. I go now to carry the answer of this Baptiste Navet to the men at the head of the rapids."

"I thank you for the information you have given me," Grantaire said. "You may keep the pipe; and here is a pouch of tobacco for my red brother."

"I give you thanks. It is good tobacco. My eyes shall be open after I have delivered my message, and perhaps I may earn another pouch of tobacco."

Grantaire watched him go into the woods, and for a time he sat on the rock and looked out over the tumbling, roaring water, thinking deeply. Things had come to a climax, he felt. The long wait was at an end. Either he put down the bullies forever now, else he went down himself. He felt that there were many decisions to be made within the next day or so.

It took an hour's thinking for him to make up his mind regarding the things to be done, and then he noticed that the sun was sinking, and from the clearing came the shouting of Bossuet's men as they came in from the woods.

They had finished the cutting that day, and early in the morning they would move several miles back along the creek, where there was a temporary camp, and there they would remain for some considerable time, Jacques Bossuet dividing his days between them and the home-camp on the river.

Louis Grantaire knew of this, for he had heard the men speaking of it the night before; and he knew that, if what the Indian had said about Baptiste Navet was true, it would be dangerous for Bossuet to be alone at the home-camp with his daughter and only a few Indian servants, and that it would be doubly dangerous for Annette, if he went with his men up the creek to get them settled.

He waited until the men were eating, and then he left his camp and hurried toward the clearing, and went straight to Bossuet's cabin. He knocked on the door, and then stood back a few feet, so that when Bossuet opened it the path of light showed him clearly the identity of his visitor.

"Well, *m'sieu'?*" Bossuet asked coldly.

"A word with you outside, Bossuet."

Bossuet closed the door behind him and approached the brute-breaker warily, half expecting treachery, and telling himself at the same time that the thought was unworthy.

"I have understood," said Grantaire, "that you have discharged Baptiste Navet and sent him away."

"It is true, though I fail to understand how it can be any concern of yours."

"In itself it is not. But this Navet will hold enmity toward you, no doubt, and he is a strong man, and a mean one when aroused, as one can tell by looking into his face. I understand, also, that you move your crew in the morning. Have you thought that your men will be some miles away, and that you will be at the mercy of this Baptiste Navet?"

"I fail to see the danger, *m'sieu'*."

"Name of a name! Are you blind? You have a daughter, have you not? Has not Navet sworn to have her? Shall you go away into the woods and leave her unprotected?"

"I am able to protect those looking to me for protection, and without any assistance from unknowns," Bossuet said. "You will please me if you quit the vicinity of Bossuet."

"They say a donkey is stubborn," Grantaire remarked. "Your ears are not overlong, yet you reveal certain other qualities."

"I do not relish your insulting words."

"Pardon, *m'sieu'!* I am but trying to bring you to a realization of the situation."

"And to ask for the position of protector of my daughter?" Bossuet sneered.

"Not so, *m'sieu'*. Were I to be here tomorrow and the day following, I'd make it my business to afford her protection without as much as asking your leave. I would do the same for any woman."

"Then you are leaving, *m'sieu'?*"

"I am going as far as the head of the rapids deserted of God. The three bullies are encamped there, and they have planned to wipe me off the face of the earth. Instead of awaiting their attack, I go to surprise them. A battle is the better for being over sooner. I suppose I'll have the chance now to meet the redoubtable Baptiste Navet."

"Whatever else I may think of you, at least I admire your courage," Jacques Bossuet said. "Is it not foolhardy to meet four bullies?"

"Perhaps; it also is necessary. I ordered them to leave the clean woods, and they have disobeyed."

"I ordered you to leave Bossuet and you disobeyed."

"That is quite another matter. I have good reasons for remaining in this vicinity, and the bullies have not."

"May I ask your reasons, *m'sieu'?*"

"For one thing, I await the return of Jean the Cripple. I told you that he would return, but you seemed to doubt me. For another, I shall have some small business to transact soon. For the third, *m'sieu'*, I love your daughter."

"*M'sieu'?* You dare say this to me?"

"Why not? I am an honorable man. At least, I do not demand her hand of you, as Baptiste Navet did. I would not have her, or any woman, unless she told me with her own lips that she loved me, and that she wished me for her man."

"It pleases me to have you remain away from my daughter. At the same time, and also, I thank you for having the welfare of mine at heart. Go and fight your bullies, and may you have success. But leave me to attend to mine own affairs. I have no need of your protection, and neither has my Annette."

"I did not mean to offer it. I was merely going to suggest that it might be an excellent thing to keep a part of your men in the vicinity of Bossuet until I have dealt with the bullies."

"I can attend to my own business, *m'sieu'*. My men are engaged to get out logs; they are not soldiers."

"Jacques Bossuet, I apologize to all donkeys, whatever their age or worldly position. Never again shall I call the breed stubborn. I never have seen stubbornness until now!"

With that Louis Grantaire whirled around on one heel and started across the clearing; and he walked briskly until he had arrived at his own camp again.

CHAPTER XIV.

THREE AGAINST ONE.

ANNETTE BOSSUET had heard the entire conversation, not having been beyond putting her small ear against a crack in the door, and now she found herself the prey of conflicting emotions. She felt a little fear because of what Baptiste Navet had threatened, and she felt proud of her father for saying that he could care for himself and his; she was greatly proud of the fact that such a man as the brute-breaker should concern himself about her, though she felt it her woman's right, and she feared for him because of what he intended to do.

But when her father came into the cabin again she was at a corner watching the old squaw wash the dishes, and she had nothing to say. Nor did her father say anything about Louis Grantaire's visit, for he had to go down to the bunk-house and see that everything was ready for an early start in the morning.

That night before she crept into bed Annette Bossuet said a little prayer for the welfare of the brute-breaker, and afterward she remained awake for several hours thinking of him. She never had forgotten her conversation with him, interrupted by her father, and she had grieved because there had been no chance to talk with him again. She regretted that she ever had declared she hated and despised him, for she knew now that the brute-breaker had her heart in his keeping. And he had said to her father that he would wed no woman until he heard from her own lips that she loved him! Annette could feel the words bubbling on the tip of her tongue, but she knew that speaking them would be a difficult task.

Finally she fell asleep, wondering what the brute-breaker was doing. As a matter of fact he was walking slowly through the woods along the roaring river, taking care to be in no haste.

After his return from the Bossuet cabin he had packed his things and then extinguished his fire, being careful to leave not the smallest spark as became a good man of the forest.

He had carried his belongings to a tiny cave near by, and had stored them there, and had hidden his canoe in the tall ferns some distance back from the stream.

Then, with his pistol swinging at his hip and his rifle in the crook of his left arm, he started toward the head of the rapids. He

did not smoke now, for this was war, and he knew the glow of a pipe and the odor of tobacco smoke might bring his enemies down upon him.

Often he stopped to rest, generally sitting on some huge rock and watching the river tumbling in the fitful light of the moon. At times it was as light as day, and at other times the moon went behind a cloud-bank, and it became so dark a man could not see the length of a pace before him.

It was within an hour of dawn when he reached the head of the rapids, though the actual distance was not more than a mile, for he had taken his time. He turned away from the stream and sought the little valley the Indian had mentioned. In reality it was no valley at all, only a deep depression in the earth, about fifty yards wide and twice as long.

There was no way of entrance or exit except one, toward the river, unless a man sought to climb a distance of almost a hundred feet in a fashion almost perpendicular.

Louis Grantaire did not walk in at the entrance. He went around it and reached the crest of a knoll, from which he could see the entire little valley when daylight came. A creek ran through it, and there was thick brush and numbers of trees to furnish cover.

He could see the steady glow of a fire in the distance, and knew that he had found the bullies' camp. He loaded and lighted his pipe now, and puffed at it comfortably, for he was not so much afraid of an enemy creeping upon him and catching him unawares.

The first streak of dawn came into the sky over the forest, and Louis Grantaire got down behind a log in the high ferns, taking a position of much security. He saw the three bullies washing their faces and hands in the creek, and wondered to find that Baptiste Navet had not joined them. He would have to be cautious if Navet was not in the little valley.

It grew lighter, and he could see them plainly. Big Leblanc was oiling a rifle; Pierre was fastening a pack; Edouard Norres was putting a teapot over the fire.

Grantaire rested his rifle against the log, aimed well, and pulled the trigger. The teapot sprang into the air and fell to one side of the fire, a hole through the two sides of it. The three men stood for an instant, as if paralyzed, and then darted for cover.

They had not been able to tell from which direction the shot had come, nor could they guess who had fired it. They did not believe the brute-breaker knew they were near Bossuet. Each in a place of safety in the woods, they waited, breathlessly, watching for a second shot, wondering who was upon them.

"It was that rascal Baptiste Navet," Norres declared. "He has arrived from Bossuet and seeks to frighten us."

"He has cost us a good teapot," said Leblanc.

"I do not think that it was a shot at all," Pierre said.

"What was it, then?" Norres asked.

"Something in the pot exploded, *m'sieu'*. Or maybe there was a cartridge in the fire."

"That is it—there was a cartridge in the fire!" Leblanc said. "If it had been a man shooting at us he would have showed himself by now. We are fear-stricken fools!"

"The brute-breaker—" Norres began.

"Is safe at his camp near Bossuet. Did not the Indian tell us so? It was not the brute-breaker."

Norres, showing more bravery than the others, crept forth and walked once around the fire. He picked up the teapot and regarded the holes in it. He decided that they could not have been made by a cartridge in the fire.

He held it up to show to the others. And again a bullet came from somewhere and struck the teapot, and this time it was dashed from Norres's hands. He dived into the woods, forgetting his rifle.

"It is that fool, Baptiste Navet!" Leblanc declared again. "He is proud of his ability with a long rifle. Let us remain hidden until he comes down the path, and then fire past his head and have some of the amusement ourselves."

So they remained hidden, making not the slightest move for several minutes, and then Leblanc changed his position and so moved

the tall ferns, and had a bullet whistle past his head for his pains.

And then there came a fusillade of bullets, tearing into the high ferns and whistling among the trees, shot following shot with clocklike precision, so that they did not know whether it was one man firing or many men trying to make it appear as one. Neither could they see any smoke and so judge from what direction the shots were coming, for they dared not lift their heads.

The bombardment did not endure for long. And when it ceased they spoke to one another in whispers, asking the meaning of it.

"It is the brute-breaker!" said Norres.

"It is that fool, Baptiste Navet!" Leblanc declared.

For a full hour, then, there was no shooting. They decided that the unknown marksman had given up and gone away, or else feared to show himself. They crept out to the fire, one by one, and after some hesitation ate their breakfast, except that they had no tea. When they had finished they put their packs on their backs and started toward the mouth of the valley.

They had decided to go quite near Louis Grantaire's camp, and there complete their plans as to how they were to overcome him. A rifle shot from a distance seemed the most popular plan. First, they would go to the head of the rapids and await Baptiste Navet.

Still wondering about the unknown marksman, they hurried down the creek toward the mouth of the little valley. No more shots greeted them, and so they decided that it had indeed been Baptiste Navet, and that they would find him waiting when they reached the river.

They came to a giant boulder that obstructed the path, and walked around it. And they saw Louis Grantaire standing beside the creek less than fifty feet away, his rifle in the crook of his left arm, and his right hand caressing the butt of his pistol.

"Do not move!" commanded the brute-breaker. "The first man who attempts to use his rifle dies!"

They were forced to obey him. They had heard certain tales of the man's prowess with a pistol, and did not care to question it just now. Like so many wooden men they stood up against the boulder and looked at him, fear and hatred mingled in their hearts.

"I gave you orders to leave the country!" Louis Grantaire said. "Instead of doing that you remain to plot my death! I have come to punish you!"

None of them dared to make reply. They continued to stare at him, as if hypnotized, wondering what he was about to do, speculating as to whether they would have a chance to conquer him.

"Leblanc, throw your rifle in the creek!" the brute-breaker commanded now. He jerked his pistol out of its holster and held it loosely in his hand, and his eyes seemed to flash fire.

Leblanc gave a gasp that sounded like a sob, hesitated a moment, regarded the brute-breaker's eyes, and threw his new rifle into the creek.

"Now you, Norres!"

"It is a new weapon—"

"Throw it into the creek!"

Norres complied. There was nothing else to be done. He was just far enough away so that they could not rush him without at least one of them going down with a bullet in his body.

"Pierre!"

Pierre had been waiting for the command. His attitude was one of submission, but his brain was seething. He swung his rifle around, as if to toss it into the water, but, instead, he raised the muzzle quickly and fired.

It seemed that Louis Grantaire fired the pistol at the same moment. Pierre's bullet sang into the trees, and that from the pistol struck the bully in the right forearm and broke the bone. The man screeched because of the sudden blow and fell back.

"Let that teach all of you to obey and try no tricks!" Louis Grantaire said. "Now it has come to my mind that I must teach all of you another lesson. I have certain work to do, and I cannot have you loitering around planning to put a bullet through me while I sleep. Is there one among you who wishes to stand up to me?"

None made answer. Each of the three,

even Pierre, whose broken arm left him out of it, remembered what had happened before on such an occasion, and told himself he would rather suffer the tortures of the damned than face such a man!

"But there must be a lesson!" Grantaire said. "There must be something that will assure me you will leave the country."

"I'll leave—I'll leave!" Edouard Norres cried.

It was the breaking point; all of them shouted that they would leave, and that M. Pretot's woods would see them no more.

"Your words are not those of men of honor," Louis Grantaire told them. "You promised once before to leave and did not. There is not one of you but what has said I beat you because good fortune was with me when we fought; all of you have boasted that you are better in the woods than I am. I have a plan regarding the lesson to be taught. You will walk one behind the other and approach me."

They fell into line and walked as he directed, and when they came to the mouth of the little valley he halted them.

"You will march directly to the shore of the river," he said. "I have rifle and pistol, remember, and will fire at the first man who attempts to escape. Straight to the river, where your three canoes are hidden. I found them before daybreak."

It was not a very long distance, and they covered it quickly, the three wondering what was to befall them when the river was reached.

"You have defiled the woods, and it is for the woods to teach you the lesson," said Louis Grantaire then, "—for the woods and the river and all Mother Nature. Also, you have said that you are as good men as I. It is my pleasure that you ride down the rapids deserted of God."

A chorus of shrieks answered him. They knew those rapids and had heard tales of men lost there, and none of them ever had possessed the courage to attempt to run them. And they knew that the brute-breaker had.

They shouted that it was certain death, and he gave them their choice—either they should run the rapids or stand up to him as man to man and take their medicine.

"I'll stand up to you!" Edouard Norres cried.

His voice trembled as he spoke, and he seemed to know what would happen if he carried out his plan, but it was better than running the rapids deserted of God.

Louis Grantaire threw his rifle aside and buckled his pistol-belt closer around his waist.

"It is to be a fair fight!" he announced; and they nodded their heads in assent.

"If a man fights foul he shall answer to me, and my vengeance will be terrible!" the brute-breaker said.

And then Edouard Norres was upon him.

The bully fought as if for life now. He could not hope that Louis Grantaire would refuse to use the calks of his boots if he won this time. Like a maniac he charged and sent Grantaire reeling backward with the mere force of his rush. The other bullies cheered him on.

Edouard Norres fought with twice the desperation that he had that other time when Grantaire was victor. He even surprised the brute-breaker a bit, and he marked his face. And then they were standing toe to toe and exchanging blows that thudded, Norres cursing and Louis Grantaire laughing at him.

Pierre crouched against a clump of brush; Leblanc was on his feet, nearly doubled over, watching the combat, hoping that Norres would get in a telling blow. He looked over at Pierre and nodded his head.

And then, before Grantaire could draw his pistol, the three of them were upon him, trying to bear him to the earth. He struck Pierre on the broken arm, and that bully retreated, whimpering with pain. And the brute-breaker had his two hands filled with the others.

Either was almost a match for him; when they combined forces he was at a disadvantage.

"You are foul!" he cried. "You have used treachery, and I shall punish!"

He hurled Norres from him and struck Leblanc a terrific blow in the face. Pierre was shrieking something, but the others gave him no attention. They wanted to come to a clinch with Louis Grantaire again

before he had time to draw the pistol; and they succeeded.

And Norres grasped the pistol now, but it was knocked from his hand, and he could not leave to regain it, for Leblanc could not handle the brute-breaker alone. Once more Grantaire hurled the pair from him, and made an effort to regain the pistol himself.

And then there was an explosion a few feet behind him, and a hot bullet scraped his cheek, bringing the blood and stinging him. He saw that Pierre had crept to his rifle and had fired the treacherous shot.

He turned madman then. There were three against him, and they fought to kill. They had planned his murder. They were trying their best to accomplish it.

He hurled himself aside and grasped Leblanc by the throat, disregarding Pierre utterly. He shielded his body with that of Leblanc and backed toward the pistol. Edouard Norres rushed in, and Grantaire let Leblanc go for an instant and whirled upon the new foe. He struck the man in the face so that he reeled, and was upon the pistol. He whirled and fired, and Pierre's left arm dangled at the wrist.

"Let us see you fire treacherously now!" Louis Grantaire cried.

He had both pistol and rifle now, but he did not fire at any of them. He drove them before him again down to the river. There he faced them, and turned for a moment to throw rifle and pistol into the stream.

"We stand equal now—no weapons!" he cried. "Three men you are, and you scarce are equal to me! And now I shall break you with my bare hands, and after that I may use the boot-calks! For you are too foul to live unless marked for all men to know! When you have enough—there are the canoes and the rapids!"

And then he was in their midst like a whirlwind, knowing that he would suffer none at the hands of Pierre, but that the other two would use every effort to overcome him. It was a battle for life in truth now. But the two could not stand against his anger.

Back he battered them, first one and then the other, back toward the canoes and the boiling river. It was more than a human could stand. They began whimpering; they put their hands before their faces, and he beat them so. Foot by foot they backed toward the water, where Pierre already was crouching. The punishment was tearing the life out of them.

Mechanically they made one last effort when they reached the shore. For an instant they rallied and showered blows upon the head of the brute-breaker, and he did not even take the trouble to guard them off so eager was he to give blows in exchange. Again he battered them, drove them back, until they were standing with their feet in the water.

"There are the canoes—and the rapids!" he cried.

Leblanc gave a cry of agony and turned. He dashed for a canoe. Edouard Norres ran to another, Louis Grantaire at his heels hammering at him. Pierre, whimpering with pain, sprang into that which Leblanc had seized.

The brute-breaker followed them into the water. They tumbled into their canoes as he rushed upon them, churning the water to spray. He followed until the rush of the current almost sent him down; and then he stopped.

A cry of anguish came to his ears. Already the river had caught the canoes. Already they were whirling down the boiling stream like mad things—the men in them working frantically at their paddles.

Louis Grantaire staggered ashore and looked after them. He reeled because of his weakness and sank upon the ground. He watched the two canoes until they looked as small as bobbing stumps in the water. And then, already somewhat rested, and knowing that he should wash the blood from his face and hands, he got up and turned toward the creek.

And Annette Bossuet came rushing out of the woods toward him!

CHAPTER XV.

READY FOR THE PRIEST.

SHE was stretching out her arms to him, her black hair was hanging down her back, she gasped for breath, and there was terror in her eyes. Louis Grantaire

hurried forward and caught her as she stumbled into his arms.

"You—you are alive!" she cried.

"If it please you, *mademoiselle.*"

"I was afraid I would not find you, or that I would find you dead. I listened at the door last night, and I knew that you were coming here. And so I ran the mile or more through the woods as swiftly as I could to reach you."

"You were afraid for me?" he asked. "And how could you have helped, little one?"

"Afraid for you—yes. But that is not all. You must come back with me—back to Bossuet."

"Why?"

"There is danger at Bossuet. My father went out with the men this morning, and Baptiste Navet has been there. I saw him coming and slipped into the woods, for I fear him, *m'sieu'!* He beat the old squaw because she could not tell where I was hiding. I can hear her screams ringing in my ears yet, *m'sieu'!* Baptiste Navet had been drinking liquor, I think. And then he took a whip and began beating our Indians, and one of them got away and started running through the woods for my father. But he cannot reach Bossuet for a long time.

"I heard Baptiste Navet screaming that he would find me and carry me away, and that he would kill my father and burn all our buildings. I watched as he set fire to the bunk-house, and then I started for you. Will you please help us, *m'sieu'*, even if my father was unkind to you?"

"Help you?" he cried. "Help you, *mademoiselle?* You have but to command. My heart has been filled with love of you these many days."

"And I love you, too," she confessed.

He picked her up in his arms and began running toward the river.

"You know nothing of me," he said. "I may be base."

"Never that, *m'sieu'!*"

"I am an unknown, perhaps a nobody!"

"But I love you!"

"I may be a worthless wretch!"

"Yet I love you!"

He kissed her passionately so that she closed her eyes and nestled close against his breast as he ran, and her face flamed red again, but she was happy. And then he put her down on the ground.

"There is but the one way, *mademoiselle,*" he said. "Baptiste Navet can burn buildings and slay Indians in a short space of time. And your father may return quickly and Navet harm him. So I must, once more, ride the rapids deserted of God. Maybe God does not desert them any longer—who knows?"

"I think that He does not," she said.

"Already have I sent three men down them this day, though they went of their own free will. One more kiss, *mademoiselle,* and then I must go. Rest—and walk back through the woods."

He hurled the remaining canoe into the water and turned for his kiss.

"But I ride with you!" she said. "I am afraid for you to go alone!"

"There is grave danger!"

"I love you, *m'sieu'*. Rather would I undergo danger with you than let you go alone. That is the true wife's part, I have heard."

She blushed at the word. But Louis Grantaire shook his head.

"And maybe, if I go, you will be doubly careful," she said.

And then she had jumped into the canoe!

The water caught it, whirled it around, sent it dashing away from the shore and into the middle of the current.

Annette Bossuet crouched beneath the brute-breaker's feet, holding her hands over her eyes. Now that she was in the midst of the seething water she did not feel so brave, and so she prayed desperately for strength, and that they might win through.

She opened her eyes once and saw frowning rocks seeming to dash past them. The roar of the river was in her ears, a hungry roar like that of a ravenous beast.

Above her, Louis Grantaire worked as never had man worked before. His heart sang because of the love he had won, and yet fear clutched at it now and then. Once he looked ahead, thinking perhaps he might see a black speck that would indicate those who had gone before, but he saw nothing except the churning water and the

spray and the black rocks that threatened destruction.

They were half-way through the peril now. Twice they shipped water, and Annette's dress was drenched. Now they were in the dangerous narrow space where so many men had come to grief. From the corner of his eye Louis Grantaire saw the ruins of a canoe on the shore, and something bulky and dark beside it, and he knew where one of the bullies had gone.

Then a whirlpool caught them, and all his skill could not prevent the canoe making the dizzying journey. But he won out of it, and they dashed on.

He could see Bossuet now, and saw that the bunk-house was burning, and that smoke was pouring from the Bossuet cabin. He saw Indians running toward the woods, and in the center of the clearing was a huge man who waved a firebrand.

He steeled himself for the last fifty yards, narrowly averting disaster half a score of times. He felt Annette clutching at one of his legs. And then he lifted his paddle and stooped to pat her on the head, as he might have a child, and she heard his voice, wonderfully soft:

"God is in the rapids this day, beloved! We have won through!"

She raised her head, and he saw that there were tears on her cheeks and in her eyes, but she smiled for all that. And now Louis Grantaire began paddling swiftly toward the shore. He wanted to land, if possible, before Baptiste Navet saw him.

But Navet whirled around and saw. He shrieked his rage, and ran with his firebrand to a storehouse, as if determined to do all the damage possible before clashing with the brute-breaker. And the heart of Louis Grantaire filled with rage because of this wanton destruction. He drove the canoe to the shore like a madman, helped Annette from it, and charged up the bank without the loss of a second.

"Ho, Baptiste Navet! Ho, bully!" he cried. "Here is your chance! Stand up to me as man to man! Your friends have been whipped and afterward claimed by the rapids. And it is your turn now! Turn, beater of crippled boys! Turn, tormentor of women, scum of the forest, besmircher of the honest woods! Turn and fight—you coward!"

Baptiste Navet dropped the firebrand and roared his rage and came with a rush. Louis Grantaire stopped him with a blow. Liquor had sapped some of Navet's strength and cunning, but had given him a fierce recklessness in their stead; his earlier battle and the strain of running the rapids had undermined Louis Grantaire's prowess; they were about an even match.

Yet not even, either, for out of the corners of his eyes the brute-breaker saw Annette Bossuet kneeling and watching the fight, her face pale through fear for him, and the sight gave him courage.

Now they stood face to face and exchanged blows, both scorning to use a guard or to retreat for better advantage. Louis Grantaire made no sound in this battle, though Navet roared obscene oaths. The Indians crept from the forest to watch, realizing what it meant. On three sides of them crackled the flames Baptiste Navet had started.

Navet was like a madman. He beat Grantaire back a pace. He rushed him, tried to hurl him down, grasped him in his strong arms, but felt them torn away and a great blow in his face. Blood blinded him, but he still had his strength. It began to look as if the brute-breaker had attempted too much this day.

"Louis! Louis!"

The call reached Grantaire's ears, and he knew it was Annette speaking his name for the first time. His heart began to sing again, and the heaviness seemed to leave his arms. He fought Baptiste Navet back to the center of the clearing, gave him two blows for one, picked the man up and hurled him hard upon the ground, and then stood calmly aside and waited until he was upon his feet again. He knew now that he was to be the victor.

And then Baptiste Navet learned what the other bullies had told him and at which he had scoffed—how this man refused to use boot-calks, but had a sterner method; how he forced a man to stand again and again and fight until he had no spirit left and stretched himself on the ground, whimpering like a baby.

Time and time again Louis Grantaire knocked him down, and waited for him to rise; and always there was another shower of blows waiting for him. His face was like a piece of raw beef; his chest was sore; his knuckles were raw and bleeding. When he tried to gain time by remaining on the ground, Louis Grantaire picked him up by the shirt collar, and held him so, and crashed a fist into his face.

"Fight, bully! Fight, coward!" he cried.

Baptiste Navet was a whimpering wretch now. He began to beg for the beating to cease; but Louis Grantaire knew what manner of lesson must be taught a bully. He continued to beat him down, lift him up, force him to try to fight. Navet put his arms before his face and bent forward to protect his breast. He cried and begged for mercy. The boot-calks in the face would have been better than this.

And then there came an end to his punishment for the time being. Louis Grantaire swung his arm with all his strength, his fist caught the bully on the point of the jaw, there was a crack as when a great tree falls—and Baptiste Navet fell like a great tree, stiff and straight, crashed to earth a bruised and beaten and senseless thing!

Grantaire reeled away from him. He scarcely could see. Blood was in his eyes and he was exhausted. But he felt an arm clasp his big waist, and looked down into a proud little face, and heard the voice he loved most of all in the world say:

"I knew you'd do it, Louis! I knew you'd do it!"

And then he sank to the ground, and Annette Bossuet went down on her knees and crooned to him, and called to some of the Indians to fetch water with which to wash his bruised face.

Jacques Bossuet found them so. He came from the forest on one of the mules used to haul the food-wagon, his face white with anger because of the destruction he saw on every side. He sprang to the ground and walked over to them grimly, regarded Navet's senseless body, and then looked at Louis Grantaire and his daughter.

"I told you, *m'sieu'*," the brute-breaker said. "But you were a stubborn donkey!"

"What have you done?" Bossuet cried.

"He has whipped the three bullies and sent them down the rapids, where they went rather than face him more, my father!" Annette said with some pride. "And he came down the rapids with me in the canoe, and has beaten Baptiste Navet, who burned our buildings and threatened violence to me! And now he is exhausted and sore with wounds—and I love him and will be his wife!"

"A woman will have her way!" Jacques Bossuet said, and threw wide his hands in a gesture of resignation. "I must send an Indian for the men; they must rebuild the cabins. As for you, *m'sieu'*, I am truly grateful, and I ask you to treat my daughter well. I shall send for the priest, also."

But there was no need to send for the priest. Around the lower bend of the river there came two canoes, and those at Bossuet looked at them in wonder. Indians were at the paddles, and there were passengers, too. They dashed to the shore and landed.

And first to touch the earth was a man-boy who cried out in joy and ran quickly across the clearing toward Louis Grantaire—a boy who *ran!*

"*M'sieu'! M'sieu'!*" he cried. "Here I am! Here is Jean! This long time I have been wanting to see you, *m'sieu'*, for 'twas you made my leg straight again. I can run—see! I can dance! Now I shall become a man!"

He was upon them then, dancing before them, trying to kiss Louis Grantaire's bruised and battered face, not seeming to notice that there had been a fight.

"It is little Jean!" Annette cried.

"Of course, *mademoiselle!*" the boy replied. "Louis Grantaire sent me to the great city and the doctors healed my leg. All my life I shall thank him! The good priest came up the river with me to see me safely home! I think I have tried him sorely with my impatience!"

"What miracle is this?" Jacques Bossuet asked, looking at all of them in bewilderment.

"A miracle of surgery," the good priest replied.

"It was scarcely a miracle," Grantaire

said, trying to get upon his feet and lift Annette with him. "I thought the boy's leg could be straightened, and I sent him to the city."

And then he stepped forward suddenly, for Baptiste Navet was conscious again and sitting up on the ground.

"Baptiste Navet," he said, "once you made the remark that you would leave the woods when Jean the Cripple had a straight leg. His leg is as good as any boy's now, as you well can see. And you will keep your word, or have another lesson from my hands. Are you as bad as the others? Or are you possessed of a spark of manhood remaining and keep to your word?"

"I keep my word," Navet said. "Within the hour I go down the river!"

And he crawled away to bathe his wounds, and they let him go.

"But I do not understand yet," Bossuet cried. "You say you thought the boy's leg could be straightened—"

"Once I had a mind to become a doctor and studied a bit," Louis Grantaire said. "But something else came up, and I decided the profession could get along very well without me."

"But the money! It costs a fortune to send a boy to a city and engage doctors!"

Louis Grantaire laughed, and the good priest stepped forward.

"Money?" he said. "The man has more than he could spend, more than a score of men could spend. Do you not know his name?"

"Louis Grantaire," said Bossuet.

"Louis Grantaire Pretot," said the good priest. "He is *seignoir* of all these broad acres, and has been for a year, since his father died."

"And I love the woods, and so I gave up trying to be a doctor and took my inheritance," the brute-breaker said. "I came here myself to find whether I had honest superintendents, and to learn many things. I wanted to swing an ax on my own property. And I found that men earning money from me were using their God-given strength to assault the weak instead of protecting them, and I was obliged to correct that. For the green forest must be kept clean, and always will be clean unless men pollute it. I have found you efficient and honest, Jacques Bossuet, and you are to be the general manager of all my camps."

"You — a grand *seignoir!*" Annette gasped, trying to pull away from him.

"To some persons, doubtless," the brute-breaker replied. "But to you I am but the man who is to be your husband; and wives have a way of scolding their husbands, I have been told. Are you ready to begin the scolding, beloved? Here is the priest."

"There will be no scolding—never!" she said, her face flushing once more. "But I am ready for the priest!"

(The end.)

THE FORMULA

BY GRACE G. BOSTWICK

WHY hurry with the crowd that's passing by?
There is no need of all this hue and cry!
Let's just work quietly and do our share,
With mind serene as saint has won from prayer.
Life is no race! That talk's all balderdash,
Fit for the heedless young and overrash.
It is a wise-laid plan of One who knows
Each bump we get; each time we stub our toes
Through overhaste or undue lust or greed.
There's but one way to turn aside the meed
Of moiling fret and failure humans drink,
And that, my friend, is *just be still and think!*

The Last Recruit

by Henry Leverage

IN the argot of the underworld there are three classes of hoboes. There is the bindle-stiff who mouches along with his bindle or bundle and pitches his camp like a Bedouin and silently rolls it up again like an Arab. There is also the yeggman who whiles away his hours between doing time and killing time. Then, there is the dynamiter who sometimes works. He is beyond the pale and as a rule ostracized from the best road society.

Whitey was a dynamiter. This terrible euphonism was fitted to nothing more dangerous than a pair of light-blue eyes, a turned-up nose, freckled, curd-creamy face with a tiny fuzz on chin and lip, and tow-colored hair which cropped out from under a faded green hat like yellow straw from a barn.

He was twenty-two years old and had ridden the rattlers from Allegheny to Yahoo Junction after being paid off at a coal mine with sixty-three dollars and seventeen cents for valiant services rendered in attempting to break up the last coal famine.

Whitey would have been a fixture at the mine and as stable as one of its props if it had not been for the tourist instinct and the nostalgia of the open places. Scientists have it that there is the primate fear in all men's hearts of being buried alive. Perhaps it came from the cave days when one baboon penned the other after removing such trifles as the stone ax, the etching of a bison or a paleolithic sunset done in mosaic, and incidentally the penned one's screeching wife who shed a few tears and then went about her new household duties with throglodytic serenity until the next homebreaker came along.

Whitey had enjoyed the open ride in the side-door Pullman as far as Horseshoe Bend where he picked up with anything but good-luck. A red-headed yegg of positive mien and cast-iron assurance crawled through the car-door at a water-tank, peered out at the brakeman and conductor, then made advances toward Whitey as the car jerked ahead over the Atlantic Divide.

These advances consisted of first, one pint of white-line and then another. These were followed by cigarette and babbling reminiscences wherein each tourist told the other his right name.

Red, despite his candor, had a shifty pair of eyes which no hobo should have trusted. They were bleared and filled with tiny specks of black in the corners. They had been the product of gin-mills and shock-houses. They had fastened once upon the bulge made by the hard-earned sixty-three dollars and seventeen cents which fattened Whitey's right trouser-pocket.

It seemed, from Whitey's recollection afterward, that Red was going to make a "meet" with two very high-class safe blowers who bore the titles of Big Scar and Corky the Goat. These yeggs had sent for Red. They needed Red badly in some undertaking which Red was not overly keen about. The place for the meet was Yahoo Junction.

Whitey went to sleep sometime during the night. His blanket was a newspaper—his pillow his arm and part of the green hat. He dreamed of working in the coal mine. He had followed the vein until it was scarcely an inch thick. Then, miraculously, the mine had opened and let in a pale, opalescent fog which resolved itself into the crack o' dawn and the sad awakening of one who had been drugged, trimmed of his hard-earned wages and abandoned to the mercy of any chance railroad detectives who might investigate the open door.

Red had vanished somewhere along the road. There were the two empty flasks, the cigarette butts and the burned matches to assure Whitey that he had not been dreaming. He moaned, lifted himself from his green hat, sat up and passed his hand across his burning brow. His tongue felt like a door-mat. His eyes ached from the liberal portions of white-line, which is drug-store alcohol and water, mixed.

The heaviest blow of all fell with a crash like a mine roof coming down. The tipple boss had told him to be careful with the money. He had been careful. He had been too careful. Had he bought his own drinks some of the money would have been left. He had taken some from a red-haired stranger who most certainly was an artist with the "shoofly" or the "peter" which is road talk for knock-out drops.

Whitey made a careful search of the car's floor as far as his reeling senses and speck-dotted eyes would permit him. He realized, then, that the matter was settled. He had worked and tried to build himself up and the result was empty pockets and a headache. Therefore, he concluded, he would be a full-fledged hobo and drop the appellation, dynamiter, from his record.

Resolved on this, he leaned against the sheathing at the end of the car and attempted to roll a cigarette. The train was rumbling across a bridge as the paper was glued together with a sticky phlegm which was part of the night's distillate. A whistle sounded as he succeeded in lighting a match and dragging the sulfur and tobacco fumes into his aching lungs. A grinding shriek of brakes announced the yard at Yahoo Junction.

The car wheels clicked over rail joints, then stopped with a lurch. Whitey braced himself, turned and glanced out the open door to where the cold gray dawn had brightened into a flaming red sky. His eyes blinked. They closed again. Two faces, hard, straight-browed and square-jawed, peered in at him with vicious speculation.

"Tecs. Railroad tecs," thought Whitey.

"It's him!" said the nearest figure.

"'Tain't him!" declared the other.

"Sure! Gap his bean, Big Scar."

"Gawan! Didn't Billie th' Dope say th' guy would be called 'Red'? This bo's a washed-blond, Corky."

The one called Corky placed his hands on the car's sill, vaulted inside and stepped up to Whitey with a put-up-your-mitts expression. The other turned and made a crafty survey of the railroad yard.

"Where you from?" asked Corky.

Whitey tried to answer and found his tongue glued to the roof of his mouth. He shielded his face with his hands and attempted to back through the end of the car.

"He's a punk!" snapped Corky. "Say, Big Scar, this ain't th' gay-cat out o' Chi. This guy works!"

"Billie wouldn't send us anything like that," said Big Scar. "Give th' punk a frisk—maybe he's heeled with a smoke-wagon (revolver)."

Corky went over Whitey with the long practice of a lush-roller and a professional poke-getter. He stepped back and turned to Big Scar.

"We're in a hell-of-a-jam! I ain't a goin'—" The voice trailed off into an expressive pause. A hand was extended and a row of blisters exhibited in silent protest. "So help me, Big Scar, I ain't a goin' to dig any more. I'm done. If Red ain't on this rattler he ain't comin'. What d'ye say we take this punk an' split three ways with him? He looks strong. He can dig. I ain't a goin' to wait in this burg till we get a rumble. Wot, with th' soldiers—"

"Easy. Easy, now," came from the open door with deep caution. "Go, easy, Corky. This kid may be all right an' then again he may be a stool. I'll croak him if he don't answer, pretty soon."

Whitey was in the grip of mingled fear and remorse over the loss of his money. He could not answer.

The bulkier of the two yeggs climbed into the car after a second search of the railroad yard. He lunged over to Whitey with his great shoulders shelved forward and his jaw squared to fearsome aggressiveness. His huge hand came out and was thrust under Whitey's chin. A pair of small, steel-pointed eyes bored down and inwardly.

" Say, kid," he threatened, " I got a good notion to wham you one right there." Big Scar toyed with the chin like a dealer with a fragile ornament.

" Please don't," whined Whitey, finding his tongue under the stress of the agony. " Please don't, mister, I ain't done anythin'."

" Wot's your monaker, bo?"

" Whitey Lewis."

" So? Used to know a punk out in Fort Worth named Whitey—Whitey Sniffendecker. D'ye know him?"

Whitey shook his head.

" Well, who do you know?" It is a rule in good road society to exchange the names of acquaintances until a status is established as to just who and what you are. This rule serves in lieu of visiting cards and such formalities as bank references.

" I know Slim Howard," said Whitey, gaining courage. " I was in Frisco with Pete th' Brute. Then there's—there's Canada Blacky, an' Boston Charlie, an' Mike th' Bite what I traveled with from Denver to Chi. Then there's—"

Big Scar turned and winked sagely at Corky.

" Some kid, eh? He knows all th' blanket stiffs an' panhandlers in th' country. I'll bet he never souped a goopher (blew a safe)."

Big Scar turned and narrowed his eyes.

" Say, kid," he said, " say, bo, did you ever pull off a big trick—a P. O. job or a country jug (post-office or bank)?"

Whitey shook his head and blinked.

" One of th' real old time touches? Soup, string and bluey! comes th' big door, an' bluey! come th' day-door, an' zowie! goes the keister (inner box). An' then, kid, did you ever run your mitts through th' kale? Th' clinkin' siller an' th' yellow boys an' th' bindles of long green. Oh, say, kid, it *is* th' life—like to try it?"

Big Scar's voice had grown softly confidential. He had held a warning hand back toward the leaning Corky.

" I'm game," said Whitey huskily.

" What d'ye mean? D'ye think I would do anythin' like that? Why, bo, you insult me."

Big Scar jabbed his hand toward Corky who had crept forward.

" You insult me, kid. I'm only foolin'. I wouldn't steal a penny from a blind man. Oh, no! I'm a businessman—I am, kid."

Whitey was properly impressed.

" Surest thing you know. Own a shootin' gallery over in Yahoo Centers. A shootin' gallery, kid, where th' rookies come in an' get their peepers sharpened for th' square-heads an' th' Dutchmen over th' Big Drink."

" He does," said Corky glancing at Whitey's strong back with a calculating squint.

" Yep, kid. What d'ye say? Want to go to work diggin' for us?" Big Scar turned to Corky. " This gentleman," he said, " is my partner in th' business. Business! We want a strong young lad to help dig a cellar. Ever dig, kid?"

Big Scar worked his gorillalike brows up and down as Whitey held out a brace of calloused hands, indurated by a pick-handle.

" Poipe 'em!" blurted Corky the Goat.

Big Scar coughed deeply.

" It's all right. It's all right t' work," he said. " Th' kid's all right. Sure he's all right. Ain't you, kid?"

Whitey glanced into the face of the big yegg like a lamb in the presence of a timber wolf.

" I ain't always worked," he apologized.

" No—well, my boy, my boy, oh, my boy, you won't always have to work. How'd you like to have more kale 'an you c'u'd carry? A box car full ov nice crinkling bills? How'd you like it, kid?"

" There ain't no such thing."

" Ah, my boy! You're dead, bang wrong! You want to go after money where

th' money is. Th' trouble wid most people is they're lookin' for cush where there ain't no cush. You wouldn't scout around a jail for an honest man—would you, kid? Well, that's what I'm gettin' at. Right down to bed-rock!"

"An' it's damn hard, too," injected Corky rubbing his arm. "Didn't I—"

"Easy—easy, pal. Wot I was sayin' to th' kid is straight talk between two gents ov th' road—as it were. We were talkin' about kale, weren't we, kid?"

Whitey nodded his head.

"I had sixty-three bucks—" he began.

Big Scar held up a hamlike hand.

"Easy, kid. Go easy. Why that ain't cigarette money to wot you're goin' to have pretty soon. Where'd you get the change?"

"Tunnel muckin' in a coal—"

"There!" said the yegg. "There you go—a diggin' in a coal mine for money. Why, kid, you want to dig in a gold mine when you want cush! A real, gold mine!"

"That's right," chimed in Corky.

Whitey glanced out the open door of the box car. He blinked his sadly battered eyes.

"Are there any gold mines in this State?" he asked ingenuously.

"Is there any gold mines?" throated Big Scar. "Say, kid, on th' dead, there's nothin' else. There's a regular Homestake near Phila. Some call it th' Mint. Then there's mines to burn at Pittsburgh. Why, there's millionaires an' mugs there just bustin' wid kale. It's a cinch, kid, this State! It's full ov jugs an' cribs (strong-boxes)."

Whitey began to see the thin edge of a light. He braced his shoulders and then scratched his head. Big Scar watched the seed he had sown grow in the expression of the youth's face. It hardened a trifle. The eyes narrowed in swollen-lidded calculation. The old road-glitter was back in his frowzled stare.

"You ain't kiddin'?" asked Whitey.

"Take it from me!" growled Big Scar. "Take it from me, kid, an' you're one fine kid, an' I'm proud ov you, an'—"

Corky had twisted his head upon his shoulders and then leaned with one huge ear turned toward the open door.

"Cluck! Cluck!" he signaled. "We better lambster! There's somebody comin'! It may be a rumble, Big Scar. Maybe a railroad dick!"

"As I was a sayin'," Big Scar almost shouted. "As it looks to me, boys, we can just about get th' target in here. Perhaps a little long, but we'll try. Now you, George, hurry up and get over to town and tell Smith to tell Jones that I'm waiting. Tell him to hurry with the target. How far would you say it was from this corner ov the car to th' other? Thirty-eight feet, eh? That 'll be all right, all right."

Big Scar moved to the door, dragging Whitey with him. Corky had sprung out. He peered under the rods. He straightened.

"Only a bunk-flop," he said.

Big Scar assumed his normal tone. A bunk-flop was a Pullman-car porter.

"Come on, kid," the yegg suggested, as Whitey hesitated at the car door. "Come on, hook up wid us. We split three ways. You'll have a bolt-ov-scratch (roll of bills) bigger round than a loco boiler. You'll have swell broads (girls) an' a smokemobile (automobile). You'll have wealthy water an' a place in th' jungles so big you'll forget to dust th' rooms. Wot's th' use ov bein' a keyhole-whistler an' a tomato-can vag? Come, kid, an' your old pal, Big Scar, will take care ov you. We got th' burg right an' a bunch-ov-speed (hand-car) trigged for a swell getaway. Wot d'ye say, Whitey?"

Whitey hesitated as Big Scar sprang to the ground and glanced up.

"Wot d'ye say, kid? Are you wid us?"

There was an evil glitter in the big yegg's eyes despite the velvet of his tones. Whitey noticed that his fists were clinched. He also caught the sinister glint of a coupling-pin behind Corky the Goat's right coat-tail.

"I guess I'll come along," he said weakly. "I ain't right on any of th' heavy work, but I'm good at running an' diggin', pals."

"Mitt me!" grunted Big Scar. "Mitt me, kid! You're a frien' ov mine!" Big Scar motioned for Corky to drop the pin. "You're a frien' ov mine, kid. Take it

from me, you are! Come on. Keep your mouth shut an' your lamps wide open. Say nothin' to nobody. Come on, bo! We'll blow while th' blowin' is good. Right over to th' main stem of th' burg an' then down to th' Centers. There's a pig-iron dump (hardware store), an' a seven-up dump (general store), an' a country jay (bank), an' a P. O. (post-office), an' a lot ov beaneries an' barrel-houses (saloons). You'll like th' place."

Whitey sprang to the cinders, rubbed his eyes, and started between Big Scar and Corky. The way led across the tracks.

They climbed a fence, dropped to a meadow, crossed a brook, then followed in Indian file as Big Scar struck along a lane, down through a country road till it widened into macadam and a lovely vista of snug-ensconced residences whose chimneys were just beginning to pour their veils of smoke up into the morning air.

"Right this way, kid," said Big Scar. "Follow me, an' watch your step. That's right. There's th' town hall where th' pollies do their grafting. That's th' fire-house. That's th' opera house—th' one wid th' billboards an' th' 'Escaped from Sing Sing' movie pictures. An', kid, that's th' band-house over there—th' county jail where th' little thieves go. Forget it. I bet they got Java an' molasses for breakfast, eh, Corky?"

"How should I know?" snapped Corky, properly indignant.

Big Scar was in a soft mood. He had found the answer to considerable thought. Whitey would do the work and he and Corky could look on and direct. It was a matter that had been worrying him for some time.

He led the way over the last block of the distance to the shooting-gallery which was upon one of four corners that graced the town of Yahoo Centers. A fountain was midway between these corners. Upon the stone of this fountain was graven: "Faith, Hope, and Charity." The fountain was dry, however, and had been stopped with dust for many a year.

"Duck!" snapped Big Scar into Whitey's grimy ear. "Duck between these two seven-up dumps. One's general notions an' th' tother's a five-an'-ten-cent joint. Now, right this way to th' back of th' target-range. There's a booby-hatch that leads to th' cellar where you can kip (sleep). Here's th' door to th' back part behind th' targets an' th' clay pipes, an' here we are in front. Wot d'ye think ov it, kid?"

Corky unhinged the front blinds, which were also the outside shelves for the guns and cartridges. The light revealed a hastily erected shooting-gallery of twenty-yards range which had been formed out of a motion-picture theater.

Whitey blinked, climbed over a shelf at the front and studied the outside of the gallery. A sign was over the top. It read:

YAHOO SPORTING RANGE AND SHOOTING GALLERY

"You're suppose to be a boy we hired to paint targets," said Big Scar, leaning out and squinting his eyes across the square. Whitey followed the cue and turned. A brick and stone bank reared there. Its windows were barred like a jail's. Its front portico faced the gallery. The doors were bronzed and closed.

"Nix on that!" hissed Big Scar. "We'll get a rumble! Come in here or I'll kick you all th' way back to th' John O'Brien! We'll send you out ov this burg in a wooden overcoat."

Whitey hastily scrambled inside the shooting-gallery. A John O'Brien was a freight-car, and he had seen enough of them to last him the days of his life.

"Where's th' people who live in this town?" he asked by way of palliation.

"Since th' soldiers came, kid—since the cantonment's been built up th' main drag a piece, nobody gets up till reveille. Ta-tata! Tatata! Are you hip?"

Whitey felt of his stomach.

"When do we get eats?" he asked.

"Soon as the beanery opens. We better go solo. Feed up an' then we'll show you about that—cellar. D'ye want to be paid by th' foot or by th' job?"

"How much a foot?"

"A hundred dollars, when you're finished. It's better'n muckin' coal, kid."

"A hundred dollars a foot?"

"Sure. You collect at th' finish ov th' job—cellar." Big Scar kicked Corky on the shin.

"Ain't that right?" he asked.

"Ought to make it a hundred an' ten," suggested Corky with a profound wink at Whitey's open-face stare of amazement.

"No," said Big Scar with final weight. "A hundred plunks is enough—considerin' everythin'. Kid, there's th' reveille—Ta-tata! Tatata! Tatata! He can't get 'em up—he can't get 'em up—he can't get 'em up a' ta—ll."

"Are they many soldiers?" asked Whitey with wistful interest.

"No soldiers—but th' makin's. Fresh from the plow. There's a recruitin' station in th' burg—up at th' tother end ov th' stem. They're so busy shootin' on th' ranges they don't bother us a' ta—ll. This is just a stall." Big Scar pointed at the targets.

"I'm hungry," said Whitey.

"Beat it for th' beanery. It's open now. It's down th' stem a piece. Here's—here's thirty megs (cents) on account. Don't eat too much."

Whitey was off like a shell leaving a French "75." Big Scar leaned far out and watched him. He turned then and thrust his lips close up to Corky's huge right ear.

"Put a gat in your kick. Get some candles. Grab th' kid when he comes back an' introduce him to th' pick. Stay right wid him. Tell him we're diggin' a hole to bury th' German spies they shoot up at th' fort every mornin' fer exercise. Tell him anythin', but keep him humpin'. We ought to tap th' jug by three—say four days. That'll be Saturday afternoon, all day Sunday, all day Monday on account ov th' holiday. Some swell getaway. We ought to be in Chi wid our boots under th' mahogany by that time. Eh, bo?"

Corky was a little runt with a head like Gladstone's and a mouth that extended from ear to ear. He grinned with a sardonic snicker as he ran his hand under the tail of his coat and touched the black butt of a short-barreled automatic.

"I'm heeled for anythin'," he said. "I'll make that punk dig like as if he was in a trench under fire. He'll hate that pick worst than I do before he's finished. You ain't a goin' to let him on th' swag at the finish, are you?"

"Leave that tu me!" rumbled Big Scar. "Jes' leave— Here he comes full ov eats. Make him duck under an' keep that tow-head ov his out ov sight. Get busy, pal. Th' world is ours—wid trimmin's."

Corky waited until Whitey had climbed over the front rail. Then he gripped his sleeve with a gentle pinch.

"This way, brother," he said. "Follow me an' you'll wear blue diamonds an' red rubies. Right this way! Through th' little hall here, where we get some candles; now through th' back room. Now down this booby-hatch. See! Look out for your bean. There you are—what more would you want than this?"

Whitey blinked, picked his matted eyelids apart with his fingers, then blinked again. The cellar of the shooting-gallery, which had formerly been the furnace-room of the motion-picture house, was heaped in one corner with fresh-turned earth. A great hole showed in the center like an ugly scar. It extended to bedrock. A pick and shovel rested in the bottom. Whitey leaned over this excavation and peered down.

"It's all right," insinuated Corky, lighting a candle and thrusting it in the top of a beer-bottle. "It's all right, brother. Just hop down, peel off your benny, and start right in. That's Mr. Pick down there, an' that's his friend, Mr. Shovel. Remember, a hundred bucks a foot. That goes, too. For Sweeney," he added to himself.

Big Scar kept above the cellar and attended to the duties connected with the shooting-gallery. It would not do to leave the place deserted even for a minute. Soldiers, townsmen, boys, and curious children passed along the sidewalk. None were lured to try "three shots fer five, an' a box ov cigars if you hit th' little bull's eye." The big yegg's voice was not insistent. He leaned against the front partition and acted the rôle of lookout for the work going on below, sounds of which gladdened his ears beyond measure of recording.

The bank, with its Corinthian columns and bronze doors, stained slightly green from wind and weather, began to take on

life and animation. The clerks arrived; the porter appeared and swept the sidewalk and polished up the First National sign. A girl in olive-drab tripped in, came out with the cashier, and, assisted by that elegant figure, succeeded in tacking up three Liberty Loan signs just under the grated windows.

Big Scar reached backward, dropped the clip of cartridges he held in his hand, and picked from an open box a scabby cigar whose wrapper had once been the pride of a cabbage-patch. The yegg struck a match upon the butt of a .22-caliber target-rifle, held it out between fingers of steel, and squinted through lowered lids as he drew in the first whiff of smoke.

Over the macadam, and diagonally across from the gallery, a portly, smug figure came strolling with the air of twelve per cent and foreclosed mortgages. He was the president of the Yahoo Centers First National Bank. He was going to work—shaving notes.

Big Scar's eyes bored the distance like two blue-chip drills. His jaws squared. Great knobs of gristle formed at their sockets. The cigar was pointed like the barrel of a Colt's .38. It followed the figure of the banker along the sidewalk, across the street, and up and into the bank. Then it recoiled back into Big Scar's mouth.

"It's a shame to take his money," commented the yegg. "He works so hard for it. Th' poor rich man!"

Big Scar heard the bell in the old church tower strike twelve slow strokes at noon. He squared his shoulders, laid down a cigar, and stamped three times upon the wood floor of the gallery. An answering tapping followed. Corky appeared, his knees covered with red dirt which he brushed off before rising to his full height in the front of the building.

"How they comin'?" asked Big Scar.

"Comin'? They're goin'—a foot a minute. Th' kid's a bunch-of-speed with a pick. He's a goopher. A ground-hog! It was all I could do to get th' dirt out of th' way. He's still pluggin' strong!"

"Ballyhoo here, an' I'll take a gap."

Big Scar lurched toward the rear of the gallery, ducked under the top of the scuttle at the back, and blinked down into the raw pit out of which dirt was flying like snow from a snow-plow.

The Yegg rested his hands on the edge, swung over and dropped to the bottom of the excavation. Whitey had advanced for another onslaught upon the sub-soil of Yahoo Centers. He had tunneled at least twenty feet from the original mark. Big Scar whistled, then allowed an oath to slide from his lips as a full shovel of dirt came back and struck him in the pit of the stomach.

"Hei, you! Easy, kid. Where you goin'?"

Whitey dropped the shovel, wiped his forehead with his sleeve, and backed to the pit's edge.

"You said a hundred dollars a foot," he suggested. "I'd like to measure what I've done already."

"About two thousand doll— Oh, boy! oh, boy! but you're goin' crooked. See that hump? We'll miss th' ban—th' place we're aimin' for. We'll hit th' kirk if we don't look out!"

"How far is th—"

"Yes—how far is th— Well, kid, I don't know. I left that to Corky. I'd say seventy feet. I guess we better measure. Eh?"

"Seventy times a hundred. That's seven thousan—"

"Come out ov it! Come on! We'll have to have a meet over this. Corky might have handed me a bum steer. I'd hate to miss—y' know."

Whitey climbed up the crumbling side of the pit and stood by Big Scar's side.

A bugle sounded sharp and clear. A platoon of infantry went by. They were followed by an armored car. Then sounded a sharp order which floated around the building and came down through the scuttle:

"Column right! By fours!"

Whitey's eyes gleamed. He lifted the shovel which Corky had been using and rested it on his right shoulder.

Big Scar lowered his brows at this maneuver.

"Put it down!" he grunted. "Come

on, my boy, come on. Come on up an' can th' war stuff. We gotta do some measuring."

An hour later the idle population of Yahoo Centers was treated to the perfectly natural sight of three surveyors laying out an imaginary line along the main street in the vicinity of the bank.

Big Scar had hidden a few of his facial blemishes by means of goggles and a slouch hat. He was followed by Corky carrying pegs and a mallet. The rear of the parade staggered under the burden of a pick and shovel, a tripod made out of a camera-stand, purchased from a general store; a false transit with a gun-barrel sight; a plumbob improvised from a top and tin-foil; a roll of blue-prints stolen from a house in process of erection, and a snaky coil of flat wire which tangled at times beneath his dragging feet.

"Hei, you Mike!" shouted Big Scar. "Set 'er up there! Right there! We'll run a line from X, 57, P.Y.B. Bring me the prints, George."

George was Corky. He stepped to Whitey's side, grunted viciously as the pick dropped on his toes, snatched at the blue-prints, and hurried toward Big Scar, who was keenly eying the curb at the bank and the great steel vault through the open doors.

He took the prints, slapped them with the back of his hand, and exclaimed:

"X, 57! P.M.B.C.Q.—northwest by east, a quarter south! Make it 16 plus A square—forty rods from dead center!"

Corky hurried toward Whitey and assisted him in setting up the wabbly tripod. He squinted through the gun-barrel as Big Scar waved a huge hand to the right. "Three degrees south," shouted the yegg. "P.M.B.D.T! Got that? More! More! Nine chains an' sixteen links. Put that down!"

"Well, boys, what are you surveying?"

The question came from the steps of the bank. Big Scar lowered his arm and turned. The president stood eying him with benevolent concern. Land values in Yahoo Centers might be affected.

"New sewer," said Big Scar. "County sewer," he hastened to add.

"Sewer?"

"Yep, boss! Government's ordered a line from here to—an' back. Can't say much. Against instructions."

"Well! Well! Well!"

Big Scar spread out the drawings and eyed one corner of the first sheet. He glanced from this to the curb in front of the bank.

"We're a little off here—three inches," he said. "Wot's under here?"

"That? Why, my good man, that's the corner-stone of the bank. You see, there's a subcellar down there, and we put the corner-stone at the exact curb. My wife's picture is in it, an' my boy's an'—"

"Ah! That's it!" Big Scar said. "Th' corner-stone threw us off two—three inches. Must be heavy?"

"Pretty big. Settled a little bit, eh? I always said there wasn't enough trap-rock in the foundation. By the way, I got the old drawings of the bank inside somewhere. They might be of interest?"

Big Scar turned and spat to the gutter. He swung and touched his slouch hat with two fingers.

"They certainly would, boss. I might step in with you an' look 'em over. Save you bringin' 'em out. These blue-prints I got ain't much. We've found three variations between here an' th' railroad-crossing. One, X.A.C.P. square, was out seven-sixteenth ov a fraction of a hercuemeter an' over four hieronomous pendexters south of th' true meridian."

"As much as that?" said the banker, as he drew Big Scar into the bank.

They reappeared within ten minutes. Big Scar was tapping a drawing with the back of his right hand, and drinking in the details of the subcellar and the vault with greed-lustered eyes.

"George!" he called. "Come here, George, with the chain—no, th' tape. Put it right on P.M.B.C.Q. That's it! Would you mind holding it?" This last was to the bending banker.

"Now," said Big Scar. "Yes, right there. Now, George, run a line from where he's holding it to the corner over there by th'—what is that?" Big Scar squinted, then shaded his eyes. "Oh, yes—it's a

shootin'-gallery. Right over there, George. Be sure an' get th' square of th' hypotonoose subjacted to th' swine ov th' perpenspectrum an' th' slantindicular even wid th' projectory."

"It's a wonderful thing—how you can do it," said the banker.

"It is," smiled Big Scar with soft lips and eyes as hard as flint.

The western sun-rays, dropping below the tree-tops and the white church spires of Yahoo Centers, glided in through the open cellar-scuttle, along the concreted floor, and illumined the pit out of which Whitey, again on the job, was tossing up shovelfuls of earth like a coolie on a contract.

Corky had renewed the candle and handed it down. Its feeble gleam served to show a subway running in the general direction of the fountain and the bank. Its roof was no more than six feet under the passing vehicles and autos on the main pike.

Whitey stooped and made his way to the breast of the excavation. This he attacked with short-swung strokes that brought the earth down in a red slide which piled about his feet. He trimmed the corners and the edges. He had turned toward the pit over which Corky was leaning on the handle of a shovel, when there sounded a hollow booming above his frowsy head. A bugler's high note struck through the gallery and down to him. He paused with one foot on a lump of dirt. He blinked. He canted his head and raised his ear toward the roof of the tunnel. A good-sized rat could have popped into his gaping mouth.

Overhead, far away at the first, then coming nearer, was the measured tramp of marching men. Their footsteps reverberated and echoed within the tunnel. Each file of recruits struck the hard pave with a resounding clank.

Their number seemed endless. Thousands upon thousands passed on their way to the great cantonment. Whitey breathed with deep intakes of breath. The timpanum of his ear throbbed like the measured beat of a far-off drum. The sound died away. It came again as another battalion reached the line between the gallery and the fountain.

Whitey lifted his foot from the lump of dirt. He glanced first at the breast of the excavation, then turned and blinked at the light from the candle in the pit.

Tawny, tigerish eyes burned through the gloom at him. Corky, with a hand on a hip, had stooped and shot a vengeful glance in his direction.

"Get busy!" snarled the yegg. "Wot d'ye think this is—a hop-joint? You look like you'd been hittin' th' dreamy-pills. Yu do!"

Whitey stared up at the roof.

"Hear 'em," he said. "Hear 'em goin' by? Them soldiers—them is!"

"Th' hell yu say! I thought them wuz boirds or toads floppin' there. Wot's them got to do wid us? Dig, kid, dig! Keep a humpin'. They can't rumble to yu when all that phoney outfit's 'ammerin' th' 'ard, 'ard 'ighway. Keep it up! Now's th' time t' hit th' grit!"

Whitey cleaned up the banked earth and tossed it out of the pit. He went back then to the breast of the tunnel, grasped the pick by a short-handled hold, and started pricking tiny holes at the upper roof nearest where the macadam pavement was laid upon trap-rock and a cinder binder.

"Tramp, tramp, tramp," he heard. "Tramp, tramp," interpolated with a silence. He worked on, pausing now and then to listen. The footfalls over his head drove down through his brain and into his very soul:

"Tramp, tramp, thud, thud, thud! Tramp, tramp, tramp," they marched.

Big Scar, on watch above, drank in the details of the olive-drab ranks. He stood half in and half out of the shade cast by the last rays of the sun which was sinking through a golden sky that merged into yellow and yellow into ocher.

"Beans an' bacon," he said. "Thirty miles a day on slum an' mulligan. Well, I should say no! I'm goin' to retire like some ov those war contractors an' live off th' fat ov th' land. We'll take that crib over there like Grant took Richmond, then we'll beat it—me an' Corky th' Goat. T' hell wid this 'Ra! Ra!' stuff!"

The last of the soldiers marched by. They wound the long pike like an ebbing tide of war. The yegg racked the rifles, put away the clips of cartridges and the cigars, folded up the shelves, and shut in the front of the shooting-gallery. He dropped the catches in place, turned and made his way toward the back and the scene of operations.

Whitey lay like a tired dog upon the fresh-turned red earth at the bottom of the pit. His eyes were closed. His expression was one of retrospection and slow thought.

"Wot happened?" asked Big Scar to Corky.

"The kid got th' blind staggers an' th' willies over th' troops marchin' by. Said they hurted his noirves."

"So?"

"Yep. But jes' take a gap at what he's dug. He's some prairie dog—all right!"

Big Scar swung down to Whitey's side, carelessly stepped upon his arm, then bent low and crawled through the tunnel to its end. Corky heard the striking sound of a score of matches. The yegg came back like a big dog crawling out of a cave. He straightened.

"Almost to th' fountain—half across," he breathed heavily. "He's a humdinger! Did it all on thirty megs worth ov beans. Wot w'u'd he do on a regular feed?"

Whitey opened one eye at this.

"You're all right, kid," Big Scar sugared. "You're th' human goopher. Another day an' you'll reach th' jug. Then, kid, ah, kid, th' moultry swag an' th' blowens, (girls). I'm goin' tu pick out a swell joy broad, what I used to know in Chi. She lives down near Jersey Jimmy's. Jus' between there an' Black Joe's scatter on Madison Street, where you can get a K. Y. an' a beer chaser for a finif (five cents). You'll like her."

"I want a horse," said Whitey. "A horse an' a buggy an' a quiet place by a river what I once saw. It's down in the Lehigh Valley."

"Ferget th' jungle, kid! Ferget it! Th' big town's th' place!"

"There's a girl, too," went on Whitey wistfully. "She had black hair like velvet bands, an' eyes wid stars in them. She—"

"Ferget 'er! Wot you want is a regular skirt. One ov them plush-an'-powder kind, wid high-heel shoes an' a picture-hat."

Whitey shook his head and pillowed it upon his arm. Big Scar climbed from the pit, leaned and whispered into Corky's huge left ear:

"You stay here an' keep your lamps on th' kid. Don't let him up. I'll mouch along th' stem tu th' beanery an' get a few eats fer th' mob. I'll bring some suds. We'll camp right here fer th' night. No use takin' chances now. I got a peep at th' bank statement. Wot d'ye think is in th' crib?"

Corky stiffened with business intuition.

"Come across?" he urged.

"One hundred an' seventy thousand bones in cush. Then there's a couple other accounts—Liberty Bonds an' Red Cross. It all amounts to th' munificent donation —tu us—ov two hundred and six grand (1,000). A swell touch—eh?"

Whitey, whose ears were young and keen, sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"You ain't a goin' to take that Liberty Bond—Red Cross money, are you?"

"Kid, there's only one kind ov money. It's all the same. We're goin' tu put th' cleaner on that jug. Wot we can't lift we can drag. It's a pipe!"

The blue eyes in the pit blinked, then steadied. Whitey rose, pressed his palm against the dirt-wall of the excavation, and started to climb out.

Corky whipped a hand around his hip, dug deep, and brought it out with his fingers wound about the ugly, chambered-handle of his short-barreled automatic.

"Get down!" he snapped.

Whitey hesitated and blinked upward. The round opening of the gun looked like the end of a tunnel to him. He dropped on his hands and knees, then rose and swayed.

"Put up your mitts! All th' way up! That's it."

"Now, look 'ere, punk!" Corky glanced at Big Scar in confirmation. "Me an' me pal ain't going to stand fer any funny moves. Get that! We're dead on th' level. Ain't we, pal?"

"Sure!" growled Big Scar.

"An'," continued Corky with a vicious stare, "an', such being th' case, we're going to croak you nice an' easy if you round on us. Get that!"

"I didn't mean anything," whined Whitey, thoroughly frightened.

"Yep, you did!"

Whitey shook his frowzy head.

"You meant tu holler copper! I know you now, an' I'm right here on th' job till it's done. You're goin' to work to-morrow an' finish it. If you don't, I'm going to make you dig your own grave, then I'm going to croak you. Th' town plugs won't think anythin' if they hear a shot from a gallery. You're gone, punk, if you don't watch out."

There was deadly earnestness in the little yegg's manner. Whitey had hit the grit long enough to know when a man was aroused. He sat down upon the dirt, thrust out his legs, leaned back and smiled.

"All right," he said. "I'm willin'. I was only foolin'. I'm kinda hungry, too."

"You're a good kid," soothed Big Scar. "I'll hoof it over an' get th' eats."

Morning and the crack o' dawn found Whitey digging as if his life depended upon his efforts, which was more or less a fact.

Big Scar and Corky, under the influence of many cans of suds and green-beer headaches, were in no mood for trifling. They had half kicked, half shoved Whitey toward the end of the tunnel; then, while Corky stood guard, Big Scar had climbed out and taken his stand at the front of the shooting-gallery on watch for surprises or curious children. Whitey worked hard. He had almost forgotten about the tramping of soldiers and the Liberty Bonds. He had resolved to suit his new masters and show them what he could do in the line of tunnel-mucking. The short-gripped pick worked as if steam was behind it. He walked through the soft undersoil. Corky, stripped to the waist, had all he could do to clear the débris. He toiled like a navvy and cursed the heat with vivid, soul-curdling oaths.

"Tramp, tramp, tramp."

Whitey heard the familiar sound and paused, with the pick back over his right shoulder.

"Tramp, tramp, tramp."

He widened his eyes, bent his head, and listened. The pick struck the earth ahead with a soft blow. He drew it back slowly.

"Tramp, tramp, tramp."

Again he rested. The slow beat of marching feet overhead struck through him like water dripping upon a Mongolian's neck. It was torture. It haunted. It vibrated a something within his soul that he never knew he possessed.

"Tramp, tramp, tramp."

He rested the pick at his feet and counted the slow thuds. They echoed and re-echoed along the gallery. They set his brain in synchronism. He wished that some officer would order a riot step. He was like a bridge breaking down under tiny blows tuned in the same pitch.

"Hey, you there!"

Whitey turned with a guilty start.

Corky crouched in the bottom of the pit. A hand was behind him where the automatic rested.

"Come out ov it! Get busy—see!"

Whitey grasped the pick's handle and started working with feverish energy. He came to a rusty pipe. He uncovered this. It was parallel with the side of the tunnel. It was the feeder-line for the stopped fountain almost overhead. He avoided the pipe by enlarging the tunnel, then straightening this out again as he advanced toward the subcellar.

Noon passed. Afternoon droned on overhead. Big Scar stood on silent watch. He made no effort to call for customers. His eyes were sharpened upon the exterior of the Corinthian-columned bank and all that it suggested to a mind crammed with larceny.

A battalion of brown-faced, hard-as-nails recruits wound down the pike. Their number seemed endless to Big Scar. Other battalions followed. Machine-gun companies, ration wagons, rolling kitchens, sappers' and bombers' platoons, and close-ranked riflemen were there with all the panoply and snap of modern war.

"Tramp, tramp, tramp!" they sounded to Whitey below.

He held the pick and dreamed. His eyes moistened. His thoughts went back to

other days. He tried to strike the earth and couldn't.

"Tramp, tramp, tramp."

The macadam transmitted the sound down through the trap-rock and the cinders. It vibrated the earth. It set the air in motion. It beat like the call of a distant drum through Whitey's brain and soul.

"Tramp, tramp, tramp."

A bugle shrilled—sharp and distinct. A band rolled the air with its:

"Oh! say can you see by the dawn's early light—"

The pick thudded to the soft earth. Whitey started backing out of the tunnel. He heard the "chuck, cluck" of warning. This was followed by the sliding back of the barrel of the automatic. There was no mistaking that sound. Whitey hesitated and twisted his head around and under his legs.

Corky stood with the gun forward, with his left hand held out as a guard. It was the poise of the professional stick-up and bad man. The eye-glint over the blued steel of the round-rimmed barrel was from the visage of sure death.

"Get back!"

Whitey dropped his chin and blinked at the red earth underneath. He heard Big Scar signaling overhead. He turned again and stared at Corky.

"Tramp, tramp, tramp," sounded faint and soul-stirring.

The leader of the yeggs slouched into the dim-lighted cellar, leaned over the pit, then sprang down.

"Wot's comin' off?" he asked through rigid lips.

"Kid's quit!" said Corky, brandishing the automatic.

"Th' hell, yu say!"

"Quit cold. He wants to get up an' tell th' coppers what he knows. Shall I croak him? Nobody 'll hear th' shot."

"Hol' on. Just a mo'. What's the matter, kid?"

Whitey did not answer. He was studying the position of the candle at the breast end of the tunnel and the other flame which illuminated the pit and the hard faces of the two yeggs.

"Wot's th' matter?"

The voice rasped like a rat-tail file. It vibrated the earth with its grating menace.

Whitey backed toward the pit, inch by inch. He was in the gloom of the offset made by rounding the fountain's pipe.

A crimson cone of singing fire and flame leaped through the tunnel. A roar and then an echoing reverberation sounded. The two yeggs, Big Scar in the lead, charged forward after the shot was fired. Whitey had flattened himself in the offset. The bullet had touched and torn his open shirt.

Acrid smoke filled the excavation. Through this pall the leader of the yeggs advanced, his shoulders shelved forward, his jaw thrust out, his fists clenched to strained balls of brutish menace.

The fight which followed was sanguinary and terrible in its intensity.

Whitey, hard as nails from work, struggled in the bearlike hug of the great yegg, who was handicapped by the close quarters. A kicked-up clod of dirt extinguished the candle at the further end of the tunnel. The second light was knocked over. Back and forth the three rolled, twisted, squirmed, grunted, and fought in the dark.

Corky attempted to get in a finisher with the butt of the automatic. It struck, instead of Whitey, the strained cords of Big Scar's neck. He squeaked like a stuck pig.

The knot of snarling hate rolled to the pipe and the offset. They lifted and crashed against it. They rose, swayed with short hooks and jabs. The air was filled with lurid oaths, powder-smoke, and flying earth. The pit became an inferno. Whitey wound his fingers about Corky's wrist, twisted in the dark, and heard the automatic thud to the earth. He struggled to get it. A blow in the stomach almost cost him the fight. He recovered, flailed out, caught Big Scar on the ear and heard him fall with a crash. Corky sank to his knees blowing from his exertions.

Slowly Whitey bent the little yegg back till one free hand groped the dirt beneath. Big Scar was recovering. There was scant time. His fingers touched a cold object. They came up with the automatic. He reversed it, grasped it by the butt, then

jerked free as a form hurtled at him from out of the darkness.

Foot by foot Whitey backed away from them. His shirt was torn from his shoulders. His eyes were berserker with rage. The gun was held at his hip. He was deadly in earnest now.

"Get him!" grunted Big Scar. "Get th' rat before he gets out!"

"Get him—yourself. He's got th' cannon!"

"Th' hell 'e has!"

"Scar!"

"Wot?"

"Where are you?"

"Here—back here. Is that th' kid?"

"He's in th' pit! He's got a shovel!"

"Wot's he doin'?"

"Buryin' us alive. Hear 'im?"

"At him! Croak him!"

"Move over."

"Look out!"

"Scar! It's dark! We're buried."

"Wot?"

A crash of falling earth, followed by timbers, targets, boxes, bottles, and more of the gallery avalanched downward. Spades full of earth struck planks like a sound of sod on coffin-lids. The air grew close and stifling. Then, and faintly, there sounded a boyish laugh of triumph. Afterward there was the brooding silence of the grave.

The two yeggs vent their rage against the walls about them. They wasted hours arguing over the situation. They started to work with their fingers and the pick which Corky found at the head of the tunnel. The candle died, flowed over the wick, and went out. The matches were exhausted. Their escape was barred by crisscrossed timbers and interlocked planks filled with earth—the labor of a long night to remove.

High noon had come when Big Scar, weak but determined, thrust his dirt-caked head through the timbering and up into the cellar of the wrecked shooting-gallery. He shouldered his way out, turned and drew Corky after him. They stood a moment breathing great gulps of air as if it were nectar. They eyed each other with homicide written large upon their grim visages.

"It's nine, ten, or eleven," said Big Scar. "We'll get that kid an' cut him tu pieces if it's th' last thing we do."

"We will!" said Corky. "Let me at him!"

A bugle sounded. A file of recruits swung the corner by the bank, right-faced with awkward steps, and clanked past the gallery. Their rifles were held like quills in a porcupine.

Big Scar opened the front blind of the gallery and squinted through. Corky rested a bleeding chin upon the yegg's torn shoulder. They saw a raw squad being put through the paces by a gruff top-sergeant and a gruffer sergeant-major.

"For th' love ov Mike!" shouted Big Scar. "Wot's that on th' end? Th' lad wid th' lock-step. Pipe him!"

Corky's eyes hung from his face like loose coat-buttons. They popped further than that.

Whitey, the hobo kid, with rifle, bayonet, scabbard, cartridge-belt, canteen, mess-kit, poncho, blanket, first-aid package, and broad hat, goose-stepped by with face set ahead and eyes shining like two blue stars.

"At him!" blurted Big Scar. "He's enlisted!"

"At him yourself. He's loaded for grizzly bear!"

There was a long silence. Corky's chin pressed heavily upon Big Scar's shoulder.

"Say, bo," breathed the big yegg after thought, "say, Corky, what 'll we do now?"

"Keep diggin'?"

"Nix on that! I'm done!"

"Why, Scar?"

"Th' job's queered. They'd throw th' key away if they pinched us now. Besides—"

"Wot?"

"Money's no good, nohow."

"W—h—y?"

"It's made round so it 'll roll away."

"Yep—all mine did."

"It's made ov paper so it 'll burn."

"That's right—Scar."

"Besides all that—wot good 'll it be if th' Germans win?"

"No good atall!"

"Not worth a jit! What d'ye say we cover up th' shootin'-match an' beat it after th' kid, and—an' join th' army."

"I'm wid you!"

"Well, jes' a mo. Let's think it over. Wot beat us? Wot wuz it that made th' kid round on his pals?"

Corky the Goat scratched his dirt-incrusted head. His fingers came away with slow motion.

"Search me, Scar," he said. "Them footfalls, I guess."

"Sure! They pounded an' pounded till he couldn't stand it any more. It was patriotism."

"Wot's that?"

"Sort ov love fer country. Th' Germans are eaten 'em over there. They sunk a transport. D'ye see, Corky?"

"Y—e—s."

"Sure you see! It's th' big scrap. Th' kid wanted to go wid th' mob."

"Then—" started Corky.

"Yep! It was that kinda thinkin' that changed th' kid. I'm kinda thinkin' th' same way myself. It's a shifty deal to hit th' jug wid all that Red Cross money an' Liberty Bond kale. Th' kid thought ov that, too."

"Well?"

"Sure! Old Uncle Sam'll take care ov us. There's bigger things than cush in this world. Patriotism's one. We can only die once. What d'ye say we do our bit an' forget th' larceny? You'll be a top-sergeant an' I'll be a cappin before it's over. Eyes right! Dress parade! Gats on shoulders! Bluey, goes th' Germans! Zowhoo! 'Rah fer th' Starry Bars. D'ye understand what I mean?"

"I get you! I'm hep! When 'll we go?"

"Now!" barked Big Scar with a roar like a six-inch gun.

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THEY SHALL NOT PASS!

BY WILL THOMAS WITHROW

"THEY shall not pass!" That was the stubborn rock
On which the Hun, at Verdun, crashed and broke!
"They shall not pass!" Great Joffre, like a block
Of granite, met unmoved the master-stroke
Of the barbarian hordes that sought to break
Liberty's cordon, with its rain of steel;
That sought from all the earth its toll to take
And crush mankind beneath the iron heel—
The ruthless heel of crude, despotic might;
But lo! its hosts, like blades of withered grass
Shriveled before the marshaled power of right
And Joffre's flaming words: "They shall not pass!"

From that great hour the despot's doom was sealed;
His dream of world empire a vanished dream;
His spoils, his dead left piled upon the field;
His glory, crumpled like his blasted scheme!
For there, with Joffre at his left and right,
The living answer to the prayer France breathed,
Gathered the world to share her glorious fight,
A world demanding peace, with sword unsheathed!
Thank God, the love of Liberty still lives!
Its fire still burns through every creed and class!
Man is not lost! He rises still, and gives
Himself to freedom's cause—*they shall not pass!*

A Threefold Cord

by H. Bedford-Jones

Author of "Sword-Flame," "Mr. Shen of Shensi," "Nuala O'Malley," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

PATRICK OWEN, after educating himself by working in lumber-camps, set up a law office in Los Angeles, but in eight months he had only one client, Captain Kezia Rends; consequently, when Rends and a friend of his, an Irish adventurer named Denis Ajax Yore, offered him a share in a wild scheme to recover valuable paintings and books from the ruined mission churches of the interior of Lower California, he jumped at the chance.

The next day, however, a beautiful girl called at his office and offered him one thousand dollars not to go. He refused. Later in the day he was surprised to see a huge old Mexican, accompanied by a giant mastiff, hiring men to go to the peninsula. Yore, when he mentioned the matter, became greatly excited, and after explaining that the Mexican is his most implacable enemy, a devil of cruelty and cunning, known as El Amo (The Master), he offered to let both Rends and Owen withdraw. They both refused, however, and immediately sailed for Loreto.

Arriving there they secured horses and started into the interior. It was evening and quite dark, but Owen, who had fallen behind the others, suddenly saw a shadow detach itself from the darkness of the roadside and stealthily follow his companions. That it was a spy—probably a tool of El Amo—was evident. Softly he crept up on the shadow and leaped. He expected a curse or a swift slash of a knife; instead, he found only a silent but furious resistance. Then, as they fought out into the starlight of the open road, the spy's sombrero fell off, and Owen started back. Amazed, incredulous, he stared down into blue eyes agleam with rage.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed. "You!"

It was the girl who had attempted to bribe him in his office in Los Angeles.

CHAPTER VI.

ASTRID NELSON.

SLOWLY, but not unwarily, Owen loosened his grip on the girl's wrist. He was utterly amazed, and showed it.

He had thought this girl far north in Los Angeles, and here he found her in Loreto—spying on his comrades! What cause had this deadly enmity of hers? Why should she be a foe of Yore, the chivalrous?

Conscious of his readiness to halt her, she met his gaze with the same baffling coolness which had so struck him on their first meeting. There was no flinching in her attitude, and even in the dim starlight he could see the blazing anger in her blue eyes.

As he looked at her, Owen did not wonder that he had grappled with her by mistake. She was nearly his own height, and was dressed in rough khaki blouse and divided riding-skirt; if she had weapons, they were not in evidence. The American slowly raised his wrist and sucked at the spot where her teeth had gone home.

"I'm not sure," he said whimsically, "that I oughtn't to cauterize these marks. Yet I'm glad they're deep, because I'll carry them with me always as a memory."

He could not take her in as a captured spy, he realized while he was speaking. The stark beauty of her numbed his stern will. Yet he was not prepared to part with her as he had the former time.

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The effect of his words surprised him. The upturned face softened quickly, and the anger died from her blue eyes; once again, as in his Los Angeles office, he caught the indefinite hint of regret in her manner —regret and surprise, as though she had not looked to find his type of man.

"I'm sorry," she answered quietly. "I —I thought—"

"You were quite justified," Owen nodded gravely. "I also made a mistake. May I inquire your name?"

"My name is Astrid Nelson. Does it mean anything to you?"

The words held a suspended defiance, and Owen frowned. The name meant nothing to him, certainly, but she seemed to expect otherwise.

"I never heard of you before," and his words admitted of no dispute. "Why were you watching us? Why do you hate Mr. Yore? Why did you try to bribe me, back at Los Angeles? Come, be frank, girl! I don't intend to harm you, but I don't like spying."

"Neither do I," she flashed out at him. "Mr. Owen, are you quite honest in saying that you know nothing of the reason for all this?"

"I do not lie to women," he said, and looked into her eyes. She flushed somewhat.

"I—I beg your pardon. But you are a friend of Yore—"

"I am second in command," broke in Owen. "Go on, please."

"Very well. That friend of yours, that vulture, that bird of prey, who dares not make his living honestly—that *beast* has persistently persecuted the noblest man who ever lived! He has tried to murder him—"

"What man do you mean?" exclaimed Owen, staying her angry rush of words. "Not your husband? You're not married?"

"No." And even as he drew a relieved breath at the word, she flung a fearful glance over her shoulder. Owen heard a low voice calling:

"Patrick, me lad, where are ye?"

Obsessed by the girl's beauty, Owen caught her arm and swung her around.

"Off with you! There's no time to argue —go quickly!"

She vanished in the shadows. Owen stepped out to see Yore and Mallock coming toward him, revolvers glinting faintly.

"Put up your guns," he said quietly. "Here I am."

"Ah, we thought something was wrong with ye!" sighed Yore, peering about the street as he came up. "What kept ye?"

Another man might have lied then and there, but not Owen.

"I met a girl—the same who tried to bribe me in Los Angeles. She was spying on us and I nabbed her. Said her name was Astrid Nelson. Do you know the name?"

"Nelson?" said Yore, and again—"Nelson?" Then he paused, and when he continued, for the first time in their acquaintance Owen sensed falsity in the man's words. "No, I don't."

"She said you had wronged some friend or relative of hers," went on Owen quietly, wondering why Yore lied, if he had lied. "She seemed to me like a pretty straight sort, Yore. Don't you know anything of her?"

"Divil a bit, me lad, I never saw her in me life, but I'd give a hundred dollars to talk with her for ten minutes and find out some things! Let's see. Astrid—sure, that's a saga name. Mallock, did ye ever know of a sou'easter named Nelson? I'm blessed if I know who the lady could be!"

"Let's see." Mallock stared around, as if seeking the vanished girl. "There was a Wisconsin man, suh, name o' Nelson—he was my corp'ril in Manila, but he done died there. Then there was that low-down Swede cook we took up with in Yucatan, him that done put lard in everything and neveh—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Yore irritably. "Did she say anything about El Amo?"

"Not a word," returned Owen, who had an indefinite feeling that he was being played with.

"Then come along. I want to be out of this cursed place."

They walked on in silence and rejoined the party a hundred yards farther on, by the gate of a large corral. Entering this, they were met by two villainous-looking half-breeds, by name Pedro and Juanipero,

serape-cloaked and sombreroed, and apparently unarmed. By the light of a lantern Owen inspected them, and was introduced to Juanipero by Yore. The man was to be paid ten dollars gold for his horses and services.

"You're sure you know the camino to San Francisco Xavier?" said Owen.

"*Si, señor,*" returned Juanipero rather sullenly.

"Then get the horses, and be quick about it."

Juanipero departed after his comrade, whom Yore had despatched on a similar errand. The horses were led up, eight for each party—four to ride, and four pack-animals. Of these latter the men at once took charge, lashing on their packs with experienced fingers, while the two guides sat in their saddles and scowled.

"All ready, suh," said Mallock, approaching Owen.

"Off with you, then," said Yore, turning to them. "Good-by, Patrick, me lad. If you meet the lady again, be givin' her me love and tell her I wish I knew her. Good luck to ye."

The two men clasped hands.

"I have some choice antiquities for you," said Owen. "Good luck to you, old man. All ready, men? Go ahead, Juanipero, and don't get too far ahead. So-long, boys!"

A hand-shake with Benson, a low chorus of farewell from Yore's three men, and Owen swung up into the saddle of his little horse, the beast following that of the guide and his men coming behind in single file. The journey was begun!

Out through the low adobes and the thatched huts they rode, out under the starlight to the trail winding up in to the black Sierra Giganta, up through the passes to the cactus-prickly plain beyond.

By this time the moon was up, and Patrick Owen thrilled to its revelations. All was new country to him—new environments, new people, new lands. In the golden moonlight he could make out the black fluted columns of cardones, the barrel-shaped viznagas, the great masses of the "organ cactus"; but nowhere a sign of life save for the little file of horses crossing the waste.

And as he rode, the thought of the girl came back and abode with him in the desert. Astrid Nelson! He joyed in the recollection of how she had fought with him, of the blow on his cheek, of the teeth-marks in his wrist, that showed dark in the moonlight. She might have fought clear of a lesser man, he knew.

A man's woman, this! And no whit less beautiful because of it. The deep-blue eyes, the sunny-brown hair, the beautiful but incisive lines of brow and cheek and mouth, the innate womanliness of her—it smote into Owen and uplifted him. And she was not married, for she had said so.

He lifted his wrist and pressed his lips against the teeth-marks.

The identity of the girl, her reasons for hating Yore—these were puzzling, indeed. The Irishman himself seemed quite in the dark about her, and if his protestations had been false, there must have been some very good reason for it.

Naturally, concluded Owen, she was a relative of some one of Yore's aforetime enemies. Not being an apologist for Denis Ajax Yore, he was not blind to the fact that the man must have had his bitter moments, his bad moments, his ruthless moments. The girl's charges might be quite true. Yet, he doubted.

But all this stormed away before the one great fact of Astrid Nelson herself in Owen's mind. What she was doing here in this alien land, what risks she ran in carrying her enmity so far, were as nothing to the fact that she was Astrid Nelson. He liked her name, as he had liked her body and her spirit and her words. It smacked of Viking days and saga songs, it fitted her absolutely, and the syllables chimed into a monotonous sing-song with the thud of hoofs on the sand of the Baja California desert.

When at length the stars began to pale and die, Owen called a halt. He did not intend to go blindly ahead trusting to the guide alone; so, while Franklin and Hayne busied themselves with the preparation of a meal, he called Mallock into play as interpreter, for it transpired that Juanipero knew little English.

He soon discovered that by pushing

ahead they would reach San Xavier the following evening, so he promptly gave up his hopes of a three-hour sleep. Further, Mallock managed to draw from the somewhat sullen guide a very good idea of their whereabouts.

They were on the Los Parros trail, and were now not far from the Los Parros rancho—the Ranch of the Wild Grapes. Beyond this they would come to the Watering-Place of Doves. At Owen's behest, Mallock here pressed the guide, and finally ascertained that Juanipero knew the country from having at one time worked at the Watering-Place of Doves.

"It's a mescal rancho, suh," stated Mallock aside. "It ain't exactly a right healthy locality, I judge. Trouble ain't neveh far off from them places."

"Then give our friend a warning that he'll have four rifles on him while we're in the vicinity of the place," said Owen grimly.

After a hasty meal the party pushed on, and now the dawn came up over them and transfigured all things. Owen was frankly startled at the country around.

They were passing through a long, winding arroyo, which seemed to be leading them straight up into the heart to towering crags and black summits — the Sierra Giganta. The sandy plain was behind them, though the deadly cholla-cactus was ever-present.

As the day came in full splendor, the rugged, majestic nature of the sierra was better observed. On every hand were towering masses of jagged rock, for the sierra was of volcanic origin, and showed it plainly; black pinnacles thrust up at the sky like spears; huge, disjointed strata sprawled overhead, a thousand feet high, and the wild upheaval spread out in grandeur unequaled as far as the eye could see.

They left the arroyo and scrambled up a steep, rocky trail, at the farther end of which was the Los Parros gorge, asserted the guide. As they came up to the tremendous chasm itself, a call from Mallock caused Owen to turn and gaze with the others at the scene outspread beneath.

They were, he guessed, between three and four thousand feet above the sea. Out around them to right and left and behind was the desolate rock-waste; down far below them was the plain which they had crossed during the night—the desert that wended up to the foot of the sierra. And beyond the plain, beyond the pinnacles and cliffs and ragged rock masses, lay the blue sea stretching out to the horizon and glinting as with diamond-dust beneath the morning sun.

"I guess," said Hayne, industriously reducing a fresh quid to tractable condition, "I guess its' hotter'n hell down on that water."

"Blime me," quoth Franklin earnestly, "Hi never want to see nothink worse than Yucatan, blarst it!"

Owen turned in his saddle and spurred on after Juanipero, who was plodding ahead as usual. The splendor of that majestic view was shattered for him by the men's words. He caught up with the guide and tried to ascertain if they were now in the gorge of Los Parros, and Juanipero waved a graceful hand ahead.

"*Sí, señor,*" he said. "Ver' old. Mos' there."

Not a sign of life could Owen make out anywhere. They were in a desolate land, barren and untenanted, and the guide's prediction showed no promise of fulfilment. This gorge itself was extremely rocky, and so precipitous that the horses could barely crawl along the trail, which was little traveled.

But it was wonderfully beautiful, with a somber, majestic beauty that thrilled Owen and uplifted him. Save for the clatter of the horses, there was no sound; it was as if they moved in a wilderness unknown of man, where the gods had torn up the ancient rocks and strewn them about broadcast as playthings.

Such country as this was new to the American. He was used to the northern mountains, tree-clad, snowy, barren in a different way, but this sun-smitten waste of bare rock was very different. Then he saw that Juanipero was beckoning, and spurred on.

"Los Parros, *señor. Comamos*—let us eat."

As it was nearly noon, Owen nodded to the gesture of the other, not understanding

the words. The trail swung around, and like a gem set upon the mountainside the Rancho of the Wild Grapes broke upon them in its beauty.

After that arid waste through which they had passed, Owen was better able to appreciate what this ranch meant, both then and later when they sat at the hospitable board and dined of the produce of the ranch with kindly Mexican hosts.

The ranch was not large, being only a few acres of very good soil stuck on the mountainside at the upper edge of the gorge. A network of irrigating ditches fed it life and sustenance, making it the richest of the rich.

Owen found orange-trees thirty feet in height, high date-palms, introduced into the peninsula from Arabia by the padres of old, vines and olives and garden-patches. In common with San José Comondu, whither Yore had gone, and San Xavier, Los Parros sent most of its produce to Loreto, and on by ship to La Paz or the mainland.

Not without regret did they ride away into the blazing noonday sunshine of the higher trail, for now their onward course to San Xavier lay through winding arroyos and patches of upland, where they felt little breeze and got the full force of the sun.

As he knew not a word of Spanish, Owen handed over his letters to Mallock, who could best arrange for accommodations at San Xavier. He had already learned that the mission was thirty-six miles from Comondu, so that they might look for Yore in from three to six days. This would bring them back to Loreto at the end of the week, and if further delayed, a man could be sent back to apprize Rends that all was well.

They came to the Watering-Place of Doves unexpectedly, but saw no one about the place. It was a miserable little adobe ranch, its land quite uncultivated, and its absence of life proved that the warning of Juanipero was needless. They rode past without halting, and Owen wondered anew at the character of these people which could lead them to bestow such a name upon so wretched a poison-distillery.

He was destined to find all too soon that there might have been less poetry than ironic truth in that appellation.

From the Watering-Place of Doves to San Francisco Xavier was a short fifteen miles through the sierra, but so rough was the trail that evening had come on when Juanipero announced that they were nearing the end of their journey. Still no sign of their goal could Owen see, and the sun plunged down and darkness gripped all things, with the mighty shanks of the Sierra Giganta surrounding them on every hand.

Owing to this, Owen gained little view of San Xavier that night. They turned a sharp bend in the arroyo, splashed across a rivulet at the north end of the mission valley, and the place itself lay before them. A moment more and they were in the village, where candles burned in a few low houses and people came running forth to greet them.

Juanipero began an explanation in voluble Spanish, but Mallock cut him short and took charge of the situation. The total population of the village, consisting of a dozen Mexican and Indian families, crowded around to listen.

Mallock conducted negotiations by light of a lantern which some one produced from a near-by adobe, and presently turned to Owen.

"Come along. I done persuaded these folks that we ain't bad men nohow. We got to put up with quarters in the church, suh, or ratheh in the church buildings, which means fleas."

"Lead the way," responded Owen curtly, and with a sigh of relief swung out of the saddle.

Their packs removed, the horses were led away by eager youngsters to the village corral. Five minutes later Owen found himself standing in a room walled and floored with blocks of naked stone, while withered and tattered fragments of tapestry fluttered on the walls. A native held a candle aloft with obvious pride. Owen looked down at the stone floor.

"Is this the best we can do?" he asked in some dismay.

"It ain't bad," said Hayne, turning to spit at the doorway where the crowd was

clustered. "All we got to do is to git out blankets and—*spat*—squat. Franklin, you sleep across the doorway. I don't aim to have that greaser guide slippin' out and goin' off with the hosses. *Vamonos! Vamonos pronto!*"

He chased the crowding natives from the room, then one and all fell to their packs. Blankets were extracted, some cold food brought from Los Parros was eaten, and after a visit to the brook for a drink and a wash, Owen returned to find that Mallock had secured a few bundles of tules and some alfalfa, which was spread on the floor beneath the blankets.

And in this fashion he passed his first night in San Xavier, beneath the roof of the historic mission which had been founded two hundred and fifteen years previously.

CHAPTER VII.

MISSION SAN FRANCISCO XAVIER.

OWEN was wakened at sunrise by a thin clangor which seemed to echo through and fill the masonried walls. The room was still quite dark, but the snores of his companions showed that they were undisturbed by the peal of the old mission bells.

Rolling clear of his blankets, he pulled on his boots and rose. The dim figure of Franklin was stretched across the doorway, which was minus a door, and with an inward smile Owen stepped across the cockney, but did not arouse him. As he recalled later, he did not glance at the other figures in the room.

He stepped out into the dawnlight. Day was fast breaking, although the sun had not yet risen above the sierras, and after a few steps Owen found himself in the one street of the village. Then, halting, he removed his hat and stood motionless, with a great awe upon him. The bleating of sheep and goats was rising on the fresh, cold air, but it was the spectacle of San Xavier which held the American spellbound in its glory.

All around the little arroyo rose the "Giant" Sierra, stretching out gaunt, black crags of rock far into the sky above, so that the village seemed as set in a well. Over the eastern rim was a splendid crimson radiance where the sunlight splendor slavered on the mountain-crests, and this died into purple and gold on the western peaks. Owen looked up at the majestic grandeur of this divine color-scheme, and a prayer rose in his heart.

It was the stirred soul of him that prayed dumbly; yet when he had turned and looked about him in the growing light, his awe of that God-painting became wonder at the man-made thing towering over him. His imagination leaped into sudden life as he sensed what such a building meant here in the desert; what must have gone into the making of it, what lives and souls of earnest-striving men must have been welded into every stone that was laid in those mighty walls. For the Mission San Francisco Xavier was very beautiful.

"Beautiful?" he murmured, gazing. "Beautiful? It is beyond beauty; it is a dream, a miracle—no, it is only a remembrance before God and man of what His servitors have accomplished in their serving."

Owen was gazing upon the most magnificent of all churches ever erected in the two Californias. It was impressive, not alone in its massive work, but in its sheer beauty, in its delicate lines, in its every detail. For here, where there was none to see save the Presence dwelling upon the summits, there was no single face built to please the eye of the world; each stone in the rear wall to the south was as carefully set and carved as were those in the beautiful north front.

The church was solid masonry, as perfect as on the day it was finished. Above the main building rose a great three-storied bell-tower, where two bells were swinging against the sky. It was these which had aroused Owen, and he wondered at the harshness of their sound.

On either side the church stood adjoining structures, which Owen took for sacristies, while the stone buildings originally occupied by the padres formed an L at the southwestern corner. Here were living a Mexican family, and here Owen and his men had found shelter also.

Beyond a ruined and desolate patio, where children were herding goats into the hills, was the western doorway—the doors double and ancient, carved into rude panels, and stout as ever. Owen walked around the buildings, stirred too deeply to heed aught else.

On the eastern and northern sides were also double doorways, arched in graceful Romanesque lines and with high extended lintels stretching up far into the wall overhead, formed of stones set out slightly from the wall, and delicately carved. Each door and many of the windows possessed this distinctively Californian feature.

The architecture of the building itself was of no one type, but mingled Gothic and Moorish in a singularly pleasing effect. By the eastern door lay the cemetery, with its wall of cut stone. Turning to the southern end, Owen glimpsed huge stone cisterns and aqueducts, leading to the rather scanty acreage beyond, which was occupied with corn, grain, alfalfa, and gardens.

The single street of the village was a hundred yards in length, and bordered by half a dozen low adobes and as many Indian shacks; a wall ran along one side, overtopped by spreading pomegranates, mammoth figs, vines, olives, orange and lemon trees. At the north end of the street was an ancient stone monument surmounted by a battered cross. Beyond this there was nothing.

Owen wandered around into the garden, for he wanted to be alone. He was oppressed, overawed, weighed down. He had never dreamed that such a place as this could exist in all America—yet he had found it here, desolate and uncared for!

The overpowering immensity of it all staggered him. He had thought to find some such place as Capistrano, in upper California, ruined and laid waste. He looked up at the lofty spired campanile rising above the fig and olive trees, and for almost the first time in his life he grasped the meaning of *faith*, such faith as had reared this astounding edifice by the hands of Indians and padres.

As yet he had no desire to enter the building itself. He could only gaze at the lofty exterior in complete forgetfulness of all things. The sunlight had not crossed the garden wall; above him waved the great, gnarled olive and orange trees, the pomegranates gleaming scarlet and the figs glowing dull purple, as they had been planted by loving hands uncounted generations ago. He sat on a twisted olive-root, lost in the potent spell of this place where time was as nothing.

All his old life seemed suddenly dwarfed and far away. The mountains, the lumber-camps, the cities of men, these things faded out before that majestic bell-tower rising over the desert waste as it had risen a hundred and sixty years before, perfect, inviolable, untouched of spoiling hands or corroding winds, or the long flight of years.

A step behind him roused Owen, and he looked up to see Mallock approaching.

"Grub's ready, suh," said the Texan. "Say, ain't it plumb hell to find a place like this heah church?"

"What's the matter, man?" exclaimed Owen sharply, sensing trouble in Mallock's eye. "Has anything happened?"

"Well, I ain't right sure," drawled the other, plucking a ripe fig and munching at it. "You ain't seen that greaser guide?"

"Who, Juanipero? No. Where is he?"

"I'd like to know that myself, suh. He done vamosed some time last night and took my Winchester with him."

"Eh? Are you sure? Isn't he in the village?"

"No, suh. Funny part is, he done skipped with his own hoss, but didn't touch the rest. Looks like he went out to put a bullet into some private enemy."

In no little anxiety over this news, Owen accompanied the other back to the church-front, where Hayne was cooking coffee and sourdoughs over a scrub-fire amid the admiring comments of Indian women.

Franklin could only say that Juanipero must have stepped quietly over him during the night; the cockney had been dead for lack of sleep, and ruefully admitted that he had not even observed Owen's passing at sunrise.

"I reckon we'd betteh get busy, suh," observed Mallock, while they discussed breakfast. "We ought to have that loot packed up when the boss comes."

Owen nodded.

"Very well. You and Hayne scout around among these Mexicans and see if any of them have books or other stuff; if they have, tell them to bring it here after lunch and we'll make trade. First, however, find out who's boss of the outfit and bring him to me, so that I can arrange to get what we want from the church—if there's anything in it. We have to go slow and not offend these people."

"These people be—*spat*—cussed," spoke up Hayne contemptuously. The stalwart lance corporal, having finished his coffee, was reducing a fresh quid to shape. "I say, let's go through the old place and loot. I ain't—*spat*—disposed to go by-your-leave with these greasers. They ain't more than half-human, anyway—"

Owen broke in sharply, sensing the danger:

"Now, look here, boys, just cut out that talk for good. You're here to do what I say, and I mean to see that you do it. That goes—and I'll back it up, understand? If you think, Hayne, that we can run the high hand here, you're a fool. So go slow, keep these people happy and contented, and if you're spoiling for trouble you can start something with me and I'll accommodate you. Get me?"

Apparently they did, for there was no more talk of looting.

Breakfast over, Mallock and Hayne departed on their mission. There was no danger of theft in this isolated spot, so, leaving their packs in their room, Owen took Franklin with him to inspect the interior of the church. They entered by the northern doorway, over which was the carved date 1751.

This was explained, as Owen already knew, by the fact that the mission had been founded in 1699, but had been moved from its original site two years later. This present edifice, too, must have been many years in building.

"Gawd blime me!" murmured Franklin awesmitten, as they entered. "Mr. Owen, sir, ain't this a bloomin', blasted miracle?"

And Owen was very inclined to agree with the little cockney.

The church was wholly of masonry, and the high roof was vaulted and in good condition. The floor was smooth, being paved with oblong blocks of stone well fitted and firmly cemented in place.

Inside the doorway was a spiral stairway ascending to the choir-loft and the high belfry above; the lower portion of the staircase was of stone, the upper of palmwood. On either side the long nave were four large windows, placed high, and inset in the five-foot-thick walls. They gave plenty of light, and the place lay fully exposed to the gaze of the two visitors.

The interior of the church was lofty, narrow, and long; Owen discovered later that it was some forty yards in length by seven wide. The roof, with the transept and bell-tower above, was at least thirty-five feet above the floor. Advancing up the nave, they halted at a carved rail eight yards from the altar.

As always, the church was cruciform, and the transepts at either end of the rail were occupied by shrine-alcoves fifteen feet in depth and twenty in width. Owen caught Franklin tugging at his sleeve, and glanced up. Then indeed he saw that they had come to this place on no vain quest.

The whitewashed and plastered walls showed evidences of ancient frescoes in delicate greens and dull reds. The altar was of stone and wood, somewhat broken; above it was a great carved image of San Francisco Xavier. Above this were two full-length oil-paintings, whose subjects Owen could not determine; on either side were two rows of three frames each.

"Some bloody looter 'as been here, sir," exclaimed Franklin hotly. "See that?"

Owen nodded, repressing a smile, for three of the frames were empty. He turned to the two side-alcoves, and there found other paintings ranged as around the altar. Two of them had also been abstracted, but in the east shrine he found a painting of "The Last Supper" which astonished him by its beauty.

"Say, Franklin," he said, "if these pictures were cleaned up they ought to turn out pretty fine—where are you, man?"

"In 'ere, sir!" came the excited tones of the cockney. "Come along!"

Returning to the central break in the

rail, Owen saw that Franklin had discovered two latticed doors, one on either side of the altar. Joining Franklin at the doorway to the right, he saw that it opened into a lofty room lighted by a high window; heaped around the room were dust-covered objects which the cockney speedily investigated.

"Blime me, sir, look at this!"

He held up an ancient chasuble, incrusted with gold braid. Owen leaped into action, and the two men uncovered a great mass of vestments and altar-trappings, which had originally been of magnificent beauty and workmanship.

Now, however, they were sadly worn by age and damp and neglect; yet even in their half-ruined state their pristine glory shone out dimly. Owen knew how these things had come here—sent out from Mexico City perhaps two hundred years before to Mexican missions, then sent on to the new foundations in California; and as he held up the faded embroideries and silks, he marveled anew. But not so Franklin.

"Nothink but old cloths, sir," cried the cockney disappointedly. "Let's 'ave a good look-see at the other room."

Owen nodded. Together they returned to the sanctuary and crossed to the other door. This was locked, but after a moment Franklin had picked the rude wrought-iron lock and they entered. One look around, and Owen gripped the cockney.

"Now keep your mouth shut about this until Yore comes, understand?"

"Trust me, sir," asserted Franklin.

The American was utterly astounded. Here, piled about the floor in disorder, were half-rotted wooden images; huge bell-wheels; great, massive silver candlesticks; two large crosses and staves of solid silver; a great chased silver asperges and sprinkler, and smaller altar-vessels of silver.

The wonder of it was that for two-thirds of a century this treasure, valuable even in its intrinsic worth, had lain here untouched and unspoiled of man, unguarded, and uncared for. Of late years a priest had come, perhaps once a year, but this was all.

He was interrupted by a hail from outside, and looked forth to see Hayne striding up the nave.

"What's the matter?"

"We got the high mogul of these greasers waitin' outside," said Hayne. He turned and spat on the stones. Owen stopped angrily, thoroughly aroused by the careless act.

"Get out of here!" he cried hotly. "Haven't you any decency? Get out of here, and if I catch you doing any more spitting in this place you'll be very sorry for it!"

"Holy gosh, I didn't mean nothing!" muttered Hayne, then turned and went. Owen called to Franklin to come along and lock the door, and followed the ex-trooper to the outside world. Stepping out into the blinding glare of morning sunshine, he found Mallock, Hayne, and the Mexican at the corner of the church beneath the fig-tree.

"All ready to talk turkey, suh," announced Mallock briefly. "This greaser is a don, and he done knuckled right under when he seen money. He don't talk English, so fire away."

Owen looked at the Mexican, who bowed to him with a sweep of the tattered sombrero. He nodded and smiled in return, and Owen made use of his interpreter.

"Give it to him gently, Mallock. Show him those letters, and read 'em if he can't read. Tell him we want to make a dicker for the old paintings in the church and the old vestments. Take him over and show him the pictures and new vestments we fetched along, and, mind you, handle him smoothly."

As Mallock and the Mexican moved off toward the padres' quarters, Franklin came up and gave Owen a low word.

"What about that stuff we found, sir?"

"That's for Yore to decide about. Now, Hayne, did you find out about any stuff in Indian hands?"

"Yes, sir," returned the cavalryman meekly. "There's a half-breed who lives in the last shack down at the south—*spat*—end of the arroyo, half a mile from here. He's got a couple o' books, he said."

"All right. Franklin, do you speak Spanish? Then go down and see that fellow and tell him to come up after lunch. If he knows of any one else who has any

books or other stuff, get after 'em. Be back for grub-pile."

The cockney saluted and strode off. Owen turned back to Hayne.

"Did you see or hear anything of the guide, Juanipero?"

"Nary a sign, sir. Trail wiped out by sheep and goats this mornin'."

"All right. He'll be back to get his horses. Go and buy or trade for some fruit, all kinds, and get a couple of sheep and whatever you can pick up for fresh grub."

Hayne shifted his quid uneasily.

"But—but, Mr. Owen—you ain't going to *buy* it?"

"Eh? Why not?"

"We don't have to do that. They ain't going to object to our takin' what we—"

"Well, I object," cut in Owen. "I won't have it, Hayne. You must cut out this looting idea, and you'll have to be reverent when you step into that church."

"But there ain't no one here!" exclaimed the trooper. "It ain't a church any more! Holy gosh, Mr. Owen, it's nothin' but a ruin!"

"See that you respect it for that reason, then. Now run along with you and bring in a real fruit dinner. Get some of those pomegranates, and we'll stock up on sweet lemons, which are supposed to be grown here."

Hayne saluted and marched off, while Owen followed Mallock and the Mexican. He found them seated in the room occupied by his party, and the Mexican was in rapt delight over some gaudy lithographs of saints and some tinseled cheap vestments of the padres.

"Will he swap, Mallock?"

"Comin' fine, suh. He wants some *lagniappe* foh himself."

"Some what?" frowned Owen, to whom the word was wholly new.

"*Lagniappe,*" grinned the Texan. "Graft, suh—a couple of pesos and one o' them pictures."

"Give him all he wants, then. Make your own bargain."

With some amusement Owen filled his pipe and sat back to watch the chaffering. The Mexican was stolid and yet eager, and rolled innumerable cigarettes for himself and Mallock, who bargained in fluent Spanish.

Imperceptibly the time slipped away, until at length Hayne entered with an armful of fruit. At this Mallock gave in, passed over a few silver coins, rolled up two of the gaudy lithographs, and the Mexican departed with his loot after sundry bows and polite expressions.

To his gratification Owen found that the Mexican had agreed that the paintings and vestments and cloths in the one store-room could be carried off, with the single proviso that Owen should substitute a sacred lithograph for every painting, and a new vestment or altar-cloth for every one of the ancient ones. It promised to be a profitable trade.

Yet, at thought of carrying off those ancient relics of a bygone day, at thought of removing them from this magnificent edifice in which they had reposed for a hundred and a half of years, something like remorse seized on him. Despite all argument to the contrary, he felt almost ashamed.

"I wonder where Frankie is?" queried Mallock suddenly.

"Past noon," said Owen. "I sent him to see about the books you found. Go and rouse him, Hayne."

The trooper departed. Owen ascertained from Mallock that one or two of the other Indian families were supposed to have ancient books or other relics, and had been told to bring them in for barter that same afternoon.

Half an hour wore away. The two men ate their fill of the fruit Hayne had brought in, but there was no sign of either the ex-trooper or of Franklin. Then came a sound of running feet, and an Indian boy entered suddenly, desposited a scrap of paper in Owen's lap, and fled without uttering a word.

Owen took up the paper, and his face went white. Then he rose.

"Wait here, Mallock. Give me one of those rifles. Magazine full? Thanks."

He stepped outside hastily, then paused to stare down at the scrawl on the paper, leaving Mallock frowning after him from the doorway. The writing was hurried, and

the paper was old and yellow, but the message was quite clear and horrible:

OWEN:

For God's sake get down here with the guns and horses. F. is dead—knifed in the back.

HAYNE.

CHAPTER VIII.

STRATEGIC RETREAT.

OWEN, on foot, hastened to join Hayne at the south end of the arroyo, beyond the gardens and few acres of tilled ground. Whatever the cause of Franklin's murder, he knew that he must fight first against his own men. Were he to let loose Hayne and Mallock on the few inhabitants of the place, the result would be terrible. For even then he did not blame these people for the deed; his thoughts had flown instinctively to the vanished guide, Juanipero.

Passing an Indian shack at the edge of the rivulet, he came upon Hayne sitting on the ground, staring down at the body. Franklin lay on his face in the sun, as though he had been stooping to drink from the water when stabbed; the blood had collected in a pool beneath his left arm, and there was a terrible gash in his back. An old Indian was standing at one side, watching impassively, two boys with him.

"Quite dead—poor fellow!" Owen, who had knelt beside the body, rose. Any sign of the murderer, Hayne? Did those three see anything?"

"Sign be damned," said Hayne slowly, staring at the body. "No sign on this rock ground. No, they come after I called them."

The cavalryman seemed paralyzed. Looking down, Owen saw a book lying at Franklin's side; it was an ancient thing, bound in wood, with iron clasps—doubtless one of those the cockney had been sent to bargain for. Hayne had torn out a leaf to send his message to Owen.

"Frankie saved my worthless life down in Yucatan," said Hayne slowly. "I wish it had been me! I wish it had been me!" And with this he lowered his head in his hands and sobbed.

More than anything else that action upon the part of such a man as Hayne smote into Owen's remembrance. He stooped and thrust the ancient volume into his pocket, noting that it was an old missal. He turned to find Hayne scrambling up.

"Where's Mallock?" demanded the trooper slowly. "By God, some one's going to pay for this! Gimme that gun—I'll lay out that old devil yonder first crack—"

He tried to wrest the rifle from Owen; the latter, seeing that Hayne was mad with grief and rage, struck out and sent the other staggering back. Hayne looked at him, slowly wiping blood from his lips; never in his life had Owen seen such stark tragedy upon a man's face as now rested upon that of Hayne.

"Brace up!" he exclaimed sharply. "Keep your head, Hayne. Whoever did this can't be very far away—"

"Listen here, Mr. Owen," Hayne spoke slowly and very distinctly. "Do you know that Frankie was knifed in the back?"

"I know it," nodded Owen quietly. "And I intend to make some one hang for it, Hayne. But there'll be no assault on innocent people. These valley people didn't do it."

"You don't know these greasers, sir." The cavalryman still spoke slowly, as if he were arguing with a child. This very fact showed the terrible anger seething within him, and Owen sensed danger.

"You don't know 'em, I say. They're all murderin' devils, or worse. We've got to clean 'em out, all of 'em, or they'll get us. Damn it, I say they'll get us like they got Frankie. We got to get Mallock and the guns and horses, and—"

"You cool off, Hayne," commanded Owen, sadness in his own rugged face as he met the tragic eyes of the other man, still wet with tears. "Ask those children if they saw any one around. That old man is harmless as a fly."

Hayne shuddered, then collected himself. He called out something hoarsely, and one of the two boys—the same who had brought Owen the note—made answer. Hayne whirled about as if stung, and his face was suddenly as livid as that of the dead Franklin.

"What is it?" demanded Owen quickly. For answer, Hayne leaped to him and gripped his wrist, his eyes blazing.

"He said that an old man on horseback was here an hour ago—an old man with a long beard. My God, Owen, he's got us!"

"Who?" cried Owen, startled and bewildered. "Who? What do you mean?"

"El Amo," said Hayne, and drew back. He shuddered again, and fell into a quietness that was unnatural. "We're dead men, Owen—you and me and Mallock, as dead as poor Frankie here. Come on back."

"Here—we've got to carry Franklin in, you fool!" cried the exasperated Owen. Hayne only looked over his shoulder with a curse.

"No, we ain't. Mebbe we won't get back ourselves. Come on."

Perforce Owen followed, amazed and dumb. El Amo! Was the thing possible, after all. Had that wild vagary of Yore's come true? He turned and cast his eyes over the camimo leading into the southern passes; from there, he knew, it led across a hundred leagues of desert waste, where no man lived. Yet no one had come in from the north, of this he was quite sure.

Of a sudden all the quiet peace and aloofness of San Xavier had turned to stern tragedy, and the shock was terrible. Owen caught up with Hayne, and they walked back in silence until they reached the walled churchyard. Then Owen forced himself into action.

"Hayne, go and see that head Mexican and have Franklin's body brought in for burial. We'll have to do that ourselves. Hurry up, now."

Hayne turned mechanically toward the adobes. Owen passed on to find Mallock waiting uneasily for him, and he broke the news without preliminary.

"Mallock, an old man with a white beard has been seen at the south end of the valley. He stabbed Franklin through the back as he was drinking—or some one did. Hayne's like a crazy man, and you'll have to help hold him down."

"Frankie—"

Mallock choked on the word. In response to the dumb look, Owen merely nodded and entered the room. He crossed to the pile of rifles and revolvers, armed himself, and came out again to find Mallock staring dry-eyed and shaken at the approaching Hayne, who was bringing the Mexican.

Hayne was so hard hit that he could say nothing, and Mallock instructed the Mexican as to bringing in Franklin's body. When he was gone, the Texan turned.

"It wasn't El Amo, suh!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Frankie wasn't bit up, was he?"

"Bit up?" repeated Owen. "What do you mean?"

"Why, that there El Amo don't kill none himself, suh. His big houn'-dawg does his killin' for him."

He went on to explain that the old man owned a great mastiff, trained to bring down men; it was no fiction, for Mallock himself had seen the dog in action. According to his theory, one of El Amo's men must have done the killing, or else a San Xavier native.

"See if you can find any prayers for the dead in this," and Owen drew forth the book that had cost Franklin his life.

He and Mallock examined the volume together. It was printed in Spanish, and bore the imprint of Valladolid, 1721. Beyond a doubt it had been expressly designed for Lower California use, as the woodcuts proved; Indians with bows and arrows were denoted as "Gentiles," and mules with the peculiar Lower California straps were shown.

Owen's belief in the innocence of the natives was confirmed when Franklin was brought in. The entire population of the little village turned out in affright and pity, wonder and dismay; even Mallock and Hayne were forced to admit that their suspicions were without foundation.

They went to the graveyard, where an empty plot was found and a grave dug. The body of Franklin was laid away while Mallock read prayers in Spanish from the ancient book, and men and women knelt around. One of the Indians, with a touch of sympathy which went to Owen's heart, climbed to the belfry and wakened the old bronze to life until the slow bell-peals echoed down again from the surrounding cliffs in clanging harshness.

The three Americans made a head-stone of a roughly carved wooden slab, and by the time this was finished the afternoon was far spent. They returned to their quarters in silence, and Owen forced the others to eat, knowing that immediate action was imperative.

"We can do one of three things, boys," he said, when they were smoking gloomily together by the candle-light. "First, we can stay here until Yore and the others come, which will be another two days, perhaps.

"Second, we can get out on the desert south of town and hunt for this El Amo. He must have a camp somewhere around a water-hole, and these Mexicans will know of all the water roundabout. Third, we can strike north and meet Yore where the Comondu camino runs into the San Xavier trail, just the other side of that mescal ranch. What say?"

"Some one's goin' to—*spat*—pay for Frankie before I leave this here country," said Hayne savagely. "I move we go huntin'."

"That would be shore sudden death, pardner," said the Texan softly. "El Amo ain't playin' any lone hand in this game. I says, wait for the boss."

They glanced at Owen. —

"Let's go saddle up, boys," he announced, rising. "Make up the grub into packs, and I'll have that head Mexican take care of the rest of our stuff. We'll go meet Yore, then come back, and go after El Amo. No use sticking around here to be potted without a show for the money."

"Hold on!" he added hastily, as a sudden thought struck him. "We'll do better than that, even—though it's taking a big chance. Come on and get in shape—I'll explain when we get in the saddle. We'll move south instead of north."

His curt decision met with no objection, and he was obeyed without demur. Both the other men were markedly dejected by Franklin's murder; nor was it strange, considering that they had been comrades for several years.

Owen knew that if the mysterious El Amo were really somewhere in the south or in the hills, he must have a force with him—doubtless the same men he had recruited in Los Angeles. For the three of them to go blundering into an ambush would be madness.

To stay in San Xavier seemed also madness. The fate of poor Franklin showed that some enemy was lying in wait to catch them off guard, and if there was a fight in prospect, Owen preferred to face it in the open places. Moreover, he saw that Mallock and Hayne would rouse from their apathy once they were away from this place.

At the last moment he had recollected a passage in one of the Lower California books which he had obtained. This had described the ruins of the original San Xavier mission, situated on the same arroyo, but twelve miles to the south. Could they gain these, as he remembered the description, they would have an ideal defense and shelter until Yore came.

For second thought showed him that to go out to meet the Irishman would mean danger. Their unknown enemies were evidently watching closely, and once caught on the open desert without shelter or water, they would be helpless.

There was danger in his new plan, of course. The ruins might even now shelter El Amo or others. Owen, however, determined to take that risk in preference to the remaining courses open to him.

"I wondeh," said Mallock, while he and Owen were making up the packs of food, Hayne having departed for the brook to fill the canteens, "I wondeh, suh, what's become of that girl—you know the one."

"I've quit wondering," responded Owen shortly.

But he had not. Astrid Nelson! The thought came to him sharply and awakened swift questionings in his heart. What had become of her? Where was she now? Could she have any hand in this murderous work? But that was impossible; Owen would have wagered his life that her enmity was not responsible for Franklin's slaughter.

Hayne returned. Their packs made up, they sought the adobes, roused up the Mexican head man, and confided to his care the pictures, vestments, and trading goods. Also, Mallock told him of Yore's coming,

describing the Irishman minutely, and directing him to send Yore on to the south at once.

Not until they had saddled up and were trotting south past the place where Franklin had been slain, did Owen set forth his plan. The others made no comment, plainly accepting his leadership and letting the responsibility rest upon him. And with this Owen was very well satisfied.

They had food for five days, and if they could find water all would go well. The change of base would at least confuse their enemies; if they found El Amo already holding the ruins, they could strike back and be through San Xavier and well on the way north before daybreak.

Owen gave his rifle to Mallock, whose weapon had disappeared with Juanipero. Their lead-horses had been left in the San Xavier corral, as they were used only for the packs, and their food could be carried in the saddlebags. Owen had no fears from the honest San Xavier people, for theft could not succeed in such a place, and they were all peaceful cultivators of the few acres around the mission.

When at length the moon rose, the three were some ten miles along the camino which led to the Rancho Jesus Maria—a ranch which Owen never learned anything of except the name. Beyond it, wherever it was, the desert stretched across a hundred leagues of emptiness to the Mission Dolores in the south.

They had cantered along hour after hour, silent and morose all three. The death of Franklin weighed more heavily on Owen now than it had at first, for he missed the silent little cockney, always efficient and always blasphemously cheerful. To him, as to the New Yorker, Chubb, profanity had meant merely a means of expression.

They passed cattle-trails which led off to the right, perhaps through the hills to the great cattle ranches around Magdalena Bay, yet no signs of ruins could they see; only the great repellent mountains towered up all around the winding arroyo, shutting off the moonlight until the night had half gone. Then Hayne drew rein suddenly.

"What's that?" He pointed with his rifle. "Corral?"

The moonlight was now flooding all things in silver, and, half-hidden among great, fluted cardone cacti, Owen caught sight of a massive stone wall. He urged his horse from the camino, wondering at every step if a rifle would spit fire and death upon them, but nothing happened; a moment later he knew that they had come upon the ruins of the older San Xavier mission, founded in the closing year of the seventeenth century.

These ruins, which proved to be absolutely deserted, and which Owen later found were unknown even to the present San Xavier inhabitants, were quite as astonishing as the more northern mission, considering the tremendous labor involved in building them.

The corral which had attracted Hayne's eye consisted of a solid stone wall, and was of great size. Near by was a small church, some twenty-five yards by five in size and twenty-five feet high, standing amid a group of giant cardones, whose fluted arms compassed it on every side. It was in perfect condition, save that some small trees had ripped through the roof, and it consisted of two rooms. Inside stood only a ruined altar, as Owen found upon entering.

There were two other stone buildings, in less repair, and, stepping out behind these to see if he could find water, Owen came upon a huge cistern of massive rock. At a glance he saw that it was the ideal spot for their purposes, and he summoned his comrades with a low call.

The great cistern seemed as solid as on the day it was finished. It was about seventy feet square by six deep, and two broken stone aqueducts still showed how it had once been filled. Stone steps led to its bottom, and the San Xavier rivulet ran not far off.

Mallock and Hayne instantly agreed that it was an ideal place in which to lie hidden, for during the day they could seek the shelter of the church. Provided their change of residence had been unobserved, as seemed probable, their mysterious enemies would have small chance of finding them here.

So the horses were led into one of the half-ruined stone buildings, and the three

men descended to the cistern. There was no need of a roof in this climate, save during the day, and as they had brought provender for the horses, this served to soften their beds.

Mallock had ascertained from an old San Xavier Indian that the church there had occupied thirty years in building, and it had evidently been finished in 1751. Therefore this older cistern and church must have been unused since 1720 at least, and its remarkably fine state of preservation, after nearly two hundred years of desolation, was astounding to the three Americans.

So, with provisions for five days, and more to be had from San Xavier, and with water in plenty for their needs, the three men settled down to wait out their siege. Each of them chafed at the inaction, at the necessity of deferring vengeance on the dastard who had knifed Franklin; but each of them realized its need.

Yet, could Owen have foreseen what murderous passions of men were to center around this ancient church and cistern, could he have foreseen the fearful things that were to come to pass here and elsewhere as a result of his action in coming here, he would have saddled up and ridden for the north regardless of all danger. But he was no prophet; and none of the three wearied men slept more soundly into the sunrise than did Patrick Owen.

CHAPTER IX.

TRAPPED.

THREE days had passed since their coming to the ruins—three terrible days of inaction, heat, desolation, and finally disaster.

With sunset they picketed out the horses in a small green patch near the brook. At dawn of the third day, when going to bring them into shelter, Mallock found that two of the animals had pulled free during the night and were gone. Their tracks died into nothing on the racky, sandy waste, and no sign of them could be made out in the vicinity.

This was a crippling chance, indeed, and the three went into immediate consultation. Without their horses they were absolutely helpless should their position be discovered, for then they could draw no more supplies from San Xavier, and would have no chance of breaking through their foe.

"One of us has got to go back to San Xavier and get those spare horses," said Owen finally. "It's queer we haven't heard from Yore. He may show up to-day."

"The boss done made a mistake," observed Mallock, "when he split us up. Looks to me like this heah El Amo has got us just where he wants us, suh."

"He ain't got me yet," broke out Hayne, and turned on Owen with sudden savagery. "The murderin' old devil! Do you know what we seen in Yucatan? He'd send for a Yaqui slave from his fields, tell the man to run, and then set his devil of a dog after him. The dog would came back with red jaws, and there wouldn't be no Yaqui left. I tell you we seen it more'n once!"

Owen reflected that Yore and his men must have seen strange things in Yucatan.

"Well, wait till to-night," he said slowly. "If no news comes from Yore, one of us can go back and get the horses, with more fruit and meat. We're about out of flour, too."

Then came the question as to which of the three should go. Each man desired the ride, for the monotony of the time here was maddening. It was finally settled by tossing coins, and Owen won.

"By starting at sunset, I'll be back at dawn," he said. "But how about talking Spanish? I—"

"Oh, shucks!" Hayne spat contemptuously. "That old head man knows as much English as I do, only he don't let on. Fact. You say what you want and show him a peso, and you'll get it."

Satisfied of this, Owen made no further objection. He was only too glad to get away from the place, which had none of the other mission's beauty about it, and where the desolation and sun-heat and lurking tarantulas made life horrible to him. It was worse for him than for the other two, because they did not possess his leaping imagination and were more content to sit and smoke and chat by the hour.

So, then, it was with vast relief that he saddled up the one remaining horse toward sunset. He left his rifle with Mallock; he apprehended no attack, and relied on his revolver in case of any sudden danger. A casual "So-long!" was exchanged, and he rode off over the almost unmarked camino to the north.

The non-arrival of Yore did not disquiet him, for they had given the Comondu party six days at least in which to reach San Xavier. Another two days of it, then, would of a certainty fetch Yore, upon which they could immediately set forth to bring swift vengeance upon the head of Franklin's murderer. That he would be found, Owen had no doubt whatever.

Upon talking the matter over, they had concluded that the two missing horses had headed back for San Xavier. Therefore the task of getting them back was simple; if they were not there, two of the spare horses could be brought.

Owen's thoughts flew back to the vanished guide, Juanipero, whom he instinctively thought of as Franklin's murderer. Why had the Mexican taken only one rifle when he could have taken them all? Why had he slain Franklin in broad daylight, when he could have cut all their throats that first night?

"I'm afraid you're out of the reckoning, Juanipero," he concluded, frowning. "Maybe that guess of Mallock's wasn't so far wrong, after all. The man may have gone to settle up scores with some of his old friends at the mescal ranch."

He cantered on at a good pace, confident in his ability to reach San Xavier before midnight and be back before dawn. The starlit miles reeled off behind him, and the first moon-flush was over the sierra peaks when at length he saw the first hut of the village black under the stars, where Franklin had been slain near the rivulet. All the place ahead seemed quite dark and asleep.

Making no noise on the dust-sand of the camino, Owen rode until the gray mass of the church rose and blotted out the stars on his left. He had a little small change in Mexican silver, procured at Loreto, and did not doubt his ability to bargain with the head Mexican for fruit. After all, it would be very simple, and in half an hour he would be headed back to his companions.

He rode on past the church, with the garden wall high on one hand and the clustering adobes and Indian shacks on the other, and swung out of the saddle at the old monument in the north end of the street. Slipping his horse's bridle over one of the cross-arms, he turned and walked across to the adobes. Then he paused, a cold chill gripping his heart.

From the shadows a great, silent shape moved out into the starlight, a yard away from him. Now, there had been no lack of Indian curs around the village, but this was none of them; it was a dog greater than Owen had ever seen before—a huge mastiff, who stood and gazed on him with bared teeth and slavering jaws, its eyes lurid-green in the darkness.

The American stood paralyzed, his thoughts flying back to all he had heard of El Amo's mysterious dog who slew men; he could not even reach for the revolver in his pocket. Then, as the dog seemed to crouch, a word snapped from the shadows.

"Señor! Back!"

Owen recognized that voice, and as the dog whined and slouched back, he turned to it with a cry, and found Astrid Nelson standing almost at his side.

"You!" said the girl, in surprise. "Where did you come from, Mr. Owen?"

"I just rode into town," he answered, mastering himself quickly, and recalling in time that she was an enemy.

"Where from?"

"From where I left my men, Miss Nelson."

"Oh, you idiot!" she flashed at him in anger. "Can't you see I'm trying to save you? Tell me where you came from—quick! They'll be here in five minutes."

"Now, see here," said Owen steadily, "if your friends are coming, I've no time for talk. Besides, you're an enemy, and I can't betray our position. I'll have to get our horses and be gone—"

"Your horses are gone already," she broke in swiftly. "We got them yesterday."

Owen looked into her eyes, and his heart

sank. She gave him no time for thought, but with a forward step laid her gauntleted hand on his arm, and the deep earnestness in her voice and face wakened him to his danger.

"You must get out of here at once—go on north and join your men, quickly! I—I'm afraid of what might happen if they found you here—after things I have seen lately. I did not know—well, no matter. You must go, gallop, ride hard!"

She glanced around half-fearfully in the direction whence Owen had come. That look completed both his bewilderment and his knowledge of the situation.

El Amo—for she must be joined with the mysterious owner of the mastiff—was coming from the south; moreover, he thought that Owen and his men had fled north. But if El Amo was on the southern camino—

"Good Heavens!" he cried hastily. "I cannot get back, then! Miss Nelson, are your friends south of town? How far?"

"They must be close to town now," she answered, surprised at his words. "I left them where the trail comes into the camino, ten miles south, and rode ahead to see—"

"Then they've got me!" snapped Owen, and awakened to the situation. He knew that he must trust this girl, having none else to trust. "You probably know, Miss Nelson, that one of my men was murdered four days ago; the other two are in the ancient mission ruins, twelve miles south, without horses. Now think fast; is there any way I can avoid your friends, circle around, and rejoin my men?"

The first radiance of moonrise was striking down into the arroyo. As Owen looked into the girl's face, he saw it go white.

"No—none," she almost gasped, for he had gripped her wrist harder than he knew. "There is only the one trail—"

"Where is your horse?" broke in Owen rapidly.

"Here, under the church-bell."

"Very good. Send that dog away—send him back at once, or else I'll shoot him. We'll get your horse and ride north. You're going with me, Miss Nelson—no, don't shrink away! Give me your parole and we'll be comrades; refuse it, and you'll be my hostage. Come, yes or no! Quickly!"

"You can't go north!" she cried out. "They are waiting at the mescal ranch for Yore's men! Let go my wrist, sir!"

In a flash Owen saw the whole thing. El Amo, finding that Yore had gone to Comondu and Owen to San Xavier, had waited his time; then, sending part of his force to the Watering-Place of Doves to cut off Yore, had descended from some camp in the hills to catch Owen between the two fires, as he thought.

And had Owen fled to the north, he would have surely been ambushed at the mescal ranch. There, beyond a doubt, had fled the guide Juanipero—probably too frightened to take more than one rifle, or to do any killing. The girl's voice struck in upon his thought, and as his eyes sought her face he found her very cold and angry.

"Mr. Owen release me. Do you know that a word from me to Señor will set him at your throat?"

"I know this," and Owen took out his revolver, cocking it. "A word from you will get a bullet through the dog. I'll take my chance. Yes or no—hostage or prisoner? Speak quickly! You can trust me, Miss Nelson."

Perhaps it was those final words, perhaps it was the rugged, grim determination stamped plainly on Owen's face. But the girl yielded. She said a low word to the dog, and the huge shadow slunk away through the night.

"I warn you, Mr. Owen," she said softly, "that you will suffer far more from this than you would otherwise! My grandfather will—"

"Eh? Is El Amo your grandfather?"

"Yes."

"Well, get your horse and join me. Hurry!"

Owen released her and strode back to his horse. As he swung into the saddle, she appeared riding another horse, and joined him stirrup to stirrup. Together and in silence they urged the horses across the rivulet and around the sharp bend in the arroyo that led to the waste plains beyond.

Owen's sudden wealth of knowledge required time for adjustment. Though he had given no sign of it, that brief talk with

the girl had left him dazed and all but helpless.

He recalled all that had been said about El Amo aboard the Molly. If Astrid Nelson was the old man's granddaughter, then she must be the daughter of the American engineer who had eloped with El Amo's only daughter. In the effort to untangle this problem he turned to her with a low word.

"Miss Nelson, I am not impertinent, but I know very little of all this terrible situation. You seem to be an American girl, but El Amo is a Mexican. Please explain."

"My mother was the daughter of El Amo, as you call him," she answered quietly. "His real name is Don Sagasto Cortes y Mendoza. My mother ran away to the States with my father, who was an American. I have always lived in New Orleans until a month ago."

"And your father? Where is he?"

"I do not know. He undertook some mine work in Sonora last year, and we never heard from him again. He must have been killed by some revolutionists, and my mother died a little—afterward." The girl paused for an instant, then continued steadily as before:

"I got a letter from my grandfather, whom I had never seen. My father and mother had seldom spoken of him, either, but he was in Los Angeles and had heard of my mother's death. I came and met him a month ago. One day he saw Yore in the street, and as we were leaving shortly for Lower California, he determined to repay Yore for the injuries and insults Yore had given him in times past."

"Hold on, please!" broke in Owen. "Why were you coming to the peninsula?"

"Because my grandfather has a place here—a concession he obtained from the government when his plantations in Yucatan were confiscated a year ago. It is no more than a castle in the mountains, but—"

"Oh, I see." Owen indeed began to see a great many things, and he knew that either Yore and Yore's men had lied to him at a terrific rate, or else Astrid Nelson had been victimized shamefully. "And I presume that your grandfather is a kindly old man who has been wronged by Yore?"

She did not catch the veiled sarcasm in the words.

"Yes. He is a real nobleman, Mr. Owen. Besides, Yore has more than once injured my father, he says. So I have been helping him as much as I could."

"I see," returned Owen, and for a space they rode on in silence.

The American was frankly at a loss. If he chose to believe Yore, then El Amo had cunningly imposed on Astrid Nelson, hiding from her his real character and posing as an injured old man in order to further some diabolical scheme of his own.

But could Yore be believed? Owen remembered the odd hesitancy which had come upon the Irishman at mention of Astrid Nelson's name that night in Loreto. Even at the time he had thought Yore's rejoinder rang false. On the other hand, the words of Mallock, Hayne and the rest anent El Amo had impressed him with their truth, and he would never forget that night at San Pedro when he first discussed El Amo with Yore.

"No man can serve two masters!" thought Owen, staring grimly through the desert night. "I'm in this with Yore, I believe in him, and I'm going to stick by him until I have absolute proof that he is false. And it looks very much as if I hold a trump card."

This reflection was somewhat comforting. With Astrid Nelson in his hands, or in the hands of Yore, the safety of Mallock and Hayne could be assured.

Too late Owen was filled with bitterness at being forced to go off and leave the two men, but he saw that it was the only course. To go back was now impossible, unless he were to leave his horse in the arroyo and circle through the hills afoot, which would be utterly useless to all concerned.

And for the immediate present there was no great danger to the two. Their presence in the ancient ruins was unsuspected by El Amo, who was now pushing on with his forces to the mescal ranch, at the juncture of the Los Parros and Comondu caminos.

Owen knew that when he did not return either Mallock or Hayne would set out on foot in search of him. By that time, however, El Amo and his men would be well

north of San Xavier, and the two could renew their supplies and await developments.

Meantime, however, what was to become of him and Astrid Nelson? Behind him was El Amo, advancing on his trail; ahead of him the winding arroyo stretched on to the Watering-Place of Doves, where another band of El Amo's men commanded the Comondu trail. Only by using the girl as hostage could he get through these, and go on to join Yore.

The moon was now flooding the arroyo, though faintly, for it was the last quarter and did not give a too brilliant light. Owen was safe from discovery because the winding valley hid the camino from those behind; but at the head of the arroyo, where lay the mescal ranch and the trail on into the Los Parros gorge, would come danger.

"I wish I knew your grandfather," he said abruptly. "Have you seen this place of his in the hills, Miss Nelson?"

"I have just come from there," she answered. "After meeting you in Loreto, I joined a guide waiting for me and struck ahead of you by a goat-path through the hills. The place is south of San Xavier, and near the ocean. It's horribly desolate."

Something in her tone caught Owen's attention.

"What's the matter?" he asked quickly. "Did anything happen there? Do you know anything about that man of mine who was murdered?"

She did not answer for an instant, then lifted her head and stared at him.

"Yes. He was killed by an Indian—one of a few hired by my grandfather. Besides these, we have fifteen Mexicans brought from Los Angeles."

"How did you get here ahead of us? Motor-boat?"

"No, by a freight-vessel bound down the coast, which brought us to La Paz."

"And do you quite concur in the murder of unsuspecting men by your grandfather, Miss Nelson?"

The unexpected question must have probed deeper than he knew.

"No." Her voice shook slightly. "I'm afraid—oh, I don't know what to think! My grandfather was so fine and noble, he was so kind to me and to every one; and then after we got down here I heard him give some strange orders, and I heard some of the men talk—"

"Oh, then you speak Spanish?" said Owen as she paused.

"My father and mother always spoke it, Mr. Owen. I have—"

She broke off abruptly. A deep, ominous sound had risen on the night behind them—a growling note as harsh as the peal of the San Xavier bells, though it came from no throat of bronze. As Owen turned in the saddle, the girl's hand gripped at his arm.

"Ride—we must ride fast! Señor is bringing them after us—ride!"

Again that growling note, that was neither bay nor bark, drifted up; and with something very like fear rising in him, Owen struck in spurs, and they galloped to the north blindly.

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.

GOSH!

BY DIXIE WILLSON

GOSH, there's things worse than a burglar man
Who breaks in and steals all the stuff that he can!
It isn't so bad when he takes things away—
'Cause you can save up some more like 'em—some day;
But gosh, when he breaks in and leaves things *behind*
That your folks can't get rid of—and you have to mind—
Gosh! Ain't there no laws that can punish 'em, maybe?
These guys who sneaks in and leaves people—a *baby?*

Idols of March

by Nalbro Bartley

IF this is ever printed it will be in the two-bit magazines, as it concerns only the mental plane, there being no horse play or exhibition of brute force.

I am sixteen with thoughts toward shaving, and I now realize what a misfortune it is to be endowed with an india-rubber disposition and a champagne imagination. Is it not a striking fact that everybody fancies they are at liberty to kid a call boy, but that the latter has no more right to retaliate than a dog to refuse to wear a muzzle? No one realizes how I have juggled the destinies of Whyte Patmore, America's pet matinée idol, or of his wife or of Salome Grabenstatter, heiress to the leather works and the terror of the countryside—to say nothing of Lewellyn Claringbold, the human black and tan!

If I was to die to-night, the theatrical world would turn out *en masse* with a muffled brass band and a van of lilies and say, "Poor Bonehead, what a fine figure of a lad he was! What a heart—what a mind! Ah, 'those whom the gods love die young, but those whose hearts are dusty burn to the socket!'" As it is, I am greeted with, "Bonehead, another bull and there will be church music in your parlor, only you will not applaud!"

To continue: I stepped in at the psychological moment, as Dia Dollings, the playwright, often mentions when we are talking things over. Dia give me a good piece of advice when he said, "Bonehead, remember the animals went in two by two—on this great commandment hang all the law and the profit!" Meaning that the unhappy ending or the split team had no room in his plays. "We all must find our mates," he says, "'the Romany lad for the Romany lass—'" and although he thought he was talking to a hick, his words were planted in fertile ground.

I never was a ladies' man—not even over to the old Hurly Burly House where all the fillies handed me neckties for not telling when their alimony was owing and used to part my hair different ways to see which made me look the most like Nat Goodwin. I was always strong for Whyte Patmore even if he was a "kiss-mammy" matinée hero. He'd come out in a purple brocaded coat with lace ruffles and a tin sword and have the spot-light attached to his person while the bass picked out dangerous notes and he said, "What, ho, Lord D'Arcy, thou craven coward—" Of course, we would sit reading the racing form and never bat an eye, but the audience ate it raw. And when he wore his yellow satin suit in the last act where he was decorated for valor and given the hand of Princess Mirza-Dovelette, nobody would put on their hats even when the curtain was down. Then there'd be a stampede for the stage door and he'd have to pass out between two rows of flappers gasping, "Oh, Mr. Patmore, won't you come to our next sorority meeting?" And, "Oh, Mr. Patmore, is it true you don't eat fudge?" It was enough to make any man a cynic. I resolved then to never

love but lightly. Just the same Whyte was no two per cent real and ninety-eight per cent alcohol.

Then there was Peggy, his wife. She was busy with Whyte's love affairs. She never let him miss a flapper—she kept tabs on their notes and answered them as impersonally as a secretary.

"It is business," she would say when he give her the signal to desist. "What good is a matinée idol without matinée girls—a scallop without tartare sauce would be more to the purpose."

Of course Peggy was on an orginal circuit. Nobody else could have stood being the wife of a matinée idol and not committed hari-kari. Peggy always took what came her way, because she claimed that when you pushed Fate out of your way you was bound to slip on a banana peel. So when she was nineteen and house mother to Indian kids in a Sioux orphan asylum and Whyte came to recite the "Raggedy Man" on Christmas Eve, he looked down into the audience and saw Peggy Paleface. Six hours later, they beat it to Kansas City and was married by a justice of the peace. I want you to understand that I was strong for Peggy, too. In fact, the Patmores had my roll from the start. I liked Peggy because she never tried to buck Whyte's leading ladies in the way of figs and she always allowed 'em two weeks to fall in love with Whyte, two weeks to enjoy planning for her downfall and two weeks to recover from the incident. Then she would set to work to make friends with them personally. She always wore tailored blue with a stiff sailor and she wasn't pretty but a best looking thing with her black hair braided like a kid's and big, blue eyes. She was all for Whyte, hook, line and sinker. The cold marble of envy never entered her heart, and the more Sunday stories she could wheedle the papers into printing about what a wonderful surprise package he was, why the less she felt the need of a nerve tonic.

Whyte said she was his right-hand man and they were going to be the Darby and Joan of the stage world—no James K. Hackett and E. H. Sothern stunts for theirs. I was, more or less, Whyte's confidant, seeing that every one else took me for a stone wall. He used to tell me the way the comedian tried to crab his big speech and why the villain ought to go back to the livery stable from whence he sprang.

Every night Peggy would come in and say, "Where's your mail—well, if here isn't the sixth letter from that little Jones girl!"

"Peggy," Whyte would answer, "a single swallow never makes a summer—I'm off diet for a week—mix me one that 'll sing," and I would leave them to the privacy of their own fireside, although a lot of call boys would have sat outside the door to drink in the softest whisper.

One day I wised up that Whyte was unhappy because—now get this right, since it is deep stuff and I have neither time nor inclination to repeat it—unhappy because his wife wanted him to be a matinée idol. He wanted to act—he was born with a green satin cape around him, saying, "The moon is like a gracious dowager, hiding tactfully behind clouds while I kiss thee, dearest Ethelind!"—more of Dia Dollings, let me hasten to give him due credit—and his only tools were a guitar, a broadsword and a suit of armor that I used to work over until it shone like a hairless spaniel. But he did not want the graft of flappers usually accompanying a matinée idol's job! The women wearied him. He used to remark, "Bonehead, the old Tacoma days when I played three shows a day with Mickey, my educated pig, had their bright memories!" This was after a bevy of young things had been let loose in his dressing-room and had snipped the ends of all his wigs. I used to be stationed at one side and when I see them dragging out pairs of riding boots, I was to step up and remark, "The cashier is at the left as you pass out—kindly have the exact change!"

Now Peggy wanted this—she was proud of it and it annoyed Whyte. Finally he says to me, "Bonehead, even if you do think with your left heel, can you get it into your head that I want no more women shown into my dressing-room?"

"I grasp the thought," I says, "but Mrs. Patmore has ordered tea sent in for the graduating class of the St. Elmo Seminary."

"Tough luck!" he says. "Well—I pass."

And after they had gone, their muffs loaded to the guards with the souvenir neckties I had run over to Fourteenth Street to buy, I hear Whyte say to Peggy: "Well, are you satisfied, you little tyrant?"

"You were splendid," she says, "and weren't they darlings?"

"Peggy," he replied in a low and dangerous voice, "don't you give a damn for me?"

"Oodles of damns," she says, "I'm making you a success."

"Never mind the success for a minnit. Answer me — do you want mobs of women coming in here to give me the once over? If so, put up a sign, 'Kindly do not tease the animals!'"

"Whyte, you're a silly old dear," she begins in her most persuasive way.

"I am not silly. I refuse to be on parade before a young ladies' seminary the rest of my life."

"Whyte," she says, "you just can't help being Van Bibberish in spots and you're so ducky in ice cream flannels."

He turned away and says, "Where 'll we eat to-night?" But I knew he was sore wounded. A girl would say, "Oh, the pig—always thinking of food," but instead of laying acrost a sofa and screaming, "Father, mother, help!" a fellow has to get his mind on something practical or he finds himself slipping.

Right then I made up my mind to hand Peggy a rebuke or else she would lose Whyte to some of the flappers that was forming a trench line from his apartment house down to the theater.

That evening I was in Whyte's dressing-room trying out his cologne, when some one taps at the door and in comes Salome Grabenstatter. I knew her from the pictures that the papers had been printing every evening. She was the eighteen-year-old heiress to the Grabenstatter leather factory, and the day she came into her fortune she bought a string of race horses and had a private faro wheel set up in the family town house. Then she turned out all the old hands and hired a cabaret gang from Little Hungary to come up and do the housework. Having been expelled from every boarding school open to the Caucasian race she had been placed under the guidance of an ex-missionary. She, also, was seen leaving the gates early on the morning of Salome's birthday.

The courts were trying to prove her *non compos mentis* to handle her money, and every girl about Salome's dimensions was reading stories about her with an eye on the stockade door. Salome never breakfasted until two P. M. She said good night to the early robin's twitter, and when she entertained a house party it was in the good old Versailles and Pompadour fashion.

She had brief, reddish ringlets and a slicker coat of purple oilskins to cover her scenery. Her hat interrupted her profile at the most tantalizing points, but I could see that her pearl necklace behaved strangely and hung way below her skirt so that it lapped around each ankle twice. When she took off the coat I learned the real facts about the white silk jersey and I realized that the shortest distance between two points is the smartest distance—judging from her skirt.

I had followed the Grabenstatter case with interest—as some day I intend being a family lawyer and stockholder in many large concerns—and I had worked out an original theory as how to deal with Salome if taken unawares. So I whirled around like a self-starter and says:

"Salome, none of the pictures do you justice."

She rose to it like a trout to a fly. "Really?" she says. "And who are you?"

"Ah," I says, sitting down and taking a cigar out of the humidor, "I'm Whyte Patmore's confidential man—what can I do for you?"

"Are you?" she asks, a little startled.

"Madam, I only have a few moments," which was the truth because Whyte would be in presently and spoil the tableau.

"Can I see Whyte Patmore alone?" she insists, sitting opposite me and opening the end of her cane to extract a violet-scented cigarette. (If I ever marry, I shall pick out a foundling and bring her up by hand, as a man does not realize unless he is in professional life the subtleties of a woman!)

"No, I don't know as you can," I says,

just letting my india-rubber imagination skid. "Because his wife is awful jealous of you."

"Of me—really?" She comes over to sit on my chair arm.

"You have practically split up the Patmores," I says as I lit my cigar and her cigarette and we puffed for a moody moment.

"How do you know?"

"I'm his confidential man," I repeats. "He's followed your history in the papers like a hound stalking game. I've seen him sit and stare at your picture by the hour."

"If you're handing me the truth you can pick out any scarf pin in the Western hemisphere," she says, giving me a little hug.

"I ast you not to come between man and wife," I tells her, "and I ast you to respect my confidence."

"I came here to arrange with Mr. Patmore to bring his company up to my house and give the last act of his play." Then she perks her head on one side and says, "Of course, you know that everybody thinks I'm crazy—let them. I should wonder! I'll have revenge for being named Salome Grabenstatter—if I have ten millions I'll make 'em sing, judge or no judge." Then she put her head down beside mine. "Is it true so many women are in love with him?"

"Like a Friday bargain counter!"

"And he really has read about me?"

"Every line." Which was the truth, for he frequently said. "That little fool ought to be sent away until she is forty-nine. Is all the war news to be forever buried because she has taken to turning cartwheels at Shanley's during afternoon tea?"

"I'll meet him to-night to make arrangements," she begins.

"His wife," I says softly.

"Skittles on his wife! Is she so very swank?"

"No, but she's a way with her."

"I'm eighteen and ten millions," and she gets up to do a one step.

"Those are good talking points," I admits. "Maybe I could fix up a little tea fight for you two to get together—"

She opens her purse, but I stayed her with a determined gesture. "Hardly so soon—such things take deliberation," I answers, sparring for time.

She flashed up like a sky-rocket. "To-night—do you understand? Do you suppose I care for his wife or any man's wife—or any man? I've got to live up to my reputation." She gave a despairing laugh which made me wish for a two foot snowy beard so I could speak with her as an aged parent on his death bed. "I'm Salome Grabenstatter, the awful orphan, the mad heiress—well, maybe I am," and she worked herself up into such a rage that I was afraid she would get to barking and disturb the doorman. Then she gave me the back scores of her imprisoned youth and her longing to get into the clover and how she had seen Whyte in "Hearts Forever" when she was sixteen and had dreamed of him ever since. For a finale she puts her head down to mine and says, "Boy, dear-o, help me. Make it to-night at the Chip o' the Old Block," and all at once I began to get her side of the question and how hard it had been and what a fine young Amazon she was but repressed and tortured by the thing we have named conventionality. Before I knew it I was holding her hand and promising that Whyte would meet her that evening.

I let her out the side way and returned in time to listen to harsh words from Whyte about the smell of cigar smoke. I took a brodie and says:

"Salome Grabenstatter has been here. She desires to meet you to-night at twelve at the Chip o' the Old Block. Ast for Miss Grabenstatter's private beefsteak room."

"Don't mention this before Mrs. Patmore or I shall be driven forth without mercy," he says, getting his eye pencils ready while his Jap comes in with the mandarin coat that has been featured in all the women's magazines.

"Ah, but Mrs. Patmore is *not* to know," I says.

"Great heavens, Bonehead, do you think I'm losing sleep to chase off to some barbecue?" he began.

"No, but if you would save a poor girl's reason—go." I knew I was getting in up to the hub, but I was like the little boy who

could not drum a retreat but whooped up a charge and won the day.

"Her reasons?" he says, "Bonehead, have you been taking a shot of hop?"

"Mr. Patmore, I give you to understand that what I say, I say in confidence as man to man. For over two years this pore girl has been consumed with love for you— don't stop me until I have my say— she has hungered to speak with you alone —none of the dressing-room teas with your wife close by to ast, 'Lemon or cream?'"

"Cut it short," he warns.

"If you don't go there to-night and explain there can be nothing more between you, she will come down here gunning. You know the way she pulls off the big times, and unless you want one marked with your initials you better take her at her word. If you don't appear she will hunt you, if you do, the novelty will be appeased." I was a bit thick as to what he would do and just what I had started, but I figured that any way you looked at it, it was a good thing for Whyte to give Peggy a little jolt by taking a night off, and that Salome, upon discovering that Whyte was banting on zoolak and would not open a quart and that he was very nervous as to drafts and only animated in his conversation when balling out the property man, would find her ideals crumbling and look elsewhere for prey. I felt that Whyte had been too long under the guiding hand of his wife. No man, no matter how enamored he may be of any female, should never allow his own individuality to be engulfed.

"Ah," says Whyte, "the idols of March have come." He was strong for classical stuff and often referred to the idols of March as a dangerous time in his life. Besides saying tag at a dress rehearsal instead of the last speech, it was the only superstition that he entertained.

It seems that every March something went against the steam. Once the theater burned, another time he got the measles, and another year his mother-in-law wrote that she was coming to make her home with Peggy.

"Well," I says, "the idols has come but they have not gone."

The next thing I knew Peggy Patmore called me just as I was getting ready to duck after the show.

"Where did Mr. Patmore go?" she asks me and I see a storm was gathering. Right then I wished I had no such strong altruistic vein in my make-up.

"To Dia Dollings to get that speech fixed," I says glibly.

"Although that was what he said," she returns, "Mr. Dollings has just phoned down to ask for him. Bonehead, have you got another message wrong?" Which was a cruel suspicion because I had mistaken P. M. for A. M. regarding a suburban train, and they had sat in the depot working themselves into a rage instead of improving the unexpected recess by some interesting pastime.

"Come in here," she says suddenly and takes me into his dressing-room and stands me up against the wall. "I want the truth—" And without waiting for an answer, she says under her breath, "Every one said it would come—but he never lied before!"

I was in to an ounce. I could have fed Salome Grabenstatter to the crocodiles. I was all for Peggy. Not that I am fickle when my heart is truly touched, only she who weeps last weeps best with me. I was about to take her in my arms, only that there are certain members of the company who delight to misconstrue the most innocent act in the world—so I says, without a memory as to what had gone before, "Mrs. Patmore, he has a date with Salome Grabenstatter at the Chip o' the Old Block—"

"Salome Grabenstatter, why I never saw her notes," she gasps. "Bonehead, how do you know?"

"Mrs. Patmore," I says, "I ast you to excuse me—"

"I know, Bonehead," she answers, "you are a trusty little friend and I shall not forget."

Then she picks up his picture and says, "Well, you are like all the rest. I was a fool to have ever believed!"

It is a terrible thing to witness another's breaking heart. I turned my face away, but she jumps up presently and says, "I'll

go to the Chip o' the Old Block. Call a taxi, Bonehead, and act as my escort."

Seeing that in a certain sense I might be held responsible for what was transpiring, I thought it wiser to absent myself from the scene. I used my strongest arguments to persuade her to go to her apartment and rest quietly until her husband should return. I felt she would be no match for Salome.

"Better than that," I says as an afterthought, "why not pretend innocence and visit with Salome yourself—learn the truth from her lips?"

"Thank you, Bonehead," she says, putting the picture back. "Call a cab," and she pulls down her veil with a nonchalance delightful and amazing to behold.

I was sitting down to have a moment's conference with myself as to what would be the next development when I see something coming in the door draped in a chalky white paddock coat and nibbling the end of a bamboo cane. When it came into plain sight and I had mentally divested it of its black pearl pin and chamois gloves, I realized there must be parents in this world who do not flaunt their children's portraits in conspicuous places.

There was nothing much to this little guy but his adenoids and his broadcloth spats. He belonged to the puff-tie division, and the worst thing he was capable of was to sing the tenor to "Pull for the Shore" and eat deviled ham.

"I want to see Whyte Patmore," he starts in a tonsilitis falsetto.

However, I spoke in a firm but kindly voice. "He only holds one job at a time," I says, "it is the night watchman's shift just now."

"Perhaps my name makes a difference," and he hands me a card with "Lewellyn Claringbold" engraved thereon.

"It makes a vast difference," I says. "Not only is Mr. Patmore not in this evening but he has gone for a tour of Van Dieman's Land."

"Don't anger me," says Lewellyn like a bruised pussywillow. "I shall wait until he comes."

Then I thinks what a good jolly it would be to shoot him up to the Chip o' the Old Block where he could creep into Salome's purple slicker coat pocket to be exhibited for a day or so, also that it would take Salome's mind off Whyte and everything would be lovely.

"You'll find him at the Chip o' the Old Block," I says. "Ast for Miss Grabenstatter's private beefsteak room."

"My Gawd," he peeps like a prostrated canary, "then it's true—she was not chaffing!"

"Who was not chaffing?" I asks, anxious and eager for my night's rest.

"Salome!" He draws himself up to his full height and lets out a couple of reels about Salome being the sweetest little girl that had ever been misunderstood and that if Whyte Patmore had dared take advantage of her love of adventure, by heavens, he would not allow himself to couch in even restrained language what would befall him.

"Come, come," I says, "I wouldn't feel that way about it. Mr. Patmore is not generally considered to be a desperate character in these parts."

Lewellyn flops down on a hassock and lets me in for a half hour of his troubles, the main bout being Salome Grabenstatter and the way she threatened to put a card in the window for the undertaker rather than to become his get. Lewellyn also confided that his physical ability was limited to picking lilacs, but that his mind was a treasure-trove of wit and philosophy and his heart as golden as California in the year 1849. Salome was given to a man who could pick up a hundred-pound cannon ball and bounce it off his arm as if it were a recreant mosquito, and when she came across a guy that was whispered about as the champion wife beater of the county, she called for her roadster and tracked him to his lair. Lewellyn felt that Salome's and his natures would be a perfect Tom and Jerry since Salome's spelling was not such as would make Webster feel his life had been for any definite purpose and her housewifely accomplishments registered nil. "I should hate to reap as Salome sows," breathed Lewellyn, "but, oh, what a wonderful thing she is! Have you ever seen her at the hunt?" Also Lewellyn and Salome were handed a beach of rocks earned

by some horny-handed ancestors, both were decorated with the title "of age" and both shadowed by ex-guardians watching eagerly for signs of mental trouble in order to put them in a nice brick house where they serve yellow turnip and chicken on holidays only.

In short, Lewellyn felt that Salome was his affinity. Salome felt that Lewellyn was the lead-pipe limit and if he wished to prove his worth he could go over and kill the Kaiser. Lewellyn chirped up quite a bit as he got into his subject and I see that I had done a cruel thing to sick Salome onto Whyte, that the half portion never has a fair showing, and although it is often quite ample for one there is a dime tax to get it across. Right then, regrets for Lewellyn began to set in. For Salome had flung out the boast that she would have Whyte and his fellow troopers at the shack cutting up shines and she wore Whyte's picture on the end of her riding crop while Lewellyn's miniature was pasted on her fattest Pom's second best collar!

It was getting pretty late and I wished to be alone with my thoughts, so I advises Lewellyn to stay away from the Chip o' the Old Block and keep his courage to curl his hair with.

We parted friends and after debating whether or not to warn the team of what was brewing, I beat it to my bunk.

When I reached the theater the next day, the word was around that the Patmores was going to be divorced. Surviving the shock, I took Whyte's armor that had to be resoldered at the knees into his room. Standing with her back to me was Peggy. To interrupt would seem too crude as I reached there in time to hear her say:

"After ten years, Whyte, I have finally realized that it has been all wrong—not you but myself. I have blinded myself to clay toes. I have made myself fancy that a matinée idol was a necessity, a benefactor—I see now that it is a force for evil, a thing of tinsel."

"And does that convince you we are to part?" says Whyte.

"When that silly child came to me today to ask me to free you, fancying herself to be your true love, when I discovered the way you met her clandestinely—"

"Peggy, do be sensible, there's an old top, I was heading her off—"

"It is I who have been the culprit. I have encouraged you, made your success my one absorbing interest—"

"May I ask what you intend doing?"

"Certainly. I am going to be Salome's companion. She needs me. After I had talked with her she begged me to come. You are not worth any one's giving up their life for," her common-sense heels just crushed into the pattern of the rug, "you are a matinée idol—it is sham duels and loves and hates! I want something real. Salome is real. Salome needs me, so I promised her I'd come."

"You're 'way wrong," he says slowly; "you know I'm saving to start a high-class groggery. Of all the little vixens, that girl leads. So she's wheedled you into coming to live with her. Peggy, don't you know you're just the day's notion. She wanted me yesterday, to-day it's my wife, to-morrow she will sent for a Zulu steeplejack."

But she was ready for him. "You can't make me change—once you made me run away from duty. I thought an actor man was a demigod. But it has dawned on me that you are just a glistening bauble, a great, strong man earning his living by mincing out before idle women! I hate myself for having ever encouraged you—"

"What do you want me to do," he says, "fly to France?"

"I'd be proud if you did something real," she answers. "Salome would never have got her silly heart set on you if I hadn't written your press stuff and made you a matinée idol. It is my duty to set her right—"

"Ah, the idols of March," says Whyte slowly. "Well, let's see, I'll begin being real by losing game. On the stage they usually splutter."

I was going to give my opinion when the suit of armor skidded against a massage electric battery that Whyte had left going, and a young boiler factory in full operation resulted. Picking myself up from the débris I made a remark about the weather which was received almost with indifference.

All evening I kept recalling Dia Dolling's slogan, "The Romany lad for the Romany lass," etc. I see that affairs was steering toward the rocks. That while my intentions were beyond reproach, my results were as far from meeting my expectations as a bride's first biscuits tally with the picture in the book. "Well," I tells myself, "I'm the subplot, and as all life is but a play, as Shakespeare says, it is just as well to apply the rules of the drama to the affairs of every-day existence. Dia Dollings says the subplot is often of more technical importance than the audience dreams. It is the string which holds the pearls, the corset which shapes the French creation, etc. Well, then, it is up to me to stop the Patmore divorce and to save Salome and Lewellyn from a madhouse.

After which I went to O'Toole's pie house and treated myself as if I were a crowd, returning to the theater to be chided for absence. No messages from the spirit world had enlightened me as yet. I see that Peggy had been busy packing up and leaving Whyte's filing cabinet of mash notes and pictures so it would be convenient. In a magazine story, the fugitive wife always bakes a large pan of macaroni and cheese and cleans house and lays the worn slippers beside the grate before she grabs the 6.10.

Whyte comes off from his scene of triumph to be met by the empty room and me. He turns around and says, "Bonehead, I'm going to get up a public subscription to have you decorated for brilliancy."

"Oh, Mr. Patmore," I says, "I hope I have done nothing to annoy?"

"Don't alarm yourself," he answers, "but if any more lunatic flappers wander in here and threaten to blow their heads off, here is a case of pistols that they can browse around until they find the prettiest patterned handle."

"The idols of March has come," I says, "but not gone."

"You get to hell out of here," he answers hastily and I compassionately slipped away.

The next day the company had the story dead to rights and Whyte was keeping busy with a strangle hold on the papers. The reporters having lost track of Salome were keen, and Whyte was having visions of the head-lines:

ACTOR'S WIFE LEAVES HIM TO BE COMPANION FOR HEIRESS!

"No More Tinsel," Says Pretty Mrs. Patmore.

Meantime I wondered if Lewellyn had died in an unmarked grave. I was kept busy working with myself as how to fix it up while Dia Dolling's words, "The Romany lad for the Romany lass" kept ringing in my ears. In all of Dia's plays there's a big stab at the end of the last act that makes the audience feel as if a charge of dynamite was running up and down the aisles trying to make friends. By all the rules of the drama there ought to come a single stroke which should unite Whyte and Peggy, Lewellyn and Salome and leave me as guiltless as if I had never happened upon the tiny rift in Whyte's happiness.

Just before the Saturday matinée in hops a reporter to ask Whyte if the rumor was unfounded that he and his wife had parted. It seems that Salome and Peggy were as happy as turtle doves and were about to sail for France as hospital nurses. Salome was to do the scrubbing and Peggy to write the diary, having had experience with Whyte's mash notes.

"Well," says Whyte, "you may say that Mr. Patmore was as astonished as your readers. However, if Mrs. Patmore desires to go to the front, she goes with her husband's best wishes."

When Whyte finished the show, the manager says to him, "Of all the sham battles we've been having, this is the limit. You can quit—contract or no contract. If you think you can jack yourself back by having a press story about your wife's leaving you to be Salome Grabenstatter's companion, take it out in meditation!"

"You mean you are dissatisfied?" says Whyte quietly.

"I mean that you've been making a fool of yourself and the company for three nights. The cigar that's named for you draws better than you do! If you can't act any better than a fried egg can box, you

better fade. I'll put Cal Hendricks in your place to-morrow."

"Thanks awfully," says Whyte, "just put your name to that and let us remember that the best of friends must part."

After the manager signed him off he sent me out to the Automat to get a couple of soft boiled eggs and some coffee. When I returned, quivering with remorse and dread as to the outcome of it all, he says, "Bonehead, old top, I'm going out of town—you're a good sort when you're asleep—do me a last favor?"

"Sure enough," I says, "what 'll it be—rain or snow?" to keep up the appearance of frivolity to the last.

"Take this note up to Mrs. Patmore. She's at Miss Grabenstatter's. Do it the first thing in the morning. I'll be gone by then, so there's no answer." Then he hands me a ring I always admired and says, "Remember, Bonehead, this game is all velvet for a little, but get into the smell of something real, if you want to last. Remember that it is better to wear out instead of rust out!"

You talk about a homesick girl to a boarding school—that was me. Onion extract was my name. I felt that the idols of March had adopted me right into the family and that next spring would see me in a cloister rather than take my chances.

"Why, you little rascal," he says, "trying to work up a scene," and he pats me on the shoulder and I just bellowed out: "Take me with you," for all the world like a matinée girl.

"No," he says, "you've gotta have your Broadway, Bonehead, and where I'm going there's nothing but the prairie chickens. I'll come back to say hello sometimes."

When he was explaining to the company that a farewell present would be as out of place as a cabaret at a funeral, I remember something I read in a scientific paper about taking a looking-glass and holding it over a blotting pad and seeing what had originally been inscribed. Odd that it should occur to me at this particular moment, but I spotted Whyte's new blotter fairly glistening with ink and a scientific curiosity to test the statement consumed me. I slips over to raise a hand-glass above the writing desk and inside of two seconds I knew enough about Whyte to be his twin.

I did not see Whyte again, but I left my ring at a jeweler's to have it made smaller. The next morning I jostled down the line of butting butlers at Salome Grabenstatter's and waited until Peggy came in. On the way up I gave Lewellyn Claringbold's establishment the once over to see if there was any wreath of everlasting hung outside, and although it was Sunday, I got a quick glance of Lewellyn and a small measure of similar half portions in white sweaters drilling in his side yard.

Knowing Peggy as I do, I see that for all her grand-stand play about being Salome's big sister and patron saint, she was not forgetting that the letters W-h-y-t-e spelled a given name, masculine gender.

"Oh, Bonehead," she says, "what has happened?"

Shrugging my shoulders I handed her the note, which said, unless the looking-glass was cross-eyed:

Send future word to the club. It will be forwarded. W.

She read it over about six times. Then she says, "Where has Mr. Patmore gone?"

I was for refusing inside information, but somehow I could just hear Dia Dollings say, "The Romany lad for the Romany lass"; and Peggy's joining Salome to do a bit in France while Whyte was speeding across the continent and Lewellyn was climbing up his cellar door while his best friends threw red-hot pokers on all sides of him did not tally.

So I let my champagne temperament bubble to the rim of the goblet.

"It will be tough for him, Mrs. Patmore. He never wanted you to know that he was canned."

"Canned!" she says. "Explain this instant!"

"The manager says he was acting like an amateur, so they smashed the contract, and Cal Hendricks is to open to-morrow night."

"Discharged!" she says to herself, a regular stage aside, such as Dia Dollings says is a "hideous *faux pas*."

"And he's started for Barking Dog,

Nevada," I says. "Golly, but he will be a tenderfoot."

"Barking Dog, Nevada," she says, "are you sure?"

"It seems to me I'm always giving out information," I answers, "but seeing that it's you, Mrs. Patmore, and you will respect my confidence—"

She kissed me square on the beaser. Right then I was all for Peggy. I'd have told her everything the writing pad had whispered, when in bursts Salome, fresh from a morning canter. What Salome couldn't do with white tricoline breeches and a gray tweed coat with russet leather boots left premeditatively unbuttoned, is not worth the ink to explain.

"Oh, St. Peglets," she says, "Dasho Delano is giving us a farewell supper party and—" Then she sees me and stopped short.

"Salome," says Peggy, losing no time, "I'm sorry, but Whyte needs me."

"Whyte?" says Salome. "I thought that was settled back in the dark ages, that we were pledged to be pioneers of the new race, self-sufficient sisters of sincerity—"

Peggy checked the flow of language. "Whyte is so real he is discharged. The blessed dear has actually flown to Nevada to try a claim or ranch or some such thing —fancy! He'll be like the babes in the woods without me."

Salome lets her whip drop to the floor. "You mean that after showing me what a bally idiot I've been, after I've come to really adore you and make you my top-hole saint—that you're going back to Whyte?"

"I'm sorry, dear," says Peggy, "but you see I'm Whyte's wife and it is my duty. I thought I didn't owe him any duty before because he wasn't real. But he is real. What does Barking Dog suggest—anything artificial?"

Although shrinking in a portière, crowding a marble maiden with no more wearing apparel than a snake has kid gloves, the words, "A Romany lad for a Romany lass" rang triumphantly in my mind.

"But what of me?" persists Salome.

"You funny little flapper who twisted us all up—you can manage. There will be a dozen women better than I who can take my place. It's when you love some one that you can't manage alone," says Peggy. "No one but Whyte's wife would go out to Barking Dog to help a dethroned matinée idol begin again!" And she left Salome and me to have a word of understanding.

"Well," says Salome, flicking her whiplash, which I handed to her, against her leather boot, "you're the cove that started it."

"I ast you to respect my confidence," I says.

"I have," she says, "and I ast you the same."

"Fifty-fifty," I says.

Then she walks over to the window and I see her looking at a miniature that I judged to be Lewellyn.

"I understand Mr. Claringbold is organizing a bantam-weight regiment to sail for the Balkans," I says, unable to resist a slice of the old "Shenandoah" technique.

"Where did you hear it?" she demands.

"Oh, call information," I says, a trifle peeved. I see her galloping down the hall and I let myself out and beat it for Broadway.

The afternoon papers had the story of Salome's wedding to Lewellyn, but Peggy's getaway was squeezed into a single stick.

Of course, I could have thrown the bomb into Peggy, if I had done my duty by Dia Dollings. All I need have told her was that Barking Dog was the big moving-picture city built by the Wurst Film Service and used for million-dollar productions. Here, any day, one might see Geraldine Farrar riding on a charger and Annette Kellermann in her own tank, and after a few days one might see Whyte Patmore, America's matinée idol, posing for "Hearts Forever," his immortal stellar rôle, by special arrangement with his New York managers and using the same mosque that William Farnum had in "Titus the Terrible!"

But I didn't throw the bomb because I knew that after Peggy got to Barking Dog, all ready to draw a neck-yoke and clear the claim, that the only way she could escape would be to borrow a highwayman's knapsack and wait for a stormy night.

The Labyrinth

by Francis Stevens

Author of "The Nightmare," etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TALE OF TOTAL DEPRAVITY.

TO prevent mistakes, we indited a message on the wall in three conspicuous places. Should Ronny and Tolliver arrive here it would be well for them to remain stationary. Otherwise, in seeking to be reunited, the lot of us might circle the labyrinth indefinitely, like a kitten chasing its tail.

Then, with the " Rejoice not " archway for a starting point, we once more essayed Dan Mason's tortuous entrance halls.

My just-revealed cousin-in-law had been right about the panels. We encountered no obstruction to losing ourselves, and in a few minutes were safely cut off from return to the padded cell.

It was too bad that on our first journey in we had been quite so thorough about blundering into every blind alley the labyrinth boasted. Rex's initials formed no guide to a short cut. In fact, we found it best to ignore them, and an intricate system of beautifully interlaced " C.C.'s " was soon added to the interior decoration of the corridors.

No longer did we shudder at the pathos of red-brown noughts and crosses. If some poor dub had used his heart's blood for paint, we knew that he had been consoled with champagne at the finish, and sympathy would be wasted.

As we strolled, laden with hope and sardine tins, Governor Charles laid bare the shameful story of his crime.

In Ronny's narrative I had been vaguely conscious of something important missing. It was just a little thing—merely the hinge on which the whole preposterous adventure turned. I could scarcely blame Charles for himself halting and stumbling over it, for his was indeed a weird tale to fall from the lips of a rising statesman.

It seemed that, made desperate by the approaching marriage of his escaped secretary *fiancée* to Tolliver, Charles determined that for the first time in his life he would resort to wicked subterfuge.

Offerings of luxury beyond the dreams, *et cetera,* having been declined with thanks, his astute brain suggested trying the opposite. He would do two things. Rouse the generous sympathy which was one of Ronny's strongest characteristics, and then rush her off her feet.

" What I wished," he explained, " was to show her the mistake she had made in allowing a trivial misunderstanding to separate our lives. I believed—I still believe—that in every important respect we are suited to one another as few people are."

Suddenly his rather spiritless manner dropped away. His face flushed, and his fine voice quivered.

" Wyndham, I love her. I loved her so. I couldn't forget her. Even work failed me. Day and night she was before my eyes and — I couldn't forget her. Then one day it came to me that ambition and the power to do are empty, fruitless things, that bring a man nothing but loneliness. It seemed to me—I was wrong, of course—but it seemed that, having labored so long and hard to safeguard the happiness of people with insufficient intelligence to guard their own, I had earned the right to take,

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if needs be by trickery, this single joy that I wanted for myself.

"It was false logic. Happiness can't be based on a lie, and if it doesn't come by free will it cannot be forced. I knew that, but I pretended otherwise. Still, if there really remained no love for me in her heart, my scheme must fail. On that basis I excused myself and carried it out."

With a nice sense of drama, he chose midnight for his début as a deceiver. That Ronny had broken her second engagement the same evening, and been left at her door five minutes before his arrival, was mere coincidence. One of those little helps of fate offered the ingénue on the downward path.

"She allowed me to see her, and I told the story I had devised. Experience on the speaking platform is not so different from an actor's training. I think my manner was convincing, and she consented—"

"Look here," I broke in ruthlessly, "just what was the wonderful yarn that you told Ronny? It was carefully deleted from her story, but I'll be hanged if it's going to be deleted from yours without a protest. *What* did you tell her?"

He flushed again, and stammered like a boy.

"If you must know—well, to be perfectly frank—I believe I hinted that—you see, it was this way. I wanted her to marry me that night, before she had time to think about it or change her mind again. I told her that—"

Suddenly he plunged desperately, and managed to get it out of his system.

"I said that years ago I committed a crime in hot blood. That there was only one witness, a friend, who had kept silent, but that of late he had taken to drink and gone to the dogs. I said that Louis Berger got hold of him on a drunken spree, and by the offer of a large sum induced him to make a sworn statement. You know, by the way, Berger has played turncoat and thrown his railroad princes to the lions? He's a soiled tool, but Comstock agrees with me—"

"I *beg* your pardon. Would you mind finishing your other story first?"

Interrupting a Governor is bad taste, and not always safe. But this was a thoroughly tamed Governor, and besides he was used to my interrupting him. He meekly returned to Ronny.

"I said that this friend of mine—this witness against me—had repented when sobriety returned, and warned me of his betrayal. It was too late, however, to save me from ruin. Not only my political career, but even my status as a citizen was lost. To save myself from a prison term, or worse, I must leave the country, and for the rest of my life play the part of a hunted criminal."

"But *what* did you say you had done?"

His embarrassment increased.

"I could think of only one crime that a man wouldn't dare stand trial for."

"Good Lord! Murder?"

He looked relieved at not having to say it.

"Yes. I had killed the man in hot blood, however," he added hastily.

"That undoubtedly saves your character. And as a murderer, Ronny of course welcomed you with open arms."

"Mr. Wyndham, no doubt this seems amusing to you, but for me it is serious."

"Yes, one would expect that. Pardon my levity. And Ronny?"

"As I had dared hope, she insisted upon sharing my exile. After demurring insincerely, I yielded, and since every hour's delay increased the danger of my apprehension, the marriage must take place at once. Then she could return to her apartment, pack a suit-case, and meet me at the Nicollet Street station."

"And I thought Ronny was intelligent!"

He looked resentful. "She is the most intelligent woman I have met. And just at this moment I can recall no man of my acquaintance who is her equal."

"Thanks. So the wedding took place instanter. But—why, Governor, who performed this ceremony? How is it that with the police on the trail, not to mention a hungry horde of reporters—"

"I'm coming to that. In a way, it is the most regrettable part of the affair, for it has involved an honorable and highly conscientious man. The Rev. Dr. Theodore Crowell, in fact."

"Ah! Well, why not? Yesterday I should have said—but we diverge. Dr. Crowell, then—"

"Understand me, he knew nothing until later of the duplicity that I had practised. While amazed at the suddenness and strange hour of the ceremony, I assured him that if he would not perform it, Miss Wyndham and I would only seek another clergyman. As an intimate friend of my dear father's, he consented, and we were married."

He ceased speaking.

"And then?"

"I told her the truth," he said heavily.

"She was not pleased?"

"She was—greatly annoyed. In fact, she expressed a desire never to see my face or hear my voice again."

"Naturally. Ronny could tolerate a murderer in distress, but not a man who had made her feel foolish."

"Was that the trouble? I hadn't meant that she should feel foolish. I merely tried to show her that her love for me really existed, and that, in the face of misfortune, she would go any length for my sake."

"You showed it. And then—"

"Then I lost my head. Instead of taking her home, I brought her here, and instead of relenting, she has every day grown firmer in her desire to leave. The moment that I heard your name, when you stopped me on the street outside my house, I knew that the end had come. I have never found surrender easy." He smiled rather forlornly. "I tried to carry it off, but I suppose I gave myself away pretty completely."

"You nearly scared your caller into suicide, if that's what you mean. It wasn't till three hours afterward that I had the remotest thought of connecting you personally with Ronny's disappearance." I explained about the fragment of letter which had put me on the trail, saying nothing, however, of the ignoble character of my suspicions. They were not the kind to feel proud of.

"So you knew nothing at the time of your call?" he queried. "I believed otherwise. In fact, I came home to-night prepared for anything."

"Even murder in earnest."

The words slipped out before I could check them. The moment they were uttered I would have given a good deal to recall them. In one clear-sighted flash there came to me the true meaning of that pistol he still carried. And Tolliver's angry expostulation at the pool—"I ought to have let him drown if he wanted to!"

Ronny had certainly made one beautiful mess of an originally fine and courageous character.

And yet—it wasn't really fair to judge her. It was not—fair.

"No," said Charles, as if he had read my thoughts, "all the wrong was mine. I had no intention to defend myself by violence. In fact, I had decided on a peculiarly cowardly way out—of which I should prefer not to speak."

"Unworthy," I dared, in a very low voice.

His teeth came together with an audible click. "No—cowardly." After a moment he continued, "The cold plunge I shared with your friend may have washed a few cobwebs out of my brain. The—the nervous tension had been running pretty high. I'm not apologizing—only explaining. You won't understand, but I *couldn't* let her go. Not till the very end was reached. And it's a rather queer sensation to feel your world sliding from under your feet. This is the full confession they say is good for the soul, Wyndham. I think that now you have the whole miserable story."

"Not quite. Dr. Crowell?"

"I went to him on the day following and told him everything. I appealed to him on the ground that should Veronica leave me in anger and tell her story my political career would be ruined. That was not my reason. What I really feared was that once away from me she would never return. Dr. Crowell, however, while deeply distressed, hesitated at injuring the son of his old friend. He consented to keep silence for a few days, while I tried to persuade Veronica. Fortunately, no license being required in this State, only Dr. Crowell, his daughter, and an old servant of theirs, whom he positively assured me could be trusted—"

"One thousand dollars reward!" I gasped.

"What did you say?"

"I said that the day of miracles has not passed—maybe. If I were you I'd go and hand a thousand-dollar bill to that remarkable servant. I'd do it first thing — the minute you're out of here, I mean."

"It might be a good idea," he conceded thoughtfully, "though it savors a bit too much of bribery. However, as I was saying, only Dr. Crowell and these two witnesses were conversant with the facts, and he has not recorded the marriage at City Hall. That is, he had not done so the last time we talked."

A look of startled recollection flashed across the Governor's face.

"Do you know," he observed, "just after your own morning visit, Dr. Crowell called me up. He said it was imperative for him to see me. I made an appointment, but was prevented from keeping it, and I have heard nothing at all since. I wonder—"

"That would be fine," I remarked. "I can just see to-morrow's papers."

There was a pause.

"I personally don't matter," he said at last. "My moral code gave way under the first real strain, and I should be forced to take the consequences. I suppose, too, that some other man can—will carry on my work as well as I. But Veronica—it is going to be very unpleasant for her if any of this comes out. What would you advise me to do, Wyndham?"

"The only safe way would be to destroy the record, strangle Dr. Crowell, his daughter and miraculous servant, knock Tolliver and myself on the head, drown Veronica in the lotos pond, and bury us all in the labyrinth. If you want any less drastic advice, you will have to give me time for deep thought."

There was a long, silent interim, in which both of us were plunged in reflections. Mine were curious.

As a scoundrel he had been startling but comprehensible. As *Sir Galahad* he was irreconcilable. And yet, after some strange fashion, I knew that it was *Galahad,* not *Gawain,* who walked beside me. I wonder if *Galahad* could have found the Holy Grail if he had been burdened with a sense of humor?

CHAPTER XXII.

THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS.

"COME to think of it, she said she couldn't marry you, but I believe that's a mistake. It isn't bigamy to marry the same person twice. Any law against it in this State?"

He looked at me sharply. "No. What do you mean, Wyndham?"

"Under no circumstances can you afford to let this secret marriage business leak out. I doubt if Dr. Crowell has made it public without telling you of his intention. Ronny must go home and frame up some kind of yarn—or rather I will—so that the baying kiyoodles of the law will drop the matter without a scandal. Then you can be remarried with all the correct flourishes—"

He stopped me off by seizing my shoulders, whirling me around, and facing me with eyes that literally blazed like blue fire.

"Wyndham," he demanded, "are you on my side?"

"No," I said very coldly, "I'm not. I'm on Veronica's side. First you made her fall in love with you, then you drove her away by bossing her—except in a business way, Ronny cannot be bossed—you nearly forced her into a loveless marriage, played the mean trick of letting her make a great sacrifice, the meaner one of showing her that no sacrifice had been made, and crowned all by trying to force her forgiveness in ignominious captivity. The initial fault, however, was making her love you. With two people like you I suppose the rest was inevitable. You may repeat that I choose to be extremely insolent, but I've been through enough to justify—"

His attention had halted two sentences back.

"On your word of honor, Wyndham," he said slowly, "do you believe she loves me?"

"She says she detests you—and will take horrible vengeance on any one who dares

cause you inconvenience over this incident."

"Oh, that's for the work's sake."

The light went out of his eyes, and his hands dropped from my shoulders. Again we walked in silence.

"By the way," I said, "have we passed any 'R. T.'s' lately?"

"What? I don't know—we were talking."

"And walking—an unsafe combination down here. It seems to me we've come a very long way."

"Remember, you were tired at the beginning."

"I was tired so long ago that I'm rested again. We've come too far. And—I say, don't you hear some one shouting?"

We stopped in our tracks.

Silence, then from far off, muffled by many intervening walls, there reached us a long "Hal-loo-oo-oo!"

"Sounds like Tolliver," I ventured. I raised my voice in reply, Charles joined me, and we got an answer after a moment.

To set out in the direction of the hail was impossible. In the first place, it was hard to know where that direction lay, and in the second, our peregrinations were governed not by will, but by where we could find a way. Reaching Tolliver was a long and tedious business.

One thing we discovered with surprise. We had become so accustomed to failing panels cutting off the rearward road that we had ceased to note whether a passage was blocked by what Ronny had named a "calamity wall," or one of the steel panels.

Earnestly conversing on matters of grave import, we had given attention to nothing but Charles's liberally bestrewed "C.C's." Were a passage bare of these, we followed it. And thus, it now appeared, we had wandered into a region panelless, "R.T."-less, and even nought-and-crossless. Only Tolliver's voice, echoing through the waste, indicated that we were still in the region of the banquet-hall.

Our education, it appeared, was not complete.

Tolliver's voice indicated something entirely different, as we learned when, at the end of a half-hour's steady hallooing, that gentleman met us at the turning of the way.

It was a distressed and mentally dishevelled cavalier who followed his voice into our presence.

"Have you seen Ronny?" was his first casual greeting.

"What—do—you—mean?" Charles's voice was softly sweet—like a tiger's growl.

"I say, have you fellows seen Ronny?"

Then I perceived that Tolliver's casual manner was deceptive. He was speaking between clenched teeth in a desperate effort at self-control.

More or less in unison we explained to him the improbability of our having recently looked upon the lady in question.

"She was left in your care!" accused the Governor. "If you have allowed any harm to happen to Veronica—"

He didn't finish, but his tone implied all the lingering deaths of a medieval torture-chamber.

Tolliver, however, was too genuinely distressed to care for our opinion of him. It appeared that after we had been shut off by the so-called "Exit," Tolliver fled in search of some implement to break through. Failing to find anything better, he snatched up one of the great silver rose-urns, with which he meant to smash out a panel.

With Ronny urging him to haste—for they, too, had heard the grind of machinery—he had done that little thing. In fact, he demolished the door so thoroughly that it fell in splinters before his knightly arm.

"But the door went with us!" I objected.

"Double door!" snapped Charles. "Go on, Tolliver."

Disclosed by the smash, they beheld a concrete wall rising some six or eight feet beyond a black and yawning abyss. There was not so much as a rail visible for a sliding car to have run on.

"Overhead rails," interjected Charles, who must have had a leaning toward mechanics in his youth. "Electric motor automatically connected, self-starter, and au-

tomatic brake. That's all simple. *Where is Veronica?"*

Veronica, it seemed, had displayed unusual symptoms of hysteria. I believe that her remaining guardian had to restrain her by force from flinging herself into said abyss, whither she insisted that Charles and I had fallen to our deaths.

"You see?" said I to the Governor.

"You are very dear to her, Wyndham," he retorted with a melancholy shrug.

"Oh—rot!" Good little pal though she was, I couldn't see Ronny committing suicide on my grave. "Well, for God's sake, Tolliver, I hope you didn't let her jump in?"

"What do you think I am? Certainly not. I told her I'd make a rope of something and go down there myself."

So he got her to a chair, rushed to the wardrobe-room, and was back in three minutes with an armful of gaudy cloaks and garments from which the rope was to be constructed.

Then came real tragedy. Ronny had vanished. Cursing himself for a fool, the unlucky cavalier flew to look down the horizontal shaft. Nothing doing. A blank white panel presented itself, which when he assaulted it with the urn gave answer with a steely clang.

"That," explained our mechanical genius, "was the inner half of the door. The car had returned as it went, and if you had waited you could have opened it as we did and joined us under the pavilion. As it was, I suppose you had smashed the mechanism?"

"I don't know," mourned Tolliver. "There was nothing to take hold of. I battered both urns flat trying to break it open."

This explosion of energy exhausted, it occurred to our hero that after all Ronny might not have flung herself down the shaft.

Running along the wall, he jerked down tapestry in moldy billows, till he did actually uncover another doorway. It was an open arch. Hurling himself through it, he found himself once more in black-and-white stripedom. Frantically seeking Ronny, he rushed along, not troubling to R. T. his path, shouting her name and hallooing from time to time.

As a result of this impetuous proceeding, the devious ways had soon swallowed up friend Tolliver. Therein he had wandered disconsolate, till our answering hail assured him that others than himself yet lived and moved in Daniel Mason's too labyrinthine labyrinth.

"Maybe when the car came back Ronny got aboard and was carried to the pavilion," hazarded I.

"Now, you must know that's impossible, Wyndham." The Governor was wearily patient. "We were there at least half an hour. The white panel that he saw was the car. If she'd been inside, she would have called to him through the door. What I fear is—"

He broke off, and we didn't ask him to finish. Had Ronny, in her temporary insanity, done the thing that Tolliver meant to prevent her doing? While he was in the wardrobe, before the car returned—

"Nonsense!" I ejaculated. "Here we stand like three fools, while Ronny is straying about somewhere all alone. Come on and find her!"

Brave advice, and eagerly taken up. Where we should look, however, was a matter beyond our choice. We could only—wander—and wander—and wander some more, shouting, hallooing till our throats were hoarse, and one would have thought that Ronny's name had echoed clear to Marshall City.

Let it not be imagined that the variety of the inscriptions had ceased with the falling panels. We met them continually—little, cheerful reminders like,

Terrors Are Turned Upon Me; They Pursue My Soul as the Wind.

Or—

Their Flesh Shall Consume Away While They Stand Upon Their Feet.

Oh, lots of variety, though we hardly bothered to read them any more.

It was a vile and twisted use for the Great Book, but the mind that had spent millions for such a purpose was too primitive to be judged by ordinary standards.

A suggestion that we separate received the gubernatorial veto. Charles had command now, and neither of us thought of questioning it. Seemed a bit strange, too. We weren't hunting for my Ronny, or Tolliver's Ronny. We were looking for Mrs. Clinton Charles—and I hadn't got used to the idea any more than Ronny herself.

In spite of us, we returned again and again over the same territory, making, I suppose, a vicious circle, or quadrilateral, or some villainous geometric figure.

"This is a hell of a joke!" our cavalier complained. "I hope that old Dan Mason—"

But it isn't necessary to say what he hoped for old Dan Mason. I hoped an unrepeatable thing or two for him myself.

Charles, however, didn't waste breath on anathema. As it was, though he had a fine voice to start with, it was pretty nearly worn out by the time we came to the place where we met ourselves walking along a corridor.

The device is as old as the hills, and wouldn't frighten a child. Naturally, it wasn't calculated to frighten three grown men. That's why we all stopped as if we'd been shot, Tolliver reached for his gun—which he hadn't got—and I heard the funniest little sound, like a gasping sob of panic. It come out of my throat.

Then we grinned for the first time in ages, and our reflected selves grinned sheepishly back.

"A mirror!" sniffed Tolliver. "Say, that's stale. By George, I do look like a specter of the Merry Monarch, don't I?"

"No—the Pretender after hiding all night in a tree."

"Veronica!" The cry was so sudden and sharp that it made me jump.

"Clinton!" came a faint little wail from somewhere. "Oh, Cl-linton, where are you?"

"I'm here! Where *are* you, Veronica?"

It seemed to me that Veronica and Clinton really ought to be reunited.

"Rap on the wall, Ronny," I called. "We can't tell from your voice where you are."

There came one violent thump. The mirror swung out and back.

Our reflected selves vanished into the all-where, and in their place stood none other than the Lost Lady of the Labyrinth, Veronica Wyn—I mean, Mrs. Governor Clinton Charles.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A HIDEOUS DISCOVERY.

DID this romantic couple, reunited after hours of terror, fall upon one another's necks?

Veronica cast about one-half of a beaming smile through tears in Clinton's direction; she swayed a similar fraction of a sway toward him.

I held my breath.

Next instant Ronny's arms were around my neck again, and her tears of relief were bedewing my shoulder.

I felt rather like a tailor's dummy—one of those wax figures that wears another man's coat.

Still, after all our years of comradeship, I could hardly shake her off rudely, and say: "Here, this is all wrong—you go and weep on Clinton. Can't you understand that you're tearing the very heart out of the man you love?"

No, it wouldn't do. Ronny must walk her own road as she'd always done, and if Governor Charles got stepped on—well, he would have to "learn about women from her," that was all.

I looked up. The back of a cavalier was just disappearing through the mirror doorway. Tolliver had gone to see where Ronny had been hiding. The back of a conspirator was moving slowly off in another direction. Charles was going to look for—oh, anything—his lost self-respect, perhaps.

"Ronny!" I said, in a voice I'd never heard speaking to her from my lips before. "Brace up! We've tramped two hours looking for you. Where have you been?"

She drew away, and her eyes had the reproachful, amazed brilliance of a baby's, that has been slapped when it expected to be consoled. Her rosy mouth quivered.

"*Poor* little girl!" said Hildreth, coming down with a dull, sickening thud. "Were you very much frightened?"

"I've had a horrible experience—perfectly horrible! If I hadn't found you again, I should have died, I think—where did Rex go? He didn't go in *there,* did he? Call him back quick, Hildreth! Quick!"

Fearing I knew not what dreadful trap, I sprang to the mirror door and shouted Tolliver's name.

He was not more than a couple of feet from the entrance, and my yell startled him considerably. He leaped through the door with the wild expression of a man called upon to defend his lady against dragons, saw that Ronny had not been assassinated, and turned on me in exasperation.

"For Heaven's sake, Wyndham, isn't there enough to get on a man's nerves without your yelling like that at him? What do you want?"

"I don't know. Ronny said you mustn't go in there."

"There's a dead man in there! He's sitting at a table, and he's dead! He poisoned himself—he read a letter—and Mr. Mason—the labyrinth—"

Suddenly Ronny pulled herself together, drew a long, quivering breath, and when she spoke again it was in the perfectly controlled voice which she reserved for matters of importance.

"You must not think that I gave way to fright because the man is dead. I've been conscious since the first moment of our entry here that something was utterly wrong. I don't mean the knife-edged, murderous panels, nor the malice written on the walls, nor any single thing that a person could see or touch. I mean a sense of something intangible and—and ferocious. It's lurked around every corner we turned. It fairly brooded over that horrible, musty old banquet-table. Do you recall how after a while we couldn't bear to speak of or look at the marks painted in—painted in red on the walls we passed? And how—"

"Ronny, you've been too long alone. There's nothing down here but our four selves."

"And a dead man—and a letter. Here—or no, I don't want you to read it yet. First you must see what I have seen—and then you—you'll know what I know."

Another quivering breath, and she caught at her under lip with her teeth.

Charles had come back.

"Wyndham, you stay here. Tolliver and I will find out exactly what is wrong."

"No," demurred Ronny with an abrupt return to firmness, "we'll all go together. For just a minute, when I first came out, it seemed as if all the—the horribleness were shut in that room beyond the door. But it's not. It's everywhere, and from this time on none of us must lose sight of the others for one single instant. I tell you, there's a vicious *intent* against us because—we've discovered his secret."

Ronny was talking so wildly that I feared her mind had suffered by whatever experience she had met in those two lonely hours. From the look in Charles's eyes I knew the same fear was on him. She was so bent, however, on our accompanying her that it seemed best to give way.

Crumpled in her hand were three or four sheets of paper, which we assumed formed the letter she had referred to.

Having examined the mirror, and made sure that it was simply a swinging door with no catch or provision for self-locking, we passed through. On the other side was a curving passage, painted in red for a change, and rather dimly lighted.

As Ronny's sole acceptable guardian, I brought up the rear with my arm in hers. Her little cold fingers locked themselves nervously around mine, but aside from that she was now rigidly calm and self-possessed.

We had not far to go. The passage made almost a semicircle and in the midst of it was an open archway.

"Don't go in," whispered Ronny. "I went, because I saw the poor man, and I thought perhaps he might have got lost here, and been half-starved, and tired, and fallen asleep sitting there. But I can't bear that any of us should cross the threshold again! Look!"

We had been looking while she spoke.

We saw a dim, circular room, finished in a shade of pale, greenish-gray. Around the wall, here and there, was fastened up a peculiar ornament—a sunflowerlike thing, of which the petals were dull-black with lighter patches of gleam.

In the center of the room was a round table, with a lamp hung just above it that cast a steady, downward glare, the only bright place in the room. Just under it stood a strange little rack of bottles. There was a partly filled water-carafe, too, and a dingily fogged empty tumbler. This latter was set close to the quiet, waxlike hand of the man.

That hand fascinated us. It was long, thin, fragile, and half curled stiffly, as if it had released the emptied glass and frozen so.

The man's hair gleamed white against the dull black of his sleeve. An old, weary man, who had dropped down in the chair at the table's far side, laid his head on one extended arm and fallen asleep. So it had appeared to Veronica when she first stumbled upon this hidden chamber.

Yet how had she ever been deceived? That hand—and the side of his face where it showed, with its slightly greenish, waxen pallor!

"The letter lay scattered in sheets," whispered Veronica, "on the table and floor. I was going to speak to him. Then I—I saw."

"And you gathered up those sheets and read them?" I gasped.

"Yes. First I ran away. I couldn't get far. I didn't know about the swinging door. It looks just like the wall on this side. I was shut in with—it. I kept going back and peeping through the doorway. I couldn't think what was dragging me there. I didn't want to go. Then it was just as if a voice spoke in my ear. 'The letter!' it said. 'The letter—the letter!' After a while I knew. *It* wanted me to read what was written on those sheets. I—I went in, on my tiptoes—very softly. It would have been so horrible, you see, if I should have—have waked him."

"Veronica, stop!" Charles spoke in his ordinary voice—a startling thing to hear when every one else had been whispering. He seemed to think so himself, for he lowered it before speaking again. "It's not like you," he continued, "to give way to fancy. There is nothing here to harm us."

"But there is—there is! Read the letter and you'll know. Read it!"

She thrust the sheets into Charles's hands, and we other two couldn't wait for him to finish and pass it along. We stood under the small electric bulb that lighted the passage.

Rex and I read with one eye apiece what the Governor had the advantage of holding straight before him. But we got on very well. The writing was in a large, bold hand, as easily legible as print.

At the top was a date five years old. The paper was commercial bond, with the letterhead of the Corporate Iron Companies, and in one corner the name of Daniel Mason, president.

As we read on, the rough, violent personality of the writer seemed to thrust itself out from every line like a discord jarring on stillness—the stillness of death.

It was addressed, "Bradley R. Fern, Esq.," and began without further preface:

You'll never read this letter till I've got you where I want you, and that's sitting right at this table in this room I've got ready for you, and with the fear of God—and me—in your heart at last.

And the best of the joke is that I'll be looking over your shoulder as you read, though you won't see me—or will you? Maybe you will. I hope so. I should like you to see me peering and laughing at you—as you laughed at me one time, do you remember? I see you do. Oh, yes, I'm standing here, looking right over your shoulder while you read. I'm laughing you down to hell, old man, do you understand?

You stole her neatly, with your butter-mouthed Bible talk, and telling her how she, living open and honest with me, would go to hell sure, because some other butter-mouthed Bible quoter like you hadn't said words over us and called us man and wife.

We'd get to that likely, too, in a year or so. Those were rough days. It hadn't seemed to her and me to make such a lot of difference—till you drifted into camp and turned my wife against me. Yes, she was my wife, and all the preachers from here to Jericho couldn't have made her more so. But you took her away, and made her a thief in the bargain.

Mary and me had saved that two hundred together, and it was ours together. If I'd taken that money and drifted off with some other woman, wouldn't I have been a thief? Yes, I would, and that's what you made of her when you got her to take it and sneak out of camp with you.

But you "made her an honest woman" afterward, didn't you? You *married* her—and *she*

knew she was my wife, and all the preachers couldn't change that and let her be yours. You didn't make her an honest woman; you made her a thief and a— I won't say the word about Mary.

You was smooth and sleek and educated, and you sure knew your Bible those days, didn't you, old man? You know who they say can quote Scripture? Well, the regular devil didn't have a thing on you that way.

You used to fire off Scriptures at me; all the while you was plotting to do the meanest sin in the whole Book—steal another man's woman away from him. But I'll bet you've got enough of Scripture quoting about now. I've spent a lot of study and trouble digging out a few bits to keep you interested.

And you won't read this till I'm dead, so I can stand and look over your shoulder and read with you. I thought about it some before I planned this out. I wanted you to suffer like the damned, before you was dead and damned forever. And a man can't do that right unless he's alone. *You* showed me that. I've been alone ever since, and if I had all the money and money-bought women in the world, I'd be alone.

So I wanted you to be alone, and, just the same, I wanted to be right with you, seeing you suffer, and enjoying every minute and every hour of it.

And how could I be with you and you be alone?

Why, just the way we've been ever since you sprung the trap I fixed for you. I'll be dead when you read this—and I'll be *standing right behind you, reading it with you over your shoulder.*

When you and Mary went off I tried for a while to find you. I'd got two bullets in my gun, both of them hungry for a mark. But I was broke—you'd seen to that—and I had to work, and you got off and hid pretty clever. It wasn't till three years ago that I saw you again, sitting up on a platform in the town-hall at Rochester. You was changed some. Your hair's white, and I suppose you know how good it goes with that sanctimonious, silly face of yours. But I spotted you in one minute.

Select councilman then, weren't you? Left the pulpit and gone into politics—rotten politics, where you belong. I don't know what you've done with Mary—my woman that you called your wife. Dead, I guess. Or maybe you deserted her and left her to starve, or worse. That's what seems most likely to me. Anyway, you've got another wife now; I found out that much.

I just read in the paper yesterday that you're going to run as candidate for mayor of Rochester. That's good. I hope you get elected. I hope you get to be just as high as you'd like to be, even if it's President. The better off you are, the more you'll have to lose. Can you see me standing here laughing at you?

I didn't know exactly what to do about you till I got talking with Signor Guido Bartoli. He's an Italian and he knows a lot. He's a devil, too, though not *your* sort. The *signor's* a big man, and a big artist in his way—that's landscape gardening—but the first time I met him, I saw in his eyes what sort of devil he was. So I out pointblank and told him about you.

He helped me—for money, but he put something in the work that money couldn't buy, and that's pleasure. He enjoyed planning this underground maze for me, and setting in that silly, innocent hedge maze over it—the solemn yews that shade the secret tomb, he called them.

He got the workmen, too, a lot of dagoes, his own countrymen, who couldn't speak a word of English to tell tales, and thought Signor Bartoli was a little god on wheels. Bartoli and I worked together like brothers. I did it for hate and he for love—love of my hate, that could wait such a long time and take so much trouble.

Bartoli killed a woman at home, he told me—that's how confidential we got—and he's been mourning ever since because her lover escaped him by shooting himself when he heard the news. Nobody ever suspected Bartoli of that girl's death, and I should be surprised if they had. He's something more than an artist—he's got brains. And he's a devil—the sort of devil you taught me to like by stealing my woman.

When I'm dead you'll get a letter. Bartoli has it now. He'll post it from wherever he happens to be when he hears of my death.

It's a very clever letter. Bartoli wrote it, and you'll believe every word of it. And you'll sneak up to the Heights all alone—I know you, with your gold-greedy, woman-greedy fingers. And you'll spring the trap. You *have* sprung the trap, or you wouldn't be reading this, would you?

You've had your fun, and now I've had mine. Can't you hear me laughing over your shoulder?

You've been looking for a way out of here a long time, haven't you? Now I'll tell you the truth, you dirty dog.

There is no way out.

I've been in and out here many times, coming and going by the door you fell through, and *being mighty careful to leave that door open behind me.*

The only way you could get it open—from underneath—would be dynamite. Do you see? That's the way it's made. And no matter how loud you yell and screech, nobody 'll hear you.

How do you like being alone with riches, and splendid rooms, and fine, fancy clothes, with food that drops to dust in your fingers, and wine that looks fine in the glass and tastes bitter as loneliness and death?

Alone? *You* haven't been alone one minute since you fell down here—into hell.

Now drink your poison or cut your throat—do I care which? I've had my fun. Look up! Look over your shoulder! Do you see me—

DAN MASON.

Scrawled half across the page, the signature came like a savage, triumphant shout, or the crash of iron on iron. Though audible only in our minds, it echoed there as he had meant it should echo in the ears of Bradley Fern.

We didn't look over our shoulders. Our backs were against a wall, and I, for one, preferred it that way.

Governor Charles suddenly crumpled the sheets together in his fist. He stood very straight, and said in a loud, stern voice, the voice of a judge:

"Daniel Mason has committed a crime more worthy of a devil than a human being. That he committed it after his own death does not excuse him. He is a murderer in his grave, and every man shall know it!"

I don't know whether he was speaking to us, or to the presence that was heavy on us all—the presence of the year-dead Master of the Labyrinth.

I know that his stern, slightly defiant voice shocked my strained nerves like the touch of an electrified wire, and that Ronny cried out softly: "Hush! Hush! Don't speak so loud!"

And then the horror happened.

The dead man stirred.

First his waxlike hand quivered, and the long, thin fingers straightened.

Then the whole upper part of his body lifted, the white head rose, and the face stared straight across at us with terrible, wide eyes.

It was a thin, rather ascetic face, with the greenish pallor of death in every line. The mouth opened.

"I saw you coming in a dream," it said. "I am very glad, for it has been lonely enough down here, with only the unrepentant dead for company!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BENEVOLENT VICTIM.

THERE are occasions when it is difficult to keep the calm poise a man should hold in face of any humanly possible event.

In the first place, for a greenish-white corpse to raise its head and speak is only inhumanly possible. In the second, we had all got our minds "set," so to speak, on this particular corpse being the sad remains of a stranger.

To see a ghost is bad. To see the ghost of a man you have supposed to be alive, and he, moreover, a person you have known all your life and thought a lot of, is infinitely worse.

It was Charles again who broke the tension. He strode into the room as boldly as if it had been the commonplace library of his own house.

"Why, Dr. Crowell," he said, "how long have you been down here?"

The "corpse" viewed his approach with a benevolent smile.

"Long enough to become thoroughly weary, Governor. I fear I am no longer young enough to enjoy such an adventure."

The old clergyman rose stiffly from the table. Charles grasped his hand, and as they stood together under that lamp I saw not one vivified corpse, but two. When the rest of us had somewhat dazedly joined them, I saw four. I suppose I was another myself.

But, of course, like every one else, I was so familiar with the ghastly effect produced by a nitrogen lamp that I wasn't the least bit frightened.

I hadn't been exactly *frightened*—well, to get on with the story, greetings were exchanged with relief on both sides. If the ghost of old Dan Mason was really present, it must have retired in disgust from such an uncongenial atmosphere of joy.

Ronny behaved like a good little sport. She laughed at herself unmercifully for the inhuman horror which she had conjured from Dr. Crowell's sleeping form, but we were not inclined to make fun of her. We recalled too clearly a few of our own emotions.

"I knew, though," said Charles quietly, "that the man was not Bradley Fern."

He must have caught a skeptical gleam in my intelligent eye.

"No, really," he smiled. "I was acquainted with Fern in his lifetime. He died last year. Yes, he passed out within a week after Mason himself. And I think we all remember about Bartoli."

Of course we did. Last spring's papers had been full of it, for the *signor* had been well known in Marshall City. Dan Mason had set a sort of fashion, with his Asgard Heights landscapery, and we have enough millionaires of the sudden and splurgeful type to have kept two Bartolis busy following it up.

Then with sad abruptness the artistic Italian had been wrested from our midst. Extradited, in fact, and hurled back to his native land. The murder of the girl had not been quite so cleverly covered up as Mason fancied.

"Ah, the hopeless futility of revenge!" mourned Dr. Crowell. "The wasted wealth and genius expended on this underground horror might have given pleasure grounds to ten thousand play-starved children!"

That is Dr. Crowell's special mission—getting playgrounds for children. I sympathized with his grief, but the imaginative picture of Dan Mason and Signor Bartoli gloating together over the design for a merry-go-round was too much for me.

"How did you come to get caught?" I inquired hastily.

"Through my own inquisitive nature, I fear." He turned to the Governor. "You will recall that you invited me to dinner."

"I did," Charles admitted. "But I phoned the Heights around five to let you know that I should be detained in town and couldn't reach here before nine or ten o'clock. Li Ching said you had gone to walk in the grounds. Later on he telephoned that you had returned to the city."

"I see. But Li Ching was mistaken. I came out early, as you asked me to do, but the—the person with whom you wished me to talk declined to see me."

Ronny looked him straight in the eye and smiled sweetly.

"I sent word that I would see you at dinner when Governor Charles should have returned."

He nodded.

"Yes, I believe that was the message. Having dismissed my hired car at the gate I strolled about the grounds for a time, enjoying the sunshine and the fragrance of the flowers. I fear that with old age absent-mindedness is creeping upon me. Being engrossed with a—a certain question which has been deeply troubling me of late, I raised my eyes to find myself walking between high walls of impenetrable hedge. I had become involved, it seemed, in a maze of endless extent and infinite convolutions."

Tolliver grinned.

"That's the best description I've heard for it, Dr. Crowell."

"Yes, I wandered there for some half-hour, calling out from time to time, till I reached a small, round building, beautifully constructed of white marble. Curiosity led me to enter. Within was a single chamber, and set in the midst of it, an empty pedestal.

"Carved upon the top of this pedestal in high relief appeared a quotation from the Book of Proverbs. I could see no aptness in its presence here, nor could I surmise for what purpose the pedestal itself was intended. The quotation, moreover, was incorrect. It is a very familiar one, and I could not be mistaken. It should have run, 'The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable.' For 'kings' the word 'man' had been substituted, and its misuse, moreover, emphasized. 'Man' was not only carved in deeper relief than its companion words, but the letters composing it were of greater size and more elaborate design.

"Intent upon this singular deviation, I laid my finger upon the word, idly tracing its letters. To my astonishment it moved slightly. Here, since I was meddling with the property of another, I should have desisted. Instead, curiosity led me to see if it could be entirely lifted away. It moved again, but in a horizontal instead of vertical direction. A small sheet of copper was disclosed, but before I had time to investigate further, the pavement fell away from beneath my feet, and to my intense dismay I was precipitated into an underground vault.

"I need not go into the details of my wanderings since that hour. You, I presume, have with you a chart of these regions. I had none. While deeply distressed by the evidently malevolent use which had been made of sacred writings,

I soon came to take a certain consolation from their presence. They formed, indeed, a perpetual reminder that, whatever the ill intent of man, I was, as always, in the safe hands of my Creator.

"Later, when I passed from the musty and desolate banquet-chamber to this smaller room, and when I had read the missive there in your hand, I felt more inclined to pity than wrath against Daniel Mason. Consider it, my friends! He must have studied the Testament through and through, and out of those wonderful pages he could extract nothing but evil and a means for cruel revenge!

"I sat thinking of this." He smiled again. "It may have been childish, but I received the most vivid impression of his personality about me and—I talked to him as if he had been here with me in the flesh! I'm afraid I preached quite a sermon to Daniel Mason's ghost. If God lets such things be it may have done him no harm. Then, being very weary, I fell asleep. Your voice must have reached me, Mrs. Charles, for I dreamed that you were beside me in this room. I awakened, and it was very pleasant to see not one friend, but four, standing in the doorway watching me."

"Dr. Crowell," demanded Veronica suddenly, "did you find that box of canned food in the banquet-hall? You didn't, of course. It hadn't been touched. And you missed your dinner—why, you must be nearly starved! We'll have to get back into the banquet-room right away."

"There's nothing there to eat," reminded Tolliver. "We cleaned out the ice-chest, I'm afraid."

"Sardines!" I remarked dramatically. "Dr. Crowell, did you ever dine on sardines, minus all fixings?"

"I believe I could dine on sardines in their natural state, at the present moment, young man!"

"No, this is real luxury. Cooked and served à la can."

The conspirator and I stacked our spoils on the table.

"If we had only included the foies gras and Madeira!" I mourned.

"Never mind," consoled Ronny. "We may need those later."

This was the first hint Dr. Crowell had received that our presence here was as involuntary as his own. As minister to one of the largest congregations in the city, his acquaintance was wide. Though Tolliver and I had not met till six months ago, he had known us both since boyhood. Naturally, then, Tolliver's engagement and my relationship to Veronica were facts with which he was familiar.

What import he at first drew from our presence here, I don't know. Dr. Crowell's thoughts could not be too easily read. He had the tact of forty years' successful ministry in Marshall City and elsewhere, and so far, aside from a curious glance at the anachronistic costumes among us, he had refrained from asking questions.

The time, however, had come when some explanation must be made.

Charles felt it, for he began abruptly:

"We haven't a chart of the labyrinth, Dr. Crowell. We fell down here by an accident."

"You don't say! All of you together—why, how very unfortunate! Hildreth, would you mind opening this can?"

They were French tins, without any patent openers. I got out my pocket-knife.

"I'm the guilty man," I confessed. "My arm was resting on top of that pedestal, and in the dark my fingers happened to close on the fatal word. Guess you'll have to eat 'em out of the tin, Dr. Crowell."

"Yes, certainly. You'll lend me your knife? In the dark, eh?"

Suddenly Charles gave me one half defiant, half appealing look, turned his back and strolled over to the wall, where he began examining one of the sunflowerlike ornaments.

I looked at Ronny. She smiled sweetly and said nothing. I looked at Tolliver. He scowled; then he muttered something about finding out how Ronny got in here, and disappeared through the arch.

Clearly, it was up to Hildreth.

"Yes," I began. "In the dark. You see, we ourselves were lost in the hedge maze."

"A very easy thing to befall one, particularly in the dark. I understand."

"Yes. Tolliver and I came out to call on Veronica. Of course you are aware that there has been some—ah—misunderstanding in regard to her marriage."

"Yes, Hildreth. I am fully acquainted with the facts. The ceremony was performed by myself."

"So I was informed. Well—the Governor felt that he owed us some slight explanation, and while we were walking about the grounds talking it over, we blundered into the maze. In trying to find a light switch at the pavilion I played fool, as I've told you, and since then we've been straying happily from place to place. Rex and Governor Charles had to change their clothes for what they could find in Mason's crazy wardrobe, because just before we reached the maze they fell in a pond—accidentally. Quite a chapter of accidents, but you know these things will happen. Have another can of sardines?"

"Thanks, no—though you open cans beautifully, my boy. And now all that remains to be done is for us to extricate ourselves."

"Just that one little thing," I agreed, "and our troubles will be over."

CHAPTER XXV.

A HEALTH TO VERONICA.

THE titanic revenge of Dan Mason had misfired utterly, so far as Mr. Bradley Fern was concerned. It was a pity that the old iron king had not troubled to consider that innocent people might receive the punishment intended for Fern. During his lifetime he probably saw to it that the pavilion was not meddled with. Or did he?

Dr. Crowell denied that any of his life blood had stained corridor walls in anguished noughts and crosses. He explained that the idea of marking his track had not once occurred to him. Mere chance guided his steps to the banquet-hall, which he entered, not through the gas-chamber, but by the open arch of Tolliver's later discovery.

Who, then, was responsible for the red-brown symbols? The question has never been answered, and possibly it was only another device of the Italian's subtly fiendish ingenuity.

The air-tight chest of canned goods, not to mention the delicacies Charles and I had found on the stairs, were not explained by the letter. Mason's "food that drops to dust in your fingers, and wine that tastes bitter in the glass," hardly applied to this assortment of really excellent provisions. The letter, however, was dated five years back. In the interim he might have decided that agony would be prolonged by a slightly more sustaining diet. Or it may be that Mason had them to refresh himself on gloating expeditions to the scene of his proposed post mortem revenge.

The elaborate completeness of the entire scheme reminded one of that famous bombardier who "took a cannon to kill a lark." Bartoli had certainly grasped the opportunity to make a very good thing out of the twist in his patron's mind.

The "death-chamber," as we named the gray-greenlit room where we found Dr. Crowell, was well calculated to inspire a desperate man to suicide. The sunflower ornaments were formed of knives, their red-rust black in the greenish rays, but once keen-edged and bright. In the table-rack were bottles containing a charming assortment of deadly chemicals.

"Cut your throat or drink your poison," commanded Mason. "Do I care which? I've had my fun." Then the final fearful suggestion of his own invisible presence, and, as he had hoped, the end.

But the Rev. Dr. Theodore Crowell was not Fern. The kindly old man wore coat-of-mail not to be dented by any weapon in a monomaniac's armory. He spoke gently to the restless, cruel genius of the labyrinth, and dropped quietly asleep.

We had no doubt that, did we care to explore further, we would find other rooms than the banquet-hall, but any curiosity we had started with had perished some time ago. Our whole desire now was centered on escape.

"Whither away?" I inquired, stowing the remaining sardine-tins in various pockets. "If we play *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* as you did, Ronny, we'll only be lost all over again."

Just then our energetic cavalier came tramping back.

"The door to the banquet-hall," he announced, "had jammed. I've wrenched it open."

This was good news, so far as it went. Following the red, semicircular passage, we returned to mold and mildew. It appeared that Ronny, driven by an anxiety which she insisted was for me, had leaped up the instant Tolliver disappeared in the wardrobe. Seeking another exit, she found this one, it closed behind her, and, the wood being sadly warped, stuck fast.

She said that she rapped, pounded and called Rex's name, but he was too noisily engaged in flattening silver urns on the car-panel to hear her.

It was obvious to us all that the only quick, safe way to regain the pavilion was by the car.

Tolliver and Charles set themselves to seek out the mystery of its working, but my assistance was declared unneedful. In fact, I found that a reclining position on the dear old divan suited my energies better. Dr. Crowell went to encourage the toilers. Ronny sat down by me. I was touched by her loyal attachment.

"Ronny," I said, "don't you think you've punished him enough?"

"Don't be horrid again," she retorted placidly.

"I'm not horrid. I'm tired. We're all tired. I think your Clinton Governor is tireder than anybody else. You are ruining one perfectly good man, and the worst of it is, you love him."

Her gray eyes softened, became almost transparently brilliant, but she shook her head.

"Not any more now. He killed my love twice over, and it can't ever live again. He lied to me—deceived me in the most cruel and treacherous manner. I can't forgive him! Oh, Hildreth, I want to forgive him! I do—I do! If he had let me go of his own free will, I—I might have felt—differently. But he wouldn't—and now it's too late. I said I hated him, but that's not true. I'm so—so sorry for him that—that it hurts me—here!"

Her slim little hand—with the fingers that from babyhood wouldn't bend back the fraction of an inch—covered her heart.

Charles's words came back to me: "You won't understand, but I *couldn't* let her go. Not till the very end was reached." It seemed to me that there was a certain unfortunate similarity between their natures.

"And yet," I observed, "you haven't appeared even annoyed with Dr. Crowell. He kept silent when a few words would have brought you help."

"Dr. Crowell did exactly as I asked him," she retorted surprisingly.

"What!"

"He telephoned me as soon as Clinton left him, Tuesday morning. I told him on no account to betray Clinton to any one."

"But, Ronny—say, if you could use the phone that way—by George, you're the most remarkable *prisoner* I ever set eyes on!"

"You don't understand. Clinton took advantage of me in—in every possible manner. He said the only way I could go was to ruin him by telling the police. That's just one more of the things I can't forgive."

"Well, as I remarked once before, Clinton is a jewel. He has a knowledge and an ignorance of you which are simply stupendous—both ways—and why were you so overjoyed to see me? If you had phoned, or sent me an 'at home' card, I'd have run out any time."

"I wish you wouldn't be sarcastic, Hildreth. You don't act like yourself."

"Part of me got lost somewhere in the labyrinth, maybe. I'm doing the best I can with what's left. Why did you accept a rescue by force with joyous relief when you could have had all the cops in Marshall City out here any time in the last week?"

"If you and Rex had been policemen," she said stiffly, "I should have sent you away without allowing you to interfere with Clinton. But I knew you would both do as I wished and keep silent."

"I see. Dr. Crowell, and Hildreth, and Rex, and I haven't a doubt, old Li Ching, the butler, would all do as you wished—everybody in the world, in fact, except dear Clinton. Isn't that the idea?"

"I shall leave you alone. Perhaps when you are rested, Hildreth, you may be in a better temper."

She left me with the dignity of deep offense. I knew she would probably never forgive me either, but somehow I didn't care. I was too tired.

I went to sleep for a while, and when I woke up Charles was standing over me, shaking my shoulder.

"The car is working again," he announced. "By bracing open the door, when it's at the other end, we can go back and forth as we like. Tolliver is trying his hand on the pavilion trap-door, and the others are with him. I came back after you."

"That was kind," I admitted.

"Veronica wished you to sleep as long as possible."

To his great amazement I rose and shook hands.

"Comrades in disgrace," I explained. "She's angry with me now."

"Is that possible?" In his eyes the final calamity had befallen me. "I hope you haven't quarreled with her on my account?"

"No; entirely on my own. What's that under your arm, Governor?"

"Madeira. I brought a bottle in case you needed some restorative."

"You have my vote from this moment. Shall we split the bottle?"

"Thank you, I rarely touch wine."

"Just one small glass," I implored. "For your soul's sake—a toast to Veronica?"

That corrupted him. I knew the mention of her name would.

And so we stood there in the decayed midst of Dan Mason's futile revenge, and drank a health to the fairest, most lovable woman I ever knew; and the most unforgiving.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RESCUED AGAIN.

ONCE more the scene changes, and we find ourselves in the well-known padded cell. It was as good a place to rest as any other, and a lot better than some. We could sit or recline comfortably on a cushion of forest green, imbibe, if we wished, two sorts of excellent wine, and otherwise sustain life on sardines, anchovies, and pâté de foies gras—while they lasted.

Beside these advantages, however, it was hard to see wherein the pavilion subcellar improved on any other spot in our new home.

Mason's letter stated that nothing short of dynamite would open that trap-door from beneath. Mason seemed to be right. It added that shrieks, howls, and lamentations might rise thence in vain. Right again.

Unless the State's anxious voters should be inspired to come out with shovels and dig for their Governor, I began to fear that he would never hold office again.

The workmen who made the place? Italians—no speeka da Eenglish—scattered about the country, or back in their native land. Bartoli? Across the water, and engaged with troubles of his own. Anybody else who held the secret of that pedestal? The silence becomes ghastly—very ghastly.

We relieved it by an occasional outburst of hammering on the ceiling. Rex returned to the banquet-room via car, and brought the two battered rose-urns. With their assistance we proved the ceiling to be sheeted with hard steel. Its decorative and highly colored embossment wouldn't even dent. The noise we made was our sole reward—and why had Mason been so positive that no sound could pierce that floor? Anyway, there was about a chance in a thousand that some one would be there to hear it.

Between intervals of pounding we sat around and admired Veronica's courage. Poor little girl! I was sorry now that I had called her unforgiving. When Charles and I stepped out of the car we found her waiting there, all ready to forgive—me. I tried to pass it along, but the effort was wasted.

It occurred to me then that after all she had gone through a pretty bad time. If her love for Charles were really dead, it was unjust to be provoked with her. He was a man. He had made the bed he lay in. If Veronica starved to death in this desolate tomb, primarily the fault was his.

I became "my own nice self" again, and tried to forget that there was tragedy

among us more intense than starving to death.

"My friends," said Dr. Crowell, "let us bravely face the fact that before us there lies a terrible ordeal—"

And just at that opportune moment the trap opened.

Now it stands to reason that when this blissful event occurred there was only one person on his feet in the middle of the floor. That person went to sleep with unusual suddenness. Ordinarily I like to go to sleep, but not when I'm hit on the head by a half-ton of swiftly pivoting marble. The awakening is too painful.

To explain the opening of that trap, I shall have to retire some seventy hours through time, and introduce a certain humble gardener man. His name is unknown to me, but I can say for sure that it was something with a Li, or a Ching, or a Fu in it. He practised his profession upon the estate of a Governor-Mandarin-millionaire, and in due course of practise, he one day reached the center of a certain maze.

Observing that a few desecrating leaves had drifted within the door of the temple which stood there, our faithful unknown fastened up his hose and proceeded to clean up.

That temple was really in a shocking state. His neat Celestial mind recoiled from the dingy appearance of its sacred interior. A scrubbing-brush and pail supplemented the hose. In the temple's midst there rose a monument, doubtless erected to the Governor-Mandarin's grandparents. Certainly its upper surface bore a prayer, facing heavenward to the gods.

The prayer, too, was dingy! Shades of the Great Emperors, this must not be!

The scrubbing-brush flew. Not enough power to it. Up on the edge the disciple of cleanliness springs and kneels. Now! With all the power of wrist and elbow—in the name of the sacred dragon, what is this?

We know what it was—I've told about that carving trick often enough—but in the unknown Wu-Li-Ching-Wung's case, it didn't work quite the same. Being perched on the pedestal itself, he couldn't fall through.

The yawning depths closed once more with a hungry snap. Gingerly descending, the unknown fled. Then he bethought him of certain temples in the Flowery Kingdom, where yawning floors disclosed heaps of jewels, dangerous things to meddle with because of jealous priests. Here were no priests.

He sought his dear old friend, Wung Li, steward of household supplies. Wung Li thought well of the news. Together they returned. Reascending the pedestal, friend unknown demonstrated. By keeping his hand on the sacred word, the trap remained open.

Wung Li, courageous adventurer, took to himself a ladder and descended, and here I have to give a Chinaman credit for more good sense than could be found among five intelligent Americans. Perceiving at once that about him lay a duplicate of the hedge maze, or worse, and with a full belief that uncharted labyrinths are better let alone, Wung Li investigated no further. If jewels there were, they might very probably be guarded by the dragons of the under-earth. Let them stay there for him.

Yet, as Confucius doubtless said, an economical mind misses no slightest advantage. Here was a wonderful hiding-place, and if it hid nothing, why that was a defect to be remedied. Wung Li was fond of that which sparkleth in the glass, but Li Ching, only less in dignity than the Governor-Mandarin himself, had slight sympathy with his desires.

What a place was here for secret revels, and the concealment of nefarious spoils!

Within twelve hours the labyrinth held a cache of delicacies meant to assuage the cravings of two thirsty Chinamen. Sardines, anchovies and foies gras were thrown in, I suppose, for good measure. The Chinese appetite is exotic anyway.

Then came the terrible night when, with shrieks of terror, the Governor-Mandarin's lady was born off by ruffians, and the G.-M. himself vanished from the sight of his servants.

Did they, armed and valiant, pursue the ravishing miscreants? They did not. Switching off the ground-lights, that the security of darkness might add itself to their

flight, they took to the woods, and it was another twelve hours before the faithful Li Ching got them herded up to the house again.

After all this excitement, Wung Li's spirit stood in need of sustainment. Accompanied by the unknown, he sought their cache in the temple.

Li Ching, watchful and very much worried, wondered what the steward of supplies might want in the hedge maze. He followed. The rest is easy, but I regret that I missed seeing those Chinamen's faces when they looked into that hole!

The trap might well have been allowed to bang shut again, and the guilty ones started on a trip to San Francisco, save for Li Ching's restraining grasp on their collars.

As it was, the ladder of the wrong-doers served to extract the Governor, his bride, *et al.*, from subterranean retirement.

Me they bore sadly thence, convinced that my career had received a very serious check. Once outside the hedge maze, however—for which event I was probably waiting—I demonstrated such signs of life that they laid me down on the grass, where my opening eyes stared full in the face of a lovely stranger. It was none other than old friend Sun, whom we had never hoped to see again in this world.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LABYRINTH'S LAST TURNINGS.

ROLLING over, I sat up.

Round about there were gathered an anxious group of those with whom I had expected to share my grave. Charles knelt beside me, the—yes, the inexhaustible flask in one hand, a glass in the other, and wearing his best hospital nurse manner. Only the spoon was absent.

"I've missed something," remarked Hildreth intelligently. "Whence came these rolling lawns and beauteous beds of flowers?"

"A trifle light-headed," commiserated Charles. He cast an apologetic glance at Ronny, as if to say that this single thing was really not his fault.

"Oh, no," Ronny corrected him. "He always talks that way. Hildreth, dear, does your forehead hurt you very much?"

I put up my hand. It encountered a lump that felt as big as Kildaire Mountain.

"My brains hurt worse," I murmured. "Last time I recall looking at you, you were sitting on a green plush floor, staring up at a sky-blue-scarlet ceiling. Now—"

"The trap-door hit you a wallop when it opened," explained Tolliver bluntly. "A couple of the Chink servants had been hiding stolen delicacies down there, the butler caught them at it, and helped us out. That's all."

Though terse, Tolliver's description of our dramatic rescue proved to cover the facts.

"Li Ching," the Governor assured me, "has gone to phone for a doctor."

"Then send some other Li after him quick!" I exclaimed. "No doctor is going to see little Hildreth at Asgard Heights. Can't you understand that it won't do? Why, old Billings has the police out now, looking for me. And Tolliver—his father is probably dragging the river for him. We've got to go home quietly—quietly; and drift in with an affidavit in each hand that we never so much as heard of Asgard Heights. Pardon me, Governor, but as a conspirator, you look the part a great deal better than you act it."

Veronica beamed on me.

"I knew you could be trusted, Hildreth," she kindly approved.

Charles saw the point himself. He hailed a slinking, pig-tailed figure—either Wung Li or the unknown—and sent him streaking off on Li Ching's trail.

I staggered to my feet. The sun was at the zenith, and it occurred to me how very many things must be done before he arrived there again.

"I'll have to come for you to-night, Ronny, after dark. Whether you and dear Cl—the Governor settle your differences or not, no one must suspect the truth of this affair. The most important thing is to restore you to Mrs. Sandry—at midnight, I think. That would be appropriate. Afterward—"

I stopped. The bump on my head must have interfered with cerebration. What

were we going to tell Marshall City anyway?

"Never mind, dear," Ronny consoled. "You'll think of something, so I sha'n't worry in the least. But is it really needful for me to stay here till this evening?"

"It is," I rather grimly assured her. "I fear the sun won't oblige us by setting before that, and you certainly can't leave by daylight—where you off to, Tolliver?"

He turned reluctantly. Maybe he thought I wanted him also to remain at Asgard Heights.

"I'm going for my car, of course—unless it's been stolen."

That was so. Though he had lost his sweetheart, he still had his automobile—perhaps.

"And afterward?"

"I say, Wyndham, what do you take me for? Let me know what kind of yarn you fix up—so we won't contradict each other. So-long."

He was off, striding down the hill, a remarkable figure of a moth-eaten cavalier; but a true cavalier, none the less. I reflected that his dust-coat would conceal the apparel from a prying world, and turned back to the others. They seemed to have become involved in argument.

"But, my dear child," Dr. Crowell was protesting, "what you propose would be very wrong. For you to return to the world posing as Miss Wyndham, and make no effort to have this marriage annulled, nor to seek a divorce, would be unjust both to yourself and the Governor."

"It doesn't matter to me," announced the somber one. "I should never wish to marry again in any event."

"Neither shall I. It would be impossible for me, after all that has occurred."

Dr. Crowell eyed that raised, dimpled chin reflectively. What he said next proved him to be gifted with unusual insight.

"Mrs. Charles," and the title was carefully emphasized, "your conscience may allow you to do this, but unfortunately mine does not. I have endured much through the reckless behavior of your husband. That I could put aside cheerfully if it were to any good end. But I can no longer be a party to these clandestine and undesirable proceedings. On my return to the city, I shall at once record your marriage, and if any one inquires of me, I shall feel bound to make known the facts. What effect this will have on Governor Charles's position, he best knows, but my duty as a minister of the gospel lies clear before me."

Ronny gave him one awful look. His generally kindly face was set in the lines of a fanatic, who will sacrifice himself and every man on earth to the Moloch of his conscience.

Charles took an appealing step forward. "I deserve it," he said in a low voice.

There was a flash of white between the minister and myself. It disappeared, involved in the folds of the conspirator's cloak. All we could see was two slim, firm hands, locked tight round Charles's neck.

The fanatical look had strangely melted away from Dr. Crowell's face. He smiled at me.

"Try not to be more untruthful than necessary, Hildreth," he murmured. "By my recollection, you have an ingenious mind. Handle the reporters yourself. I am going to the house and lie down."

An ingenious mind! If he meant that he remembered me as a good liar, why didn't he come right out and say so?

However, the Rev. Dr. Crowell had departed, and I was alone with the conspirator and his kidnaped bride.

After some considerable period I went and sat down on the side of a wheelbarrow that a gardener had left there. Occasional low murmurs reached my ears. Their import could be surmised, though I had no curiosity. I was too tired.

I wished that the mysterious Li Ching, who had floated through the background of the last sixteen hours of adventure like an invisible Celestial wraith, might materialize in the flesh and offer me some matches. A full cigarette-case and no matches—old Mason would probably have given Bartoli an extra bonus if he'd had brains enough to think up such a tantalizing torture. Now, matches in themselves are a slight luxury—

Just then there emerged from the single statuesque group before me two radiant, unfamiliar beings. The lady angel beamed

upon me as if I, too, were a beautiful, beautiful stranger. The gentleman seraph strode over and grabbed my hand for no apparent reason.

He shook it up and down violently.

"She's forgiven me, Wyndham! Thank God, she's forgiven everything!"

I observed how nice that was, in words as cordial as I could think up. I tried to feel radiant, too, but somehow I was too utterly played out.

After a little more of this I inquired what they intended to do about the police and the reporters.

"It doesn't matter—we both trust you perfectly for that. I know that Dr. Crowell can be persuaded to keep silent—he can marry us again if he wants to. She's forgiven everything, Wyndham! What *can* anything else matter to me?"

"It matters a whole lot," was my stern retort. "What about my immortal soul that you expect me to imperil in talking to those reporters? Nobody's asked *me* to forgive anything. However, I do it most freely. As I seem to stand *in loco parentis*, pray accept my pardon and blessing."

Ronny looked from me to Charles.

"Don't mind him, dear," she deprecated. "He never means anything he says."

Charles's reply was meant to be *sotto voce*.

"I understand him perfectly, Veronica. Behind his flippant manner he hides a very earnest and serious mind."

First it was ingenious and now it was earnest! The time had come for Hildreth to take his departure.

"When your next wedding comes off I hope you'll invite me. I'll be very quiet and good. Ronny, will you be ready to go this evening?"

"Do I have to leave here just the same—now? Don't look like that! Yes, I can see that it's necessary. But you're not fit to go home yourself, Hildreth. That lump on your head is terrible."

"Come up to the house," Charles invited hospitably. "Take a hot shower, a good breakfast, and sleep the rest of the day. I have to get in town," he added, glancing at his watch.

Then he frowned and shook it. I judged the timepiece had unfortunate memories of that lotus pond.

Now, I didn't like to say that I deeply distrusted his house—that, though unshaven, unshowered and unbreakfasted, I preferred to go off somewhere in the peaceful woods, far, far from the Charles ménage, lay me down on a carpet of leaves, and go to sleep. Also that I meant to do it. Down the slope of the hill a blue-smocked figure was moving. All Chinamen smoke opium. Ergo, all Chinamen carry matches. I kept my eye on the blue figure, and prevaricated glibly:

"My head's fine. Tolliver has gone after his car, and if I don't do the same with mine, some one will find it, and complications will increase. You be ready for me this evening, Ronny."

"Well—if you really feel you ought to go. Be sure and take some rest, won't you, Hildreth? Good-by. You've behaved like a perfect dear about everything."

"Yes, that's my nature. Good-by till to-night."

"Good-by."

I turned away.

"Clinton," came Ronny's sweet contralto from behind me, "last night, just before you came home, I was thinking about these verbena beds. Now verbenas are pretty, but they're not exactly suited to this lawn of ours."

"Why not?" Clinton asked quickly. "On first looking the place over I told the gardener to put verbenas in along this walk. I thought you'd like them."

"Yes, dear, I know; but you see verbenas—"

I hastened my steps. If they were going to quarrel again, Ronny might find some one else to rescue her.

I had caught my Chinaman and realized my best expectations before I once more looked back. They were walking together toward the house. Charles's arm was thrown around her waist, and against the somber conspiratorial shoulder her hair shone like gold.

Evidently one of the two had yielded on the verbena question—and I had a very fair idea of which one it was.

(The end.)

Valentine West, Secret Agent

by Percy James Brebner

THE LADY'S GLOVE

"YOU here, West?"

"Why not?" and a fair-haired, young-looking man turned sharply to face his questioner, letting a monocle fall from his eye as he did so, suggesting that he saw a great deal better without it. "Why not, Sir Charles?"

"No particular reason, only one hears of fellows meeting you in such rum places, right the other side of the city, or out in the suburbs somewhere, queer places where no one else goes."

"That hardly applies here, does it?" West returned, glancing across the great room rapidly filling with guests. "I wonder what Lady Hanson would say if she heard you call her house a rum place."

"Agree with me, I expect, if she were entertaining a political crowd like to-night. Politics and diplomacy bring some rare specimens into the open. Which are you?"

"Neither."

"You are not going to tell me you come here for pleasure."

"Is that the only alternative? Why not get local color for sensational articles on social London?"

"Is that the game?"

"You mustn't forget that I am half American, and that half of me is inclined to hustle."

"Your erratic course becomes clear," said Sir Charles. "High and low society, eh? That is why you were at the Sussex Music Hall the other night while we looked for you at the club to make up a bridge table."

"Then it wasn't you who saw me there?"

"Good Lord, no. I don't even know where it is; I only know it's a place where nobody goes. It was Harley who saw you —fellow in the Home Office."

"Was he after local color, too?"

"He didn't say, but I think not," Sir Charles answered. "As he has confessed to half a dozen other queer places during the past month, and as I notice that Jennie Bradshaw has been doing a dancing turn at every one of them, I draw conclusions. It's not much use being in the diplomatic service if you can't draw conclusions, and I am getting quite a lot of practise out of Harley."

Lady Hanson, wife of a cabinet minister, and an American, was a noted hostess. Besides being a very beautiful woman, she had brought her husband a fortune, and had introduced into his surroundings a certain unconventionality which most people found attractive. There was some truth in what Sir Charles Morrison said. People were to

be met at her receptions who were unlikely to be seen at other similar functions, artists and literary men who had not yet made good, and leaders of movements which had not yet moved sufficiently to attract attention.

"Hello! The guest of the evening," said Sir Charles suddenly.

West looked across the room. In the curtained archway, opening on to the hall, Lady Hanson was receiving her guests. At this moment she was greeting a handsome, middle-aged man, and her manner certainly suggested that he was a guest of special importance.

"Up to his neck in the European tangle," said Sir Charles, "yet swears there is no political significance in his visit to this country. I fancy the Foreign Office believes him."

"General Rasiloff, isn't it?" said West. "Lady Hanson appears to know him very well."

"Met him in Moscow when her husband was out there. I wonder what you newspaper fellows think of him."

"More than we print. I am wondering what you diplomatists know."

"Lots more than we tell, even to you, West," and Sir Charles moved away to speak to a lady who had evidently stopped to attract his attention.

Valentine West watched him for a few moments. Sir Charles Morrison was by no means a fool, and West was not anxious that he should practise diplomacy on him as he did on Harley of the Home Office. He moved through the growing crowd of guests in the opposite direction to that which Sir Charles and his companion had taken, and presently managed to get near the archway where Lady Hanson talked to General Rasiloff.

"I must wait a few moments," he heard her say. "There are always the late arrivals, and some of them are important. I am wondering what has brought you to England."

The general smiled, but Lady Hanson spoke as if she had no doubt he would tell her. She was the kind of woman to whom a man might tell secrets he would whisper to no one else. It was an interesting point that they had met in Moscow. Lady Hanson might be deeper in political matters than any one supposed.

Some days ago West had discussed General Rasiloff with the foreign minister in his private room at the Foreign Office, and the minister had suggested that many women gave away secrets in chatter. Since then every social function attended by the general had also been attended by this fair-haired, insignificant young man who affected a monocle and was supposed to spend his life in killing time. Sir Charles Morrison's knowledge of some of his recent movements warned him that his real business in life must often be in danger of discovery, and West kept in the background now, lest the general should realize he had seen him several times lately, and grow suspicious. Not much was likely to escape those keen, dark eyes.

Lady Hanson glanced at the watch on her wrist and concluded she had given late arrivals grace enough.

"Now, general," she said, taking his arm, "we have a Russian orchestra in the music-room in your honor. You must tell me whether they are as good and as national as people say, and also you can tell me—"

They moved away, and West lost the conclusion of the sentence; and in the music-room he could not get close enough to overhear their conversation. He had to be content with watching them from a distance.

The orchestra was small but excellent, playing Russian music almost exclusively, perhaps on Lady Hanson's instructions, or perhaps because the leader, the first violin, had noted that the honored guest of the evening was a compatriot. It was in the general's direction that he bowed when acknowledging applause.

The music-room was the center of a suite of rooms containing many treasures of art, pictures, china, statuary, and rare furniture, treasures which would have come to the hammer, it was whispered, had not Lord Hanson married a fortune. When the music ceased, the guests broke up into groups, some moving in one direction, some in another. The hostess had been called

away for a moment, and the general was alone.

Whether it was accidental, or whether he intentionally kept on the edge of the moving crowd, West could not determine, but as if he had been watching for this opportunity the first violin was suddenly at the general's side.

"*Monsieur*, the lady who has just left dropped this," and he held out a long, white glove, which the general took almost mechanically. The musician gave him no opportunity to ask questions; as quickly as he had come he was gone, and was lost among the guests. Conscious apparently that he looked rather foolish holding the long glove as if it were something he did not understand, the general doubled it up, and had thrust it into his pocket when Lady Hanson returned. She was wearing gloves, she had not dropped one, yet she must be the lady referred to as having just left him. The general had been with no other.

Valentine West, looking exceedingly bored, became keenly alert. Not for a moment must he lose sight of Rasiloff. The general may have been surprised to get the glove from the violinist, but sooner or later he expected to receive it, and knew its significance. Just at first West had not been certain of this, but he was the moment he saw the general thrust it into his pocket. The glove was a sign; action of some kind, probably, would follow quickly, and wide issues might hang on the general's behavior during the next two or three hours.

The first move came sooner than West expected. Making some excuse to his hostess, the general went hurriedly into the hall as if in pursuit of some one he had caught sight of; and as he went he took the glove from his pocket, feeling it carefully.

He turned it so as to get at the fingers, and from one of them he took something. This was accomplished as he went among the guests, unnoticed by any one except West, who followed close behind him. Under a light in the corner of the hall he casually unfolded a tiny piece of paper, as a man does who finds a scrap in his pocket and wonders what it is; as casually he screwed it up in his fingers and tossed it aside, much to West's astonishment. It could not be of much importance. Then he turned back toward the room he had left and seeing a servant gave him the glove.

"I picked this up. Some one may inquire about it."

The moment he had gone West let his handkerchief fall, and in picking it up picked up the paper pellet as well. On it was written in ink:

To-night. After one. No. 42 Grove Road, Kensington.

He did not throw it away again, but slipped it into his waistcoat pocket. Then he followed the servant.

"By the way, do you chance to have found a glove, a lady's long glove?"

"A gentleman has just given me this, sir."

"That's the one. Thanks very much."

West looked at his watch, made a rapid calculation, and strolled back into the rooms. He caught sight of the general in the distance talking to Lord Hanson, and then he ran into Morrison.

"I'm off soon. Are you going to the club? We might go together."

"Sorry, but I am off now—Fleet Street way. Social article, you know. Fleet Street gets busy when the rest of the world is thinking of going to bed."

An hour later when Sir Charles remarked in the club that Valentine West was a journalist, he caused a roar of laughter. West had never done a day's work in his life either with a pen or with any other implement, he was informed, and the general impression was that Sir Charles had had his leg badly pulled.

West got his hat and coat from the cloak-room. He was walking, he told the servant at the door. He crossed the road to the railings of the garden in the center of the square, paused there, and was immediately joined by a man in a bowler hat and ulster.

The man listened while West talked.

"You quite understand. Be sure you operate on the right car."

"There shall be no mistake, Mr. West."

West walked leisurely out of the square

and found his own car at the corner of an adjacent street.

"We get a move on, Amos," he said to the chauffeur, "and it's not in the direction of bed yet. Grove Road, Kennington. The appointment is for one o'clock. Find the road; I'll find the house."

Amos Free never spoke unless he was absolutely obliged, and then he was usually monosyllabic. Now he nodded, looked at the clock fixed in front of him, and regulated his pace accordingly. He had no idea where Grove Road was, and at the Horns, Kennington, he was obliged to pull up and ask a policeman. They were probably the first words he had spoken that day.

Grove Road proved long and dark, with semidetached houses fronted by strips of garden on either side. Possibly it had seen better days, the houses were large enough to suggest it, but palings were rather dilapidated now, gates hung awry, and there was a plentiful crop of "To Be Let" boards.

"I am going to No. 42, Amos," said West, getting out at the end of the road. "Get up a bit closer to the house when I am in, and if I whistle get desperate. It will be time."

A dim light shone through the semicircle of frosted glass over the door of No. 42; no other light was visible, and the houses on either side appeared to be empty. A moss-grown path led to the door, and the strip of garden had been allowed to look after itself. There was no knocker, only a bell push. West pushed twice before there was a sound of shuffling feet and the door opened. An elderly, slatternly woman looked out, and without waiting to be questioned, stood aside to let him enter. Evidently she expected a visitor. She led the way down the passage to the back, opened a door and shoved him into a room, tawdrily furnished, with a most appalling wall-paper, and one gas-jet burning in a three-branch chandelier. The woman closed the door and left him without a word.

Valentine West was prepared for anything, or imagined he was, but he had not expected to be admitted so easily. It made him cautious. He looked quickly about him and listened for sounds in the house. The room was one of two between which heavy green curtains hung closely. At one time there had evidently been folding doors. The door by which he had entered was in the wall at right angles to the curtained opening, and in the wall opposite the curtains, and to one side of it, was another door. It might be the slatternly woman's idea of a desirable sitting-room, but there was nothing in it to indicate what manner of person was accustomed to occupy it. Valentine West was certainly not prepared for the person who came to him.

She entered by the door in the wall opposite the curtains, a girl in shimmering white, a dress which seemed to sheathe and caress the most perfect figure he had ever seen. Her hair was raven black, her eyes deep violet, full of dreams and passion, her face that perfect oval beloved by artists. West had wondered what General Rasiloff could possibly have to do with such an entourage as this. The girl before him put a different complexion on the matter. Who was she? Somewhere he had seen her.

He bowed, waiting for her to speak, hoping to find some clue to the mystery. She could not belong to this house. It was a secret meeting-place. West had been working on the assumption that the general had come to England to obtain certain information. The nature of it he did not know, nor did the Foreign Office, though it was very anxious to learn.

"I do not know you," she said, perplexed. Her voice was full and musical, suggested that she might not be quite as young as she looked. She was Russian, or a Pole, perhaps. Her hesitancy gave West an inspiration.

"No, I am not General Rasiloff," he said quietly. "I gather you do not know him personally."

"I am only concerned to know who you are and why you are here," she answered.

West felt convinced she did not know the general. He drew the long, white glove from his pocket and placed it on the table which was between them.

"That may introduce me," he said.

"Really, sir, I have encountered much insolence from men, but yours — what is this?"

"Just an ordinary glove, a woman's glove, possibly not yours, but in the finger of it a scrap of paper was concealed which the general—"

"Then—"

"Oh, yes, he received it quite safely. That is why I am here."

"You come instead of him? You waste your time and mine. I have a message for him; I give it to no one else."

"You do not understand," said West.

"I want to," she laughed. "Is he afraid? It is not like him."

Her attitude was dramatic, and her laugh had a ring in it which once heard was not likely to be forgotten. West knew he had heard it before. Where? If he could remember it might give him a clue how to act.

"Oh, he is not afraid," and he laughed too, "but he is not quite as free as you imagine, nor as he himself would desire. When visitors like the general are in this country we do our best to take care of them. Police watch over their safety wherever they go, and at this moment I imagine the general is doing his best to give his guardians the slip in order to visit you without any one being any the wiser."

"Then why are you here?"

"The general is aware that traps are sometimes set for persons in his position."

"You think—"

"I think he will be quite safe."

Intuition and memory came to Valentine West at the same moment.

This woman, with the fire of passion in her eyes, was too closely in touch with the primitive to hide her feelings successfully. She hated General Rasiloff. Why? She was a Pole; it would be more natural for her to love him. West knew she was a Pole, for remembrance had come to him. She was Elska Maloski, the prima donna who had created something of a sensation during the past opera season. He had heard her sing in "La Bohème" and "Faust." He had never been in her company before, never spoken to her, but he knew she had been widely fêted, and she would certainly not remember all who had been present to do her honor on these occasions.

"I am afraid you are looking upon me as an enemy," he said. "I am most anxious to be considered a friend. You have forgotten me; it is not remarkable, but one does not so easily forget Elska Maloski."

"You know me! How?"

"You have been entertained more than once; is it remarkable that I should have been among the guests? I am a music lover. Only to-night I have enjoyed the music of your friend, the violinist, who was your messenger."

"Still I do not understand what you have to do with General Rasiloff, nor why you are here. Men have forced themselves upon me before."

"I know the kind you mean; I am not one of them. Let me explain. General Rasiloff is not only a Russian, he is of interest and service to every state in Europe. His own country comes first, I doubt not; but he has done much to advance higher ideals of government in Europe, higher aims of life, to establish a greater sense of brotherhood among the nations. Such wide activities as his naturally embrace many small men—men like myself for instance. No one can be better aware of his wide sympathies than you are. There is no man in Russia who has worked so steadily for the good of Poland. His partizanship has earned him many enemies in his own country."

"Rasiloff! Poland! You can say all this of General Rasiloff?"

"I know it is true."

"True of Michael Rasiloff!" she exclaimed. "You are either a fool or his dupe."

The passionate tone of her answer set West's brain working rapidly. Surely this house was a trap to-night, baited with this beautiful singer. Yet she did not know the general, that was clear; it was only his reputation she knew, or thought she did. Whatever information the general expected to receive to-night, this was a dangerous place to come for it. What was Elska Maloski's purpose in being here. West made up his mind quickly. He might run some personal risk in telling the truth; he might ruin all chance of discovering the reason of Rasiloff's visit to this country, but the

general might be here at any moment, and there was no knowing what peril lay in wait for him in this house in Grove Road.

"Perhaps it is you who have been deceived," he said. "Do you know who General Rasiloff really is?"

"Know him!" she exclaimed.

"Do you know that the name is only assumed for traveling purposes, as an incognito; that he is the Grand Duke Paul?"

She stepped back in amazement.

"The Grand Duke Paul," she said in a whisper; "the man for whom any Pole would gladly die."

"That is why we look after him so carefully," said West.

"You swear this is true?"

"I do."

She looked straight into his eyes as if she would read his soul. For a moment she stood rigid, and then suddenly she was alive with a movement so swift that West's eyes could not follow it.

"Liar!" she cried, and at the same instant a revolver cracked, fired at him point-blank, West thought. He had no time to utter a sound, and if he moved at all it was involuntarily until something struck him and sent him staggering across the room. It was a man's body which struck him as it fell to the floor. He had heard no sound, but the woman had seen the man come from between the curtains, bent on murder, and had fired at him across West's shoulder. He lay quite still, a short dagger still gripped in his hand. West realized that the woman had saved his life if at the same time she had taken her own revenge.

"That was Demetrius Braska who for his own ends lied to me," she said.

"And objected to my telling you the truth," said West, bending down to look into the man's face. It was the violinist who had led the orchestra at Lady Hanson's to-night. At that moment the front door-bell rang.

"Are there any more like him in the house?" West asked, pointing at the dead man.

"No."

"Will you allow me to take care of that revolver?"

After a moment's hesitation she gave it to him.

"I will open the door," he said.

The girl had saved his life, and instinctively he was protecting her against the result of her action. He was not afraid of the duke, but he was very anxious the slatternly woman should not know what had happened, not yet at any rate. There was no knowing what interest she might have in the dead man.

The duke was armed and prepared for surprise, West saw that the moment he entered. Without a word he closed the door and led him to the room at the back. Elska Maloski swept him a deep curtsy, and as he acknowledged it he saw the dead man on the floor.

"I shot him," she said calmly. "I will tell your highness why."

"I am General Rasiloff. Your message—"

"No, no, you are Duke Paul," said the girl. "I know. Your friend here has told me."

The duke looked at Valentine West and then caught sight of the glove lying on the table.

"Is this a trap?" he asked, and it was quite evident he was ready for emergency.

"It was," said West. "There lies the man who brought you the glove to-night at Lady Hanson's."

"Demetrius Braska who lied to me," said the girl excitedly. "I will tell you about him and about General Rasiloff—Michael Rasiloff. When I was a child there was discontent, revolution in Poland; it is often the same. My father was in it, my mother, too, I think. This Michael Rasiloff was also one with them at first, then turned traitor, and was afterward one of those sent to suppress the rising. There are horrible stories told of his doings. Of one I know. My father was killed in street fighting; my mother, with many others, was arrested. This Michael Rasiloff was in love with my mother, what he called love, and because she would have nothing to do with him she was, at his instigation, most foully treated, dying at last under the whip."

"I know the man," said the duke. "It

is a common name. I did not think of this man when I adopted it."

"He was in high favor," the girl went on, "not to be punished; but I vowed to remember, and some day pay my mother's debt. The resolve has been with me always. Even at my moments of greatest triumph when an audience has gone mad at my song it has been with me. The man lying there became my friend. Persecution had made him flee from Russia to England—he said so, but he may have lied in that too—and he was full of sympathy for me. He had a plan to get General Rasiloff to this country. There was certain information the general wanted concerning plotters in Russia; he would go anywhere to get that information. I wrote a letter, putting a sign to it which Demetrius said the general would understand. I said I could give him the information he wanted; that he must come to London; that at some function or other, or in some other way, he would receive a lady's long glove in the finger of which he would find the appointment. It was the scheme of Demetrius, and it pleased me. I waited for him to-night. Had General Rasiloff come he would be lying there instead of Demetrius. Had your highness come instead of this gentleman you would have been lying there. I have never seen you, I should have taken you for the general whom I have never seen either. God! To think of it."

"It seems, sir, you have saved my life," said the duke, turning to West.

"And the lady has saved mine."

"Who is this man who is so anxious to make an end of me," and the duke stooped to study the face of the violinist. "No, I do not know him."

"The police may find out something about him," said West. "I imagine you have so nearly got the information you require, perhaps without being aware of it, that this man, understanding how dangerous you were, employed this method of removing you."

"I should be glad to know who you are, sir. There is still much I do not understand in this business."

"Shall we not think of the lady first, your highness. I am very personally concerned since I owe my life to her. We do not want it known that either she or we have been in this house to-night. I propose to send her away in my car at once, and then, if your highness will allow me to return with you, I can explain."

"I am not sure I can do that."

Valentine West took a small silver token from an inner pocket and showed it to the duke.

"I shall be pleased to drive you back," said the duke, and then turning to Elska Maloski, he asked: "Can you not tell me something of that dead man's secret?"

"Nothing. It is true, I know nothing. I was only concerned with Michael Rasiloff."

"I can tell you something of him," said the duke. "Months ago he was disgraced. He is in prison at this moment. I think you may safely leave him to the Russian government."

A few moments later there was a low whistle in Grove Road and a car came out of the darkness and stopped at the gate of No. 42.

"Amos, you will drive this lady to Charing Cross. If she wishes to go further you are at her disposal. You will not return here for me."

West helped her in.

"You are sure the woman in the house knows nothing about you?" he asked.

"Quite sure. Braska has only had the house a month. The woman is not in the house now. She came daily and only stayed late to-night to let you in. She left directly afterward."

"Then I think I can promise that you will hear nothing further about to-night. Good-by, and thank you."

"Perhaps we may meet again," she said, but it was difficult to decide whether she wished it or not.

"Perhaps," he answered. "I have usually found the world a very small place."

A little later Valentine West drove out of Grove Road with the duke.

"The police will find him to-morrow," he said in answer to a question from the duke. "I shall arrange that. His death

will be a mystery. Too many inquiries will not be made."

"Your secret service is more thorough than I supposed, Mr. West. It would interest me greatly to know how you discovered what was my purpose in coming to England."

"I only discovered it this evening, your highness."

"And my journey has been fruitless. I had hoped for evidence against men I suspect in Russia; men who, I believe, are responsible for much evil, who are a curse to their country. I wonder how much that man Braska knew."

"I cannot say. In this affair my business has been to protect your highness," and Valentine West smiled to himself in the darkness of the motor. It would have surprised the duke had he known how curious England was about his visit; had he overheard the interview between West and the foreign minister. He might have had even a greater respect for the secret service of this country.

"I have to thank you for guarding me most efficiently, you with the help of Providence. Had my car not got a punctured tire outside Lady Hanson's, I might have arrived first, and then probably I should be lying in that empty house at this moment."

"In this case, your highness, Providence has not played much part," said West when the duke put him down in Piccadilly. "I had your tire very thoroughly punctured when I left Lady Hanson's to-night."

The dawn was breaking as Valentine West entered his chambers in Bruton Street.

WHEAT-FIELDS

BY EDNA VALENTINE TRAPNELL

WHY is it in the wheat-fields,
All green beneath the sun,
This year in the valley
A shadow should run?
Is it that the wheat
Hears the tread of marching feet?
Hush, baby, hear the bugle
Die away down the street!

Over all the wheat-fields
Summer wind and rain
Beat the heavy heads down,
Thin the golden grain—
Summer wind and rain
Sing a very old refrain:
"Many ranks are thinned
That shall not fill again."

Waiting are the wheat-fields
Beneath a harvest moon;
Why lag the reapers
That should have come so soon?
Death, the Harvester,
Reaps the red fields of war.
He has stilled the feet that trod
Upon the threshing floor.

Palos of the Dog Star Pack

by J. U. Giesy

Author of "Mimi," "The Blue Bomb," "House of the Hawk," etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

MUCH MISCHIEF AFOOT.

THE morrow saw them on their return journey to Himyra, with Croft pushing his engine to top speed. He wanted to get back and to work on the grenades at once, for two reasons: First, that they would offset in part at least the embargo against the manufacture of more rifles, and because it had occurred to him that they would be of vast service should he have to force entrance to some enemy town.

For now Croft was planning his campaign. His knowledge gained through his unsensed presence at the council at Niera months before made him believe that Zollaria would throw her entire weight on Cathur's north frontier, while Mazzeria attacked Bithur and possibly eastern Milidhur.

From a second motor-shop established at Ladhra and equipped with men trained in the Himyra plant he had already sent a motor-fleet to the capital of Gaya's home state for the rapid transport of troops to the frontier in case of need. He had organized a fleet of motor-driven marine transports to take men from Aphur and Nodhur to Bithur's aid. This expedition was to be led by Robur in person, and with him Croft had outlined each step so far as he could. They would proceed up that river promised Mazzeria for her aid in the war of conquest Zollaria planned, and debarking near the frontier, carry the war straight to the foe.

As for himself, he planned with Jadgor to cross the Central Sea almost due north, capture Niera, and penetrate the State of Mazhur, thereby establishing a dangerous flank movement which, if successful, would result in withdrawing the Zollarian army operating against Cathur's frontier. Two of his armored motors would go with the Milidhurian expedition and two with Robur against the blue men of Mazzer. The other sixteen would accompany the expedition north. These things he now explained to Jadgor, Lakkon, and Magur while they rushed back to the capital of Aphur. They heard him and nodded agreement.

Jadgor smiled and turned to the priest. "It appears Zitu has sent us a general as well as a genius of design," he exclaimed. "If Zitu inspires not his mind directly, then is he the most wonderful man Tamarizia has seen."

"Raised up for Tamarizia's hour of great need, O Jadgor," Magur declared. "And who should raise him save Zitu, who knows the future as we know the present and past? Zud says as much, and I believe it. Praised be Zitu's name." He made the odd horizontal sign of the cross Croft had first seen Abbu of Scira use.

"Nay, I doubt it not," Jadgor replied. "Tamhys shall yet live to learn the truth of this!"

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for July 13.

Yet Croft, despite the religious superstitions of these truly patriotic minds, was human after all. He plunged into a frenzy of work on his return. He explained all to Robur, saw him thoroughly versed in the making of the grenades, leaped into his car and drove to Ladhra to begin operations there. Two weeks elapsed while he was getting everything to his satisfaction, and during those two weeks other things happened, which he could not foresee.

He returned to Himyra late one afternoon, drove to the shops, saw everything running smoothly, listened to the reports of Robur, who was enthusiastic over the progress being made, and drove on to the palace to bathe and rest for an hour, since even the splendid physique of Jasor's body was beginning to feel the strain of the months of scheming and toil.

Fresh from his bath, he was suddenly minded to seek Gaya and learn if there were any word from Naia, such as she frequently sent him by Robur's wife.

He found her awaiting Robur's return, and proffered his request.

That Gaya was glad to see him there could be no doubt. His coming seemed to afford her relief. "My lord, your coming lightens my heart," she declared after Croft had greeted her by sinking on one knee. "The maid sent you her farewell, and asked that I say this much more: 'Tell him to forget not his promise.' She did not explain, yet I have felt you would know the meaning of her words."

"Her farewell? You say she sent me that?" exclaimed Croft, staring into her face. "By Zitu, Gaya, my friend, what meant she by that?"

"You know not of her absence from Aphur?" Gaya widened her eyes in surprise. "You have not heard?"

"I have heard nothing. I came to you for word," Croft began, and paused with an odd grip taking hold of his heart. "Absence from Aphur—" he began again.

"Aye." Gaya wrinkled her brows. "Some days ago an escort came from Cathur, asking that the maid and Lakkon, her father, visit Scira, in order that Kyphallos might present his bride-to-be to his people before he ascended the throne."

"Kyphallos on the throne of Cathur!" Croft frowned. "Has Scythys, then, laid down the scepter in favor of his son?"

"Scythys has died," Gaya said. "Wherefore, despite the fact that the cycle of betrothal has not run out, Kyphallos craves the privilege of entertaining Naia and her father, and assuring his people that he has chosen a worthy queen as his consort on the throne."

"And—and she—they—have gone?" Croft stammered as he spoke.

"Aye." Gaya looked into his eyes. "Jasor, what of it? I—I am a woman, and I have thoughts—fears, perhaps, or fancies. I like this journey not. What does it portend?"

"That I know not; yet shall I ascertain," Croft replied between set teeth. "She told me to forget not my promise. By Zitu and Azil and Ga, I shall not. Gaya, my sweet woman, how long have they been gone?"

"This is the third day since they departed, my lord."

"They went—how?"

"In the ship which brought the escort—one Kyphallos sent."

"The day after to-morrow they arrive. So, then, there is time."

Croft relaxed somewhat the physical tension which had held him, and his voice grew less sharp. He sighed.

"Time? Time for what, Jasor?" Gaya inquired.

"To-night I shall sleep," Croft told her frankly. "And while I sleep I shall learn what is the true intent of this sudden desire on Kyphallos's part to show Cathur their queen."

Gaya's eyes grew wide. "You shall sleep — as you sleep to learn?" she faltered.

"Aye." Croft smiled. "And I shall learn, wife of my friend. Zitu made Naia of Aphur a maid to madden men's blood, not for Cathur, but for Jasor. Aye, I shall learn."

But despite his confident tone he was more than a little disturbed as he sought his own rooms that night and stretched himself on his couch. What intent lurked in the mind of Cathur's prince he could not

see. Nor could he understand why, knowing what already he had told them, Jadgor and Lakkon had decided to accede to the Cathurian's request, unless they had followed the other man's own course at the time of the betrothal and acted in order to blind suspicion of their counter preparations so far as they might, or at least to avoid an open rupture at this time. Hence it appeared doubly important that he should learn what was toward in Cathur now. He focused his mind. His body relaxed. He projected his intelligent ego toward Scira to discover what it might.

At first he went to the cell of Abbu in the Scira pyramid to learn, if he might, what Abbu was about.

He found him speaking with a brother priest—was half-minded to leave, yet lingered, held by the first remark of the unknown monk:

"A nice time for Kyphallos to be at Niera, with his promised queen approaching Scira on the sea."

"He will return in time to greet her," Abbu said.

"Yet I like not his frequent journeyings to Niera, nor his association with the Zollarian nobles who make it their resort. Nor does Cathur like it overly well."

Abbu frowned. "Nor does Cathur like well the stories which come back from Anthra concerning the things which occur there in the palace. Adito, they tell me, is more worshiped than Zitu. Ga, the true woman, or Azil, her son, have small consideration. 'Tis Adita, woman of folly and beauty, whose shrine is there."

"I have heard said that, while a creature of beauty, this Aphurian princess is not given to folly," his lay brother replied. "Mayhap she shall win Kyphallos from his present course, and so prove a blessing to Cathur in cycles to come."

"If so be she mounts the throne at all."

"You think she will not?"

Abbu shrugged. "Who knows. Cathur mutters even now, as you know. Scythys was a dotard. Kyphallos is a degenerate. Cathur is the worst-governed state in all Tamarizia—the most beset with taxes, with the least returns to show. But—Cathur is loyal to Tamarizia as a people. Think you they will long brook a king who makes merry with Zollarian nobles, while affairs of state go to pot?"

"Come!" cried the other. "You have heard something, Abbu, it would seem."

Abbu nodded. "Perhaps I keep my eyes and ears about me when I leave the pyramid."

Croft left. At least he thought Abbu was attending to his duties as Aphur's spy in so far as he might. And Cathur was muttering against their soon-to-be king. Cathur, then, was loyal—what if Kyphallos found her betrayal less easy than he expected? He smiled and willed himself to Niera, since now it appeared the Cathurian profligate was once more there. And if there, Croft thought he knew where to find him. He would be, almost without doubt, in the presence of Kalamita of the tawny eyes and hair.

And it was with her and her brother and Bzad, the Mazzerian chief, he found him, in a room of that palace overlooking the Central Sea. They sat together in a low-toned conversation. Evidently something important was forward, since they had closeted themselves thus, thought Croft.

Kalamita stretched her supple length like a cat about to yawn, and turned a slow smile on the Cathurian prince.

"So then," she said, "it is all thought out. You men, with your spears and swords, are far stronger than subtle, my lords. Leave the subtlety to a woman in your plans."

"I see no chance of failure in this, I confess," Bzad spoke as she paused. Croft noted a flash in his eyes.

"Not unless you bungle." Kalamita laughed.

"I?" Bzad growled. "By Adita, goddess of beautiful women, I shall make no mistake. See, I shall repeat it step by step. On the fourth day after the princess arrives, Kyphallos of Cathor invites her and her father to visit Anthra, and they take ship the next day. Meanwhile I place my galley under the cover of Anthra and wait. At the same hour they set sail I slip forth. Midway we meet and I sail close in passing. A collision seeming im-

minent, in the confusion a wrong order is given on board Kyphallos's galley. The prow of my galley strikes his ship as it seeks to cross my bows through turning in the wrong direction. Kyphallos and the maid are saved. Lakkon drowns, and any surviving sailors on board the Cathurian ship are destroyed, so that none shall survive to tell what happened really. I sail to Scira and put Kyphallos ashore. We tell a story of disaster in which all perished save only him. According to it, this Naia died with her father. I sail away. She is mine—and once in Mazzeria, think you I shall not enjoy her beauty? By Adita, I think I shall!"

Kalamita nodded. "You have it, Bzad," she declared, "and—soon you shall have —her—to do with—as you please. They tell me she is very fair indeed. She should bring you joy for some time."

A blind rage—a fiery disgust and loathing filled Croft's soul as he heard the wanton's words. This was the fate her soiled brain had evolved for the pure, sweet jewel of womanhood for whom his spirit cried. Yet since in his present state there was no chance for expression of those things he felt, he controlled his horror at thought of Naia as the plaything of this cold-faced blue savage, and learned all he could.

"Thereafter," Bandhor spoke for the first time, with a thin-lipped leer, "our good lord Kyphallos shall come to Anthra, after a period of mourning, and invite our sister to visit him for a time. But upon her desiring to leave he shall refuse. A man of her ship's crew shall escape Anthra in a boat and bring tidings, whereupon him to whom she is pledged shall lay the affair before the emperor himself. Our army shall be ready. An expedition shall proceed to Anthra to rescue Kalamita. In the mean time Kyphallos shall have taken her to Cathur, and have concealed her—placing her in the sanctuary of Ga, where the vestals will have her in charge. Then shall Zollaria attack, and Mazzer. Tamarizia, finding herself assailed on all sides, shall break like the crushed-in shell of an egg!" He contracted the fingers of a mighty hand until they were flexed in his palm. "Thus it shall be."

Thus it shall be. Would it? Man proposes but God disposes. Croft thought to himself. Naia of Aphur the toy to a man of blue—a member of the servants' caste nation—Cathur to Zollaria. Tamarizia crushed. Kyphallos and his light o' love on the throne of Zitra where now the pacific old Tamhys sat. A pretty plan. Bzad and Bandhor, Kyphallos and Kalamita, in her scented and voluptuous beauty, seemed very sure it was coming about in time. To Croft, as he left them at their scheming and flitted back to his room in Aphur's palace, it seemed somewhat less likely to occur.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE HABIT OF ZITU.

ONCE in the flesh again, conscious of all he had seen and heard, he sprang from his couch and dressed. He was going in the flesh to Scira. That one thing was clear in his mind. He would go to the capital of Cathur as quickly as his swiftest motor-galley might take him, and get into touch with Abbu and through him with Naia. After that, things must be met as they arose, only there was another thing on which he was equally determined: the girl should never embark for Anthra on the Prince of Cathur's craft.

Leaving the palace, he entered his car, kept in the court now always for any emergency, and drove straight to the dock on the Na, where the fleet of motor craft were kept busy. Here he selected a galley —one of the latest models he had prepared; sent runners to rout out the crew and order them aboard, ready to sail at once. From the dock he drove to the shops, flaring with light as the night-shift worked; called one of his most expert motor builders to one side, and directed him to report aboard the galley as quickly as he might. To him he gave authority to open a warehouse and provision the boat for a voyage of some days, and instructions to bring it to the quay below the palace so soon as ready to sail.

Then he went back to the palace itself, and sent a nodding guard to rouse Robur

and ask him to come to Croft's rooms. He waited there in a vast impatience until the door opened to admit Aphur's crown prince.

That Robur was keyed to some expectancy he saw at a glance. The man's eyes were wide, his whole expression eager. Croft suspected Gaya had whispered wifely confidences into his ear earlier that night. He plunged into his theme at once:

"Rob—I've slept—one of my certain sleeps. Gaya told you, I suppose."

Robur nodded. "Yes. And you have learned, Jasor—what?"

Croft told him, and Robur swore a strong Aphurian oath. "They plan that, do they? Naia to Bzad, a man of Mazzer. By Zitu, Jasor, I am with you in whatever you mean to do."

Croft shook his head. "Nay, Rob, my friend. Your duty is to Tamarizia first. You know all we have planned. Your place is here—to general the Bithurian expedition when it is time. Mine is the duty to the maid."

"You love her." Robur made the statement direct.

"Aye." Croft met it and looked him in the eye.

Robur put forth a hand. "Azil be kind to you and her," he made answer. "What have you planned?"

Croft explained his intent in a very few words. "I await now the lights of the galley at the quay below," he made an ending. "I desire to slip forth unknown to any save the guards. Will you drive me down with what arms I shall take?"

"Aye," said Aphur's heir. "You can reach Scira how soon?"

"In two days—the day after Naia and Lakkon arrive."

Robur smiled thinly. "Should you save Lakkon's life as well as his daughter's a second time, his gratitude should overcome much."

Croft shook his head. "I plan not on gratitude, Rob. I myself shall overcome much — Kyphallos, Zollaria, and Mazzer. So shall I reach to the woman Zitu formed to guard the looped cross of life itself—for me. I shall enter Scira at night, and go to the pyramid, and— Hold! Drive now with me to Magur. He must lend me a priestly robe."

"Come!" Robur's eyes flashed. Once more he smiled. "A priest shall reach Scira, my friend? He shall go to the pyramid. I understand."

The two men left the palace, entered the car, and crossed the bridge, swung into position on Robur's order. They stopped before the pyramid and hammered on the door. A sleepy priest admitted them at last and sent them up on the primitive lift to Magur's lofty apartments. Magur himself appeared in the end, blinking sleepy though startled eyes when he faced Croft and Robur himself.

Croft explained.

Magur balked. "Shall the garments of Zitu be used for deception?" he exclaimed.

"Shall not the garments of Zitu serve to guard a clean shrine of life from pollution?" Croft snapped in return. "Can the cloth of the Source of all Life be put to a better end?"

Magur gave him a glance little short of admiration. "Ye speak, as always, with the words of Zitu himself," he returned. "I am convinced. Wait, and this matter shall be arranged." He turned away. In five minutes he was back with a dark-brown robe and hood, not unlike a cowl, also a pair of leather sandals and a cord with which to belt the robe about the waist. These he placed in Croft's hands, and raised his own. "Zitu go with ye, my son," he spoke in a formal blessing. "Should he favor ye on this mission, what shall ye do with the maid? Her return to Himyra would cause a clacking of tongues."

"I have thought of that, O Magur," Croft replied. "The maid shall go to Zitra so quickly as she may. There Zud himself shall see her in sanctuary in the quarters of the virgins, until this thing has passed, unless you have better to suggest. Thus it is Zollaria plans to hide their unclean Kalamita in Scira. I am minded to turn their own trick upon themselves."

"Nay," Magur smiled. "Thy plan is worthy of one of your mind. Go, then, and may Ga, the pure mother, use you to guard the maid."

The galley lights glared red in the night

at the quay as Croft and Robur drove back across the bridge which opened behind them span by span. All was ready now save the arms and ammunition. Working in haste at the palace, the prince and Croft collected those and took them down to the ship.

"You shall win, my friend," said Robur as he clasped hands with Croft at parting.

Croft smiled somewhat grimly. "I shall win, Rob," he returned, "or you need not look for me back."

Then he was off, dropping down the Na, passing the high-reared barrier of the walls, and once past those, opening the motor and speeding down the mighty yellow flood to the sea.

A day passed, two days, and night came down. Far to the front the lights of Scira lifted above the waters. Croft called his crew and gave them their instructions in detail. They were to stay by the ship, were to be ready to start at once. Then, to their amaze, he slipped on the priest's robe over his cuirass and sword, and appeared before them thus as they approached the harbor gates. The standard of Aphur broke out at the galley's stern. They passed inside unchallenged and moored at the quay. To the harbor master—a huge Cathurian captain—Croft said merely that he was a priest come on a mission from Magur to the pyramid, and stepped ashore.

And knowing Scira as he did, he set off in the right direction without delay, arrived in due time and without incident at the pyramid portals and rapped for admission, asking for Abbu so soon as he was inside. Then—he was in Abbu's cell, fumbling with his robe and casting it from him, to stand in gold and silver harness before the monk's staring eyes.

"My lord—my lord!" faltered the priest.

"Hold." Croft lifted his hand. "Strange things are forward in Scira. What know you of them, Abbu, who have acted as Aphur's eyes?"

"Yesterday the prince returned from Niera to greet the Aphurian maid he is to wed," Abbu replied. "It was a holiday occasion. The streets swarmed with people."

"Think you Kyphallos intends to lead Naia to the throne?" Croft snapped.

"Zitu!" Abbu lifted his hands in the sign of the cross. "Is it not so pledged?"

"Aye—by the lips, yet not by the heart," said Croft. Swiftly he told the staring monk those things he had learned.

"Zitu would not permit this," Abbu mumbled at the last.

"Nay. Hence am I here. Listen, Abbu the priest. What I do, I do by grace of Zitu—and with His consent. I am come to overthrow this most foul plot. You who have sworn to help me in Zitu's name must gain access to this maid. Say to her what is to be. Say to her thus when you have told her all else as a sign: 'Jasor has not forgotten.' Hearing this, she will believe. Say to her then that on the night after you have spoken to her she shall desire to speak with a priest from the holy pyramid, to receive a blessing before she is presented to Cathur's people. She shall prefer her request of Kyphallos himself, and insist that it be granted. She shall specify the priest Abbu, whom she knows. I shall then go to her in the palace. Instruct her that her father shall be with her when I arrive. Thereafter shall we contrive a way out of the palace and to the boat I hold waiting for her escape. Say not to her that I shall come in your place. That she will learn when I appear. Now give me a place to sleep, and when you see her state these facts concerning Kyphallos's plan as things of your own knowledge, confessing to her that you have acted as Aphur's eyes for well nigh a cycle past."

Abbu bowed. "Indeed," he said, "I believe you speak truth, O Jasor, and with Zitu's help I shall do all you say. Take my pallet for your slumber. I shall pray through the night for your success to Zitu himself."

Throughout the next day Croft lay hid. Abbu brought him food in the morning and disappeared. He was not disturbed during the day. What Abbu was about he could not know. Only late in the day when the monk returned was he to learn how he had managed his task.

"My lord, there was a pageant in honor of her of Aphur and her father," he explained. "The civic guard and that of the palace marched before them, while the peo-

ple watched, and you know that it is a custom for the lay brothers of the pyramid to solicit alms. So with my little earthen jar I passed among the people, and after a time I approached the raised station where Aphur's princess sat, and lifting my little jar I cried to her as Cathur's queen-to-be that she give freely to Cathur's temple. This I did for a purpose which fell out as I desired. A guard about the noble party bade me be off. I lifted my voice in protest, crying again to that beautiful woman for alms. She heard me, my lord. She has a gentle heart. 'Hold,' said she to the guard. 'Let the priest approach.' Thus, my lord, I gained her side, and she gave me pieces of silver enough to fill my jar, compelling all her party to contribute freely. And when that was done she asked me of our temple, and I told her concerning it, and called a blessing upon her, and contrived to whisper that I had an important message for her ears alone.

"The maid, my lord, is quick of comprehension. She turned to the prince himself. 'This priest finds favor with me,' she said. 'I would speak with him further. It may be that I shall select him for my own spiritual instructor once I am Cathur's queen.'

"Kyphallos smiled, my lord. 'As you will, my princess,' he replied, and I think he suspected nothing.

"Then the maid turned back to me and set a time for me to come to her at the palace on the morrow in the morning. Is it well, my lord?"

"It is well," said Croft, though the delay of another day did not please his impatience to know Naia safe. "Yet there is more for you to do. Provide me a second robe such as Magur gave me which I wore here, and arrange for a carriage to be waiting to-morrow night on the street from the palace to the harbor. Do this in time that I may know the driver's name, when I shall come upon him, and so calling him identify myself as the man for whom he is employed. Here—" He drew a pouch and placed silver in Abbu's hand. "Pay the man well, and tell him to look for as much beyond what you give him if he serves me without fail. Also provide me a standard of Cathur's colors, such as are used on ships."

The latter request was due to a sudden thought which had popped into Croft's mind, and evoked a tight-lipped smile. He had conceived of a way to throw consternation into the camp of his foes. He set about planning it out that same night and the succeeding day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN THE TABLES WERE TURNED.

AND when night came down once more on Scira he was ready. Once he had ventured forth, gone to the harbor, in seeming a priest, and conferred with the captain of his ship, telling him to be prepared to sail on the word that night.

Back in the pyramid he waited Abbu's coming with what patience he could. The monk came about noon. "All things are ready, my lord, so far as time permits," he made his report.

"You saw the maid?"

"Aye."

"And what said she?"

"At first she was amazed, bewildered, I think, as was her father whom she summoned after I had told my tale, that I might relate it again to his ears. That was after I had said to her the words you told me to repeat. Hearing them, she believed and called Prince Lakkon at once. His anger was great. He was for carrying the thing to Kyphallos himself and compelling him to admit or deny. But—both the maid and I prevailed upon him to see that by so doing he would destroy not only himself but her. In the end they agreed to summon me to the palace so soon as it fell dark."

"That is well," said Croft. "The rest is prepared."

"The driver and the standard, aye. I shall give you the robe before you depart."

"You shall live to receive your reward," said Croft. "Now we have naught to do save wait."

And waiting proved the hardest part as the day dragged past. Of the adventure of the evening he had no fear. In fact he

chafed to be at it as a restive horse frets at restraint. Never had the hours of a single day seemed so long in their course. He marked mid afternoon, and watched the lowering sun. He welcomed evening and the creeping twilight. Dusk was a boon to give thanks for, and yet he raged because dusk having fallen, Naia did not send for Abbu the monk.

Yet in the end Abbu appeared before him and whispered that the time was come —that a chariot from the palace waited without the pyramid. He carried a tightly rolled package in his hands and gave it to Croft. "The robe, my lord," he declared. "Zitu aid you in its use."

"Zitu reward you, as I shall see you rewarded in a time to come," Croft told him, donning his own robe and thrusting the other beneath it. "Farewell for the present, Abbu. Your service is done."

Leaving the pyramid he entered the chariot sent to fetch him and rode swiftly to the palace. Once as he noted his driver he smiled as he imagined the man's consternation could he dream whom his passenger was despite his priestly seeming and the final results of this drive. But he spoke no word while they threaded the streets or when the chariot pausing, he descended, passed inside the palace, and was led by a page to the Princess Naia's door.

That door he entered, and for the first time in months found himself in the presence of the woman he loved.

She rose and stood before him. "I have done as I promised my father, what more must I do?" he heard her sweet-toned voice.

"Aye, what more have you to tell us, Abbu, you could not tell us before?" asked Lakkon, rising from a couch placed farther back from the door.

Croft threw off his enveloping cowl and robe. He stood before them, his cuirass with the sun of Aphur shining on its metal breast, sending a sparkle of light through the room. "Not Abbu this time, Prince Lakkon," he said.

"Jasor!" Naia's eyes went wide. She started back a pace while her color faded swiftly, and she lifted a hand to her breast.

"Jasor of Nodhur, by Zitu!" Lakkon cried. "Come, my lord, what means this priestly disguise?"

"Life—for yourself—life and honor for your daughter, as I hope, since I know she would not live without the latter," Croft returned. "Hark you, Lakkon of Aphur. You are a man with a sword at your belt. Tell me, is your daughter's serving-maid, Maia, of your party here?"

"Aye," Lakkon returned, visibly impressed by Croft's presence and bearing. "Yet—"

"Enough," Croft cut him short. "Here is an extra robe of a priest. Let the princess and Maia don them and pass out of the palace doors. You and I shall walk forth together. To any who seek to stay us, I am your friend. I wear Aphur's arms. Let them stop two nobles of Aphur at their peril. Without the palace, the princess and the maid will turn to the right and walk down the street toward the harbor which is by happy chance toward the Scira pyramid. We shall overtake them. We shall enter a carriage and drive to the harbor and leave this nest of treason. Abbu has told you ere this what is planned."

"Aye—but—" Lakkon stammered.

"I shall prove his words true," Croft flashed. "Summon Maia quickly lest somewhat intervenes."

"Father—do as my lord advises." Naia laid a hand on Lakkon's arm.

"By Zitu—I like it not, yet—if it be for your safety. Were it not—were it for myself alone—summon your maid." Jadgor's counselor yielded to her plea.

The thing was so simple, indeed, that it made Croft smile. Inside five minutes the two women were prepared. Naia's wealth of hair was lost beneath the cowl. Croft opened the door and they sallied forth.

"Be of good heart," he found means to whisper into Naia's ear. "You see I did not forget, O maid of gold."

His reward was a quiet smile and a deep glance out of her eyes. Then she was gone, a monk seeming, with Maia at her side. Croft felt sure of their escape. Priests were no unusual sight about the palaces of the Tamarizian states. He doubted they would be questioned, even though two went out where one had come in.

Hence he waited with the frowning Lakkon until some five minutes had passed. Then opening the door he strode forth and turned down toward the palace doors. Beside him Lakkon stalked in silence. "Talk to me—seem to converse for the sake of your daughter at least," Croft urged.

Lakkon complied. In seemingly friendly converse they progressed. They reached the portals giving on the entrance court and passed the guards, the more easily, perhaps, since none there as yet suspected what Kyphallos really planned, and hence were not on guard against any act of the father of Cathur's queen-to-be, or some Aphurian friend of his, who wore the sun of Aphur in silver on his breast.

Hence what might have proved difficult, proved easy. They left the court, overtook the women, led them to the carriage and drove swiftly to Croft's ship. There he paid and dismissed the driver and took his passengers aboard. Only when his sailors cast off the moorings did comment arise at his acts. Then a harbor guard appeared and questioned the proceeding. And by then Croft was once more a priest, while Maia had resumed her natural part. And the priest explained he must return to Himyra quickly. The guard saluted and withdrew with the monk's commendation of his attention to duty. The ship left the quay. It passed the harbor gates and floated free. Croft heaved a sigh of relief.

"On the fifth day you and your daughter would have journeyed to Anthra," he turned to Lakkon to say. "Midway you would have been met by Bzad of Mazzer and your vessel rammed. Death for yourself and dishonor for your child would have swiftly followed. Lakkon of Aphur, I told you I would prove my words true, and I will. We shall meet this galley of the Mazzerian's midway to Anthra on the fifth day."

Lakkon beat the planks of the deck with his foot. "Jasor of Nodhur, you are a bold man," he said. "You seem to have faith in your words. Yet should you fail to prove them, I think I shall have your head."

"Then take mine with it, my father," Naia who had approached unseen by either man burst forth. "Once before has Jasor saved our lives. Now saves he our lives and that which I prize higher still. You are hard to persuade, if you call him not son in the end."

"Ah—fall it so!" Lakkon turned upon her. "To your quarters, girl. Is it seemly for her who values honor so highly, to offer herself to a man?"

"To the one man, aye," she retorted, turning to go below. "Between him and her is no question of honor, nor of aught, save love. To that man she belongs, nor will yield to any other while Zitu gives her breath."

"Azil, Giver of Life, and Ga, the Virgin!" Lakkon swore.

"Peace!" Croft's hand fell on his arm. His heart was singing in his breast at Naia's words. "Hold, Lakkon. Let me prove true my words."

And now Croft carried out the change he had made in his plans. All the succeeding day he sailed in circles, drawing nearer and nearer to Anthra rather than to Zitra. He lay to at night, keeping no more than headway on the ship. Just what Kyphallos might think when he found his affianced princess flown he did not know, but he smiled more than once as he fancied a pretty to-do in Scira, and a somewhat confused rage in the young reprobate's mind. For indeed as he saw it Kyphallos must sense himself in a rather precarious plight. His hostage to Bzad was gone. As yet there was no war. He might hardly send word to Aphur, that their princess and Lakkon were gone he knew not where. He must find it an embarrassing thing to explain the incident to Zollaria as well—a hard thing to make them swallow—a thing which might very well shake their confidence in himself.

Indeed, as Croft saw it, Kyphallos would put off the explanation so long as he might, hoping to find some trace of the Aphurians themselves and thereby obviate any necessity of explaining anything at all. Yes, Croft chuckled to himself, Kyphallos was in something of a fix. Probably, though, failing to find his escaped guests the first day, he would go in person to meet Bzad.

That must be foreseen. Hence it were best for Croft to be ready with his arms. He got them out and saw them loaded—and since he had chosen a war galley for his trip north, he had men aboard he had already trained in their use. He distributed the weapons to a selected number and was ready for what might occur.

Lakkon saw the rifles in the hands of the men and questioned concerning it at once. Croft, nothing loath, explained the entire situation as he viewed it. "You have asked proof, and proof I intend to give you, Prince Lakkon," he declared.

Lakkon's face grew grave. "Indeed, I think you believe all you say, my lord," he replied. "What do you intend?"

"To meet Bzad close to Aphur," Croft explained. "To hang forth the standard of Cathur. To lure him close, and give you proof of what I have said from the man's own mouth."

For so he had planned and was bent on carrying out. The morning of the fifth day found him therefore close to Anthra—yet not too close.

Before its shores were more than a faint blur on the horizon the lookout reported a galley heading west.

Croft called Lakkon and bade him stand beside him on the deck. He directed the standard of Cathur hung from the stern and ordered the speed of the engines increased. The galley surged toward the meeting at top speed. And the other galley came on.

"She will sail very close," said Croft.

Lakkon frowned.

"At the last I am supposed to give a wrong order," Croft spoke again. "My helmsman knows his duty. We shall crush her near bank of oars."

The two ships drew nearer still. Croft fancied Bzad would be surprised at their speed, but—Cathur's standard rippled in the breeze. He would think everything well.

Closer and closer. Croft raised his hand. Two sailors sprang to the rail in the waist. They carried grappling hooks attached to ropes. Closer still—

Croft dropped his hand. The bow of his galley veered.

Crash! The near bank of oars snapped like straws. The vessels ground together. The men in the waist cast their hooks and lashed all fast.

Bzad appeared on the after-deck. His face was dark, yet he seemed not yet to comprehend the full bearing of what had occurred. Lakkon was in full sight of the Cathurian galley, and Lakkon he knew was to be aboard. Kyphallos was not visible, but another man in armor was by Lakkon's side.

Bzad lifted his voice. "What means this?" he cried.

"There has been a change of plan," Croft returned.

"A change of plan!" the Mazzerian repeated. "Aye, a change of plan indeed it would seem, when you crash into my side and destroy my oars instead of crossing my bows as 'twas arranged. Still, small matter. I have others. Where is the maid?"

"Below," said Croft, sensing Lakkon stiffen at his side. "Do you wish her still?"

"Do I wish her? Adita, goddess of beauty, was she not promised me for myself as a part of the price?" Bzad roared.

Again Croft lifted an arm. Men appeared with rifles in their hands. "Then if so be you wish her, come and take her, aid of Zollaria and man of an unclean tribe. If you wish her, come and take her from a ship of Aphur, Bzad."

And now the Mazzerian understood at last. He started back and raised his voice: "Aboard them—strike, slay! We are betrayed! Let none live save the maid of the yellow hair!"

His men were no cowards. They rallied to his cry. Seizing weapons they hurled themselves toward the close lashed rails.

"Fire," said Croft, as an arrow whistled between himself and Lakkon.

His men responded with a will. This was the first trial of the new weapon in actual war. They fired and loaded and fired again. On board Bzad's vessel men fell. They slumped to the deck or toppled back from the rail which they had reached.

Bzad appeared among them. He was beside himself with rage. He sprang on the rail. A sailor fired pointblank in his

face and missed him. He reached the deck and charged with drawn sword toward Lakkon and Croft.

With a strange tingle running through his entire body, Croft drew his own sword and set himself before Aphur's Prince. And then, before they could come together, Bzad staggered and fell. The sailor had not missed his second shot.

Bzad struggled for a moment. He forced himself half-way up and sank back. His limbs twitched oddly for a moment, and he died.

Beyond him the deck of his own craft was a shambles. Men lay on Croft's deck as well, some of them his, more of them Bzad's, of whom no more than six survived out of possibly a score. Of Croft's none had been killed and the whole affair had taken no more than five minutes from beginning to end.

Croft's voice boomed forth. "Overboard with the dead. Bind the remaining men and take them with us. Board the galley and sink it. We leave no trace of this."

Then as his men sprang laughing to do his bidding he turned to where Lakkon stood by the body of Bzad. "Will you go below and reassure your daughter, Prince Lakkon?" he said.

"Come—we will go together," Jadgor's brother-in-law replied.

Croft complied. The two men went below. They entered the quarters where Naia sought to look from a tiny port, and Naia crouched in a corner as far from the opening as she might.

"Come my child," said Aphur's prince; and as she advanced slowly toward himself and Croft, stretched out his hand for hers.

"Behold your lord," he went on and laid her hand in Croft's. "To him shall you be given by Magur himself, when this thing is ended. In the mean time shall you lie with the Virgins at Zitra, even as he has decreed."

Naia flushed. A soft color dyed her face and perfect throat. She lowered her eyes, and suddenly throwing all reticence aside, she lifted her arms and laid them about Croft's neck and raised her lips to his.

"Ah!" exclaimed Lakkon somewhat aghast. "Naught can keep you from her now with honor, Jasor of Nodhur — my son."

"Nothing shall keep me from her save death," Croft told him and held her very close.

And lying against him, Naia turned her head. Her eyes were glowing with the light of a sacred fire. But she laughed. "My father—you have called him son," she reminded. "Recall that I said you should."

"I ask no better privilege, my son and daughter," Lakkon yielded with a smile. "Zitu himself knows I liked not the other arrangement. He knows this pleases me well."

The captain tapped on the door. He reported the Mazzerian's galley sinking, and the decks as cleared.

Two minutes later, Croft's vessel was headed for Zitra south by east. Behind was an empty sea. If Kyphallos had started a galley to inform Bzad of what had occurred at Scira, it was apt to search long and vainly for him it was meant to meet.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DOGS OF WAR.

WAR! War between Zollaria and Tamarizia! War planned for fifty years and now set into motion! It had come as Croft had predicted, as Jadgor of Aphur had feared. As though malignly determined to be avenged even in death, the bullet-pierced body of Bzad had washed ashore, and been discovered. No other pretext was needed by the Empire to the north.

All other plans they threw by the board. Bzad of Mazzer—a guest of their nation had been slain on the Central Sea. They made demands for redress, and they asked Cathur as the price of what had just occurred.

Tamhys of Zitra with a pained, almost puzzled expression in his aged eyes, heard the demands of the envoys and answered them finally not as a man of peace but as a patriot of his country, unwilling to see

his land dismembered to appease an enemy's greed.

The Na was alive with motor-driven vessels, gathering at Himyra, filling its yellow flood with a ready fleet. Aboard them marched men or rolled armored motors, soon to have their test on a bloody field. Into them were loaded those things Croft had fashioned against this time, rifles and ammunition and grenades.

Ladhra and Himyra swarmed with marching men. Milidhur's two armored cars were rushing overland to join her assembling forces. Robur in his glory was loading his expedition for the relief of Bithur, where Mazzer was to strike. The gentle Gaya wept, while her war lord girded on his armor and boasted of the fate he would carry among the blue men with his death-dealing tools.

Naia of Aphur was with the Vestals of Zitra, where Croft had left her a month before. He had taken her to Zud, and explained what he desired. Zud had listened and given assent. Their parting had been brief since Croft knew he must hasten back to Himyra and begin the final preparations for what was soon to come. Zud knowing her pledged by Lakkon to Croft, had left them alone at the last, before he took her to the apartments of the Virgins, close to the top of the monster pyramid, where a white flame leaped from oils never allowed to diminish in front of a figure of Ga—the Eternal Woman—brooding over the sacred fire of life.

Croft stretched forth his arms.

Naia of Aphur gave him the look of the woman, and laid herself on his breast.

"Mine," said the man.

"Yours," said the maid, in a voice like the sighing of a harp. "Promise me you shall come again to claim me, Jasor, my lord, whom I love."

"I shall come to claim you, my Naia, and make you my own," he said.

"And should you not, no other shall claim me ever," she whispered and raised her lips.

"Naught save death shall keep me," Croft vowed with his lips on hers.

"I know. If you come not, I stay here forever," she told him, clinging to him.

"Nay." He held her from him to look down into her face. "You shall tend the fire for me, rather than Ga."

"Azil permitting, beloved." And because of the meaning of her own words to her soul she colored beneath his eyes.

Then came Zud and led her to the Vestals, and Croft, full of the divine fire of that parting, went back to Himyra to prepare for those things which must come to pass ere he might return to her.

He plunged into the task with the full cooperation of Jadgor, Lakkon, and Robur. A swift boat was sent to Zitra to wait any news at that point. Word was sent to Milidhur and Ladhra to mobilize their forces and be ready to move on the word. At Himyra activities of every nature were pushed. Never had the Red City seen such ceaseless preparation as now went on to meet and check Zollaria's plans.

Of those plans Croft kept track, leaving his body at times in the night and hovering over Cathur and the northern nation. He knew when the envoys left for Zitra to demand Cathur, of Tamhys, as the price of peace. He witnessed the massing of her army along Cathur's north frontier. He saw Kyphallos at the head of the hastily gathered levies of Cathur, men untrained, unready, herded into hasty companies, poorly equipped—beings to be led to the slaughter in a sham of resistance as he knew, ere Kyphallos did his part and surrendered to what would seem overwhelming forces equipped and trained for this moment through a span of fifty years.

Yet Croft smiled. In all that vast army set aside for this one task by the empire which had raised it, there was nothing to compare with the weapons he possessed, naught to resemble them in the least. Spears there were and bows, crossbows even, and swords. Chariots there were, and men in glistening armor, who drove them. Scythelike blades armed their wheels to cut and rend asunder all who stood in their course. But what were they to his chariots which would move themselves across the field of carnage and vomit the fire of death into Zollaria's ranks.

Then came the swift boat from Zitra, reporting Tamhys's answer and the return

of the envoys north. Tamhys had refused. Croft laughed into Jadgor's eyes. Tamhys had asked—*asked* that Aphur and Nodhur and Milidhur, use their full power and their new weapons to make Tamarizia strong.

"Think you he would have been so bold had he not known of them?" Jadgor growled, with a teeth-baring grin. "Nay by Zitu! If so I do not agree. 'Twas because he knew these things were in our hands, and Tamarizia in our hearts he refused."

"Go!" he cried to the messenger who had but returned. "Say to Tamhys that we stand ready—that we say at once—that ere Zollaria's men shall return with his word, we shall be nearing the northern coast! How say you, Jasor, my lord?"

"Even as Jadgor has said, O king," Croft replied, since this was what he had planned.

That night all Himyra flared with fire. That night the sound of marching feet, the rumble of motors filled the Red City's streets. The firelight struck on the motors' metal bodies, glinted on the slanting barrels of the rifles carried by Aphur's sons. A swift car had flown to Ladhra carrying the word. In Ladhra, too, the night was filled with the embarkation of the forces which were to join with Aphur in the north.

At break of day Croft, Jadgor and Lakkon sailed. That afternoon Ladhra's first contingent arrived. Then Robur sent part on the heels of the former fleet, and took part in his own party, to Bithur's aid. Belzor himself led the section which hurried after Croft. He reported the motor transports as already whirling the bulk of the troops for Milidhur's aid toward the east.

In three days Croft made landfall on the coast of Mazhur not far from Niera and coasted toward the town, after landing a party under Lakkon some miles above it with instructions to advance down the coast, and entrench themselves on the landward side of the city at once. He appeared before the city with his fleet about midmorning and demanded its surrender at once.

His answer was defiance, of course.

Croft set to work. His own galley ran close in toward the gates of the harbor. The enemy manned the walls. They began a rain of arrows and spears and the casting down of fire-balls, hoping to set the galley on fire.

Croft had expected this. He had prepared some metal shields which could be used to cover the decks against arrows and spears from above. They were impregnable save for some square-cut holes. Through these he began a bombardment of the gates themselves with grenades. Heavy as they were, they had not been built to resist the assault of powder. Inside twenty minutes, while the air filled with the shouts and missles of the defenders, one was blown from its hinges and fell with a mighty splash. The other followed shortly after. Croft's galley sailed in, followed by that of Jadgor and several others of the fleet.

And now he had the defenders of the walls in the rear. His galley paused. The others followed suit. Their decks swarmed with men who knelt and opened fire from the rifles Croft had made. A smell of powder filled the air. Smoke clouds floated in the air. The shouts of the defenders changed to cries of alarm as they found themselves stricken by this new and unknown force. Other galleys forced the passage and speeding beyond the engaged vessels opened a galling fire along the waterfront. Under cover of this landing parties were flung ashore. They marched into the town, engaging the Zollarian guards wherever found, yet always at an advantage of weapons and range. In an hour it was done.

The Zollarian commander surrendered. Croft shut his men in their barracks and posted a guard. Bulletins printed in advance, promising freedom from harm to all non-combatants who kept to their houses and caused no trouble, were affixed at the houses at the corners of the streets. The remainder of the fleet entered the harbor and debarked their men and the armored motors. Inside two hours more Croft marched out of the landward gate and joined Lakkon and his men where they labored on their trenches. That night Jadgor's tent stood in the midst of an armed camp on Mazhurian soil. Tamarizia had struck swiftly and with an overwhelm-

ing force, for which Zollaria had been unprepared.

The next day the men of Ladhra arrived. Croft left them to garrison Niera until a later body from the interior parts of Aphur should arrive, then follow on. In fact he left orders that as each new contingent appeared they should take over Niera, releasing the garrison they found to advance through the state in support of his main force. Himself, he broke camp and moved inland along the splendid roads which Tamarizia had built generations unnumbered before, when Mazhur was one of her states.

For Palos, the sight was odd as the well-drilled ranks moved ahead in steady cadence, with here and there a huge ungainly battle motor rumbling along, its monster body filled with men. Here and there in some minor town some slight resistance was met. The motors took care of that. Rolling irresistibly forward into a slithering flight of arrows and spears, they spat fire at the defenders until they fell or fled. On and on crept the column with scarcely a pause save for rest or food. That word of it went before it Croft did not doubt. He even smiled grimly as he suggested to Jadgor what that word would be —a garbled version of monsters which breathed fire and slew with their breath, of troops which shot not arrows but more of the monsters' fire.

And Jadgor smiled in return as he gazed down the sturdily swinging ranks that crept along the road the lumbering motors had cleared.

Luckily there were few streams, for the Zollarians seemed to understand dimly by what they were attacked. They destroyed what bridges lay in the line of their retreat. Some of them had to be repaired, thereby losing time. Thus, as he advanced, Croft found the countryside cleared and sensed that the retreating forces were trusting to the main body, when they reached it, to check his victorious course.

He had some swift motors, in which he himself and Jadgor and Lakkon rode. Taking one of these, he sent it far ahead to feel out the road. In it he placed a picked squad of his very best marksmen and ordered them to return at all costs should they contact the enemy in force.

But the enemy in force was attacking the frontier of Cathur. That was as Croft had planned it. That was Zollaria's second mistake, even as her first was in not knowing the full weight of the power she faced.

Thus days passed and the Tamarizian army had actually reached the northern bounds of Mazhur itself, as Jadgor declared, before any news of the main enemy body was received.

Then the scout motor came back and reported heavy forces hurrying to intercept their present line of march.

Croft ordered a halt and took stock of the situation. Before him was a defile in the hills, through which ran the road to reach a farther plain. And that was enough. He ordered an advance. Deploying his army right and left, he set them to digging trenches along the hillside so as to enfilade the plain from both sides of the central pass. In these he posted the riflemen and one of his trained grenade corps every fifty feet. Across the road he built a barricade, some way back on the front-line trench. High on each side of the pass he posted other riflemen behind shelters of stone in such a position that they could fire into the road or cast down grenades. In front of the barricade itself he parked his battle-motors, unseen from the plain, but ready to emerge upon it when the time should come. He was hard at it in the midst of these arrangements when a band of Zollarians mounted on gnuppas appeared above a gentle swell in the road, perhaps a mile away, sat watching the work along the hillside for some moments, turned and disappeared in the direction from whence they had come.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHEN HELMOR'S SUN SET.

"THEY come, O Jadgor of Aphur!" Lakkon said.

"They come," Jadgor replied.

"Let them," Croft flung out from a wonderful confidence. "You shall see their slaughter, O king."

The hosts of Zollaria appeared. From the top of the hill above the road Croft and the other two watched. Foot and chariots the men of the northern nation began to top the rolling hill before them. It was mid-afternoon. The sunlight sparkled upon spearpoint and chariot, on cuirass and plume-tufted helm. It was a wonderful sight as the soldiers of the empire prepared to hurl themselves against the smaller force which held the pass and the hills to either side. They deployed right and left, spearmen, bowmen, with a chariot filled with some noble and his driver here and there along the far-flung front. And, having deployed, they began a slow advance, moving like a mighty living ocean toward the shoreline of the hills. Prisoners were to tell Croft later they were sorely puzzled by the scant sight of the enemy they obtained. The trenches, wherein lurked the waiting death they faced, baffled their understanding, was new in their knowledge of war. Their captains knew not exactly what they led them against. Yet they were proud in their might and the training of fifty years for this moment. Men had lived and been trained and had died and handed down the tradition of this day to their sons who were being trained to take their father's places in the ranks when the day should come. Now they advanced without hesitation to write the history of the day itself upon their nation's page.

Croft turned to Jadgor and Lakkon. "You command the wings," he said. "I shall lead the motors. The next hour shall make us freemen or slaves. Say as much to your men." He began the descent of the hill, reached the motors, each with its load of tensely waiting soldiers, and entered his own—the first and leading car.

He gave the command. The motors roared. A faint cheer broke from the lips of the men behind the barricade. The armored cars gained speed. They left the defile of the pass. Suddenly they broke upon the sight of the Zollarian host.

For a moment it seemed to falter all along the line as the motors left the road and deployed now in their turn to right and left. Then, with a shout, a flashing chariot dashed from their ranks and headed with plunging gnuppas at Croft's own machine. Crash, crash! Two of the gnuppas were down. The chariot was overturned in a smother of dust and flying hoofs as the stricken creatures dragged their teammates with them in their fall. Croft's motor advanced. The whole line of unwieldly shapes rolled forward. They began to spit acrid smoke and flame.

Crash, crash! The trenches opened fire, shooting above the moving motors toward the Zollarians' ranks.

Men went down in a swift dissolution. Some one sounded the charge. Zollaria's manhood answered the summon to their manhood. They surged ahead in a roaring human flood. The motors were engulfed, but still they spat fire. Men gathered about them and sought to overturn them. They died. The press of the charge passed toward the hill. The motors lumbered about and fired into the rear of the storming forces. They squatted on the plain and sent a stream of death into the backs of their foes.

And in the faces of those foes a stream of death was pouring. Rifles blazed and grenades began exploding along the sides of the hills. Still they stormed up. This was Zollaria's day—*the day*—the thing dreamed of, planned for, through fifty years. Only by degrees could the thought of certain success begin to waver in the minds of the men in that charge. Some of them died on the hillside. Some of them reached to the lip of the trenches themselves and died. Some of them entered the defile and found the barricade and died before it under the blast of its rifles and the grenades hurled down upon them from its edge. And all the while the glistening motors squatted on the plain or ambled slowly toward the hillsides, spitting flame, while other men died.

So in the end Zollaria's men began at first to doubt and then to fear. In front was death, and death was at their backs. Turn where they would that fiery, unknown, roaring death spat at them. The air was full of it. The very ground seemed to leap into flame at their feet and carry death. They wavered. They turned. They fled. Bowmen, spearmen, chariot, and plume-tossing gnuppa, they streamed down the

hillside and out on the plain. And after them came death — and death met them again from the metal-covered motors, which fired and fired into their mass as they retreated in fear.

Croft saw them vanish over the rolling hill which had veiled their recent advance. He opened the door of his motor and called through a trumpet to two of the cars by number. They were under command of trusted men. He ordered them to take each two others and follow the beaten army, giving it neither respite nor ease while daylight should last. Himself he returned to the defile. It was a great hour, the greatest hour he had ever known in his life—the hour in which all he had promised was proven, all he had worked for was won. He climbed down and mounted the hill to where Jadgor stood.

"O king," he said. "To you for Tamarizia, I give back Mazhur, the lost state. Another meeting such as this and, I think, Zollaria will surely sue for peace."

Jadgor reached out and embraced him—to Croft's surprise. "Jasor of Nodhur—man of wonder!" he exclaimed. "Did I ever doubt Zitu had sent you to Tamarizia's salvation I do not doubt it now."

That night Croft camped where he was. The next day Belzor, with his Nodhurians, having made a forced march from Niera, came up. Gazing on the body-strewn hillside and plain he wept with disappointment not to have been present to witness what took place.

Croft grinned. "Patience. The emperor himself leads the army against Cathur, some of the captives tell me. To-day we advance."

Toward midnight his motors had come back to report the enemy still in flight and the road a mass of wounded who had fallen from exhaustion on the way. Croft's heart went out to the poor devils, who were, after all, but the victims of their ruler's lust for power. Yet he could do little for them because of the lack of time and the fact that he passed through openly hostile territory now. It had been somewhat different in Mazhur, where many of the inhabitants were Tamarizian still at heart. But here, should he leave men behind to attend the wounded, he knew, that if discovered, they would perish without any doubt. Hence beyond collecting them in one place, supplying them with provisions, and leaving the lesser wounded to wait upon the others, he could do nothing before he advanced on to the main body of the enemy.

That advance lasted for a week. Twice, during it, Croft left his body, satisfied himself the state of things was safe, returned to earth, and chatted with Mrs. Goss and went back. At the end of the week he found himself once more facing a foe.

His first victory had produced a wonderful effect. Zollaria, driving Cathur before her like chaff, under Kyphallos treacherous leadership, had made progress already when word of Croft's landing and advance from Niera had caused the Emperor Helmor to detach a portion of his army under his son to crush the flank attack. Instead, his son's command was crushed and recoiled in a sorry rout. Helmor faced about. Raging at this check to his plans, he rushed north and east to finish the Tamarizian army himself.

And now Croft found the positions reversed. Helmor chose his own ground. He set himself to withstand the shock of battle along a line of gently rolling hills, up which his foe must advance to the attack. Thus his bowmen had a tremendous advantage, according to all his knowledge of war, and his spearmen, at close quarters, could give a most magnificent account of themselves, while the chariots, in the rear of the line, could take care of any small bands of the enemy which might chance to break through.

In this case Croft put his motors in the front. Deploying his men, he instructed them to advance by rushes, keeping well in the rear of the sixteen machines, yet close enough to take advantage of any breaks they made in Helmor's line.

"This day will be the last," he said to Jadgor as he prepared to lead in his own machine.

"Zitu grant it, and victory with it!" Jadgor replied. "Should you carry defeat to Helmor, Tamarizia is yours, to do with as you please. Once before I would remind you, Jasor, I said well-nigh as much."

"There is but one thing in Tamarizia I desire." Croft looked at Lakkon as he spoke and smiled.

"It is yours, my son," said Aphur's prince, and spoke softly to Jadgor. "What think you, O king. Our Jasor desires a maid."

And Jadgor nodded. "Aye. Lakkon, I am not a fool! You are willing she should go to him?"

"I have pledged her to him," said Lakkon as he bowed his head.

"And I go to win her now," said Croft as he entered his car.

Naia of Aphur. That was the cry of his heart he carried into the fight. Naia of Aphur. This fight should make her his. He gave the signal for the advance with a smile upon his lips.

Like huge metal turtles the motors began crawling toward the hill where Helmor waited. Slowly, steadily, as implacable as fate, they rumbled ahead. And, after a time, their breath rose on the air of the cloudless morning in acrid whiffs of smoke. Flights of arrows and crossbow bolts rattled on their sides and fell harmless. They reached the foot of the hill and began to climb—up and up. They were half lost now in the smoke of their own fierce discharges and the clouds of flying shafts.

Back of them the infantry advanced as Croft had directed, dashing forward a hundred yards, and dropping down to fire in crashing volleys which covered their comrades sprinting rush, rising again and swarming ahead while the other end of their companies covered them in turn. On the hill confusion began to develop after a time. Men fell in heaps without a chance to strike back.

Nearer and nearer, without pause, the odd metal turtles crept up the hill. Nothing stopped them. Nothing, neither valor nor marksmanship, silenced the deadly spitting of their fire. Arrows broke upon them, cross-bolts slithered off their invulnerable hides. Nearer and nearer crept the menace of their ugly snouts. On the right flank two reached the Zollarian line and crashed against it. Men fell and were ground into bloody pulp beneath metal wheels. The Zollarians tried. They flung themselves in waves upon the monsters. They sought to climb upon them. They gripped at the spitting rifle-barrels. But still the motors plowed on in a bloody foam. They turned and began crawling through the sea of men. Flesh and bone could stand no more. The right flank wavered and fled just before the infantry swarming up the slope in a final rush drove its own charge home. They fell back in a disorganized mob, flinging bows and spears from them as they ran.

They left the center unsupported, attacked from both front and side. It wavered, bent, sought to turn itself to meet the double-attack, broke in the process, and split asunder. Behind it, in his gorgeous chariot, Helmor raged to no avail. Through the mêlée a monster thing of metal bore down upon him. From it there came a brazen voice as of one speaking through a trumpet:

"Yield, Helmor of Zollaria, and put a stop to slaughter! Yield, Helmor, or perish with your men!"

This was the end. This was the fruition in blood and despair of that day prepared against through the span of fifty years. Thus was Zollaria's ambition sinking to destruction, smothered beneath the swirling dust of a panic-stricken ruck. Helmor swept the lost field with his eyes and knew the truth.

He gave the sign of surrender, spoke to his frightened aids, and sent them galloping on gnuppas right and left to carry the word of defeat. A standard shot up from the top of Croft's car. The sounds of battle ceased by degrees and died as car after car raised a similar signal across the battle-front.

Croft opened the door of his car and stepped down. "You will enter Helmor of Zollaria," he said shortly, and gestured to the door.

The Emperor Helmor bowed. He bent his haughty crest and disappeared from sight. The door closed behind him, shutting him safe beyond all dreams of conquest for all time to come. The great car turned and lumbered back down the hill toward the camp where Jadgor of Aphur had waited and watched. The sun was at its

zenith above a field of dead and wounded. But Helmor's sun of ambition had set.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CONSUMMATION.

THESE are the things Croft told me. It was three o'clock in the morning when he was done. "That was a month ago, Dr. Murray," he said, and sighed.

"But what became of Kyphallos?" I asked.

Croft smiled. "Kyphallos was placed under arrest and tried with speed," he replied. "He was sentenced to exile in that Zollaria he had tried to aid in her plans. He went forth in a rather boastful fashion and appeared at the capital, Berla, itself. But neither Helmor nor the tawny Kalamita would have aught to do with him since he could be of no further use to them. Only then I think did Kyphallos realize his true position, because then he drew himself up before Kalamita and asked her, for all time, to say he was nothing to her.

She replied with a sneering laugh.

Kyphallos gave her one look, drew his sword, held it before his breast, and fell upon it and died.

"And the maid?" I asked. "Pardon me, Croft, but I'm human! And like all human beings I recognize love as the mainspring of existence."

He laughed. "As it is—love, Murray, is life—the cause of all being. The maid is mine, or shall be so, soon as I return."

"You're going back?" I said.

He gave me a glance. "Of course. I ask nothing better. God, man, don't you understand that she waits for me—there? Oh, yes, I've seen her since Zollaria was beaten! I've held her in my arms—felt her lips. The wedding-day is set. It is to be in Himyra, with Magur as priest. Man, can't you understand?"

"What?" I inquired.

His laugh came again. But it was nervous. "You rather force me to blow my own horn. Murray, I'm Tamarizia to-day. When we returned to Zitra victors and learned that Robur had driven the Mazzerians like chaff before the wind, and that Milidhur, outside of a skirmish or two, had found nothing to do, Tamhys gave me new rank. He named me Prince of Zitra, a title never known in Tamarizia before, but next in importance to the imperial throne. Man, I could have been emperor had I wished since Tamhys's term expired one week after we got back."

"Could have been?" I said.

"Yes." He smiled. "But—I didn't take it. Do you know what I did?"

"Hardly." I shook my head.

"You might deduce it," he returned. "Murray, Tamarizia is a republic now. She was ready for it. She had come nearly to it before I arrived. There was no reason why she should not set up a true democracy. When they offered me the crown I replied with a request. I called for a council of the states. I put the thing squarely before them. They hailed the suggestion with acclaim. My word was law, Murray—law.

"Last night when you called me back and I returned, do you know what was being done? Certainly not. But—we were completing the draft of the republican constitution. Nothing less. When I returned I found them clustered about me—those nobles of the nation. They thought me in a faint, all save Jadgor and Lakkon and Robur, of course. I caught their eyes and knew they understood. But I said nothing, and we finished the draft last night. Now Jasor's body, which I have used, lies in Zud's own room in the Zitra pyramid. It is guarded by a priest. Above it, between it and the Temple of Zitu, Murray—between it and God, Naia of Aphur is waiting, a virgin guarded by Virgins for my return, in that room where Ga, the eternal woman, broods above the sacred fire. Think you I shall not go back."

"No—I think I would go myself if I could," I replied.

His eyes filled with a far-away look. "Earth is beautiful," he said. "I love it, its mountains and valleys, its streams and lakes, its fields of grass and flowers, but, Murray—there is something, some one now in my life I love beyond anything else. Man, I have found my mate. Like the moose of the great woods, I must answer

her call. I shall go back. I shall make Naia of Aphur my wife. There will be an election to select a president of the new republic. I have been asked to put up my name. I think—nay, Murray, I am sure, that Naia shall be the first lady of all Tamarizia at Zitra itself ere long."

"And your body here? What will you do? Shall you tell her the truth?"

"Aye, I think so," he declared. "Truth is a wonderful thing. It should be kept sacred between a man and his mate. Were that done more commonly by man and his consort half the marital trouble of the world would disappear. But—what need have I of an earthly body any more. My life calls me to Palos. Henceforth I am through with earth. Hence Murray, my friend, when I return from this final excursion, I shall do what I have never done before. I shall snap the invisible bond between this body and my spirit, which, until now, I have held intact. I shall remain here a very few days to perform some necessary tasks. I must provide for Mrs. Goss, and I desire my estate to be given to some foundation for the welfare of my race. Then—then Murray—I shall go to the woman I love—Naia—my God-given mate!"

This is the story he told me that afternoon and night. Was he sane? I think so. Was the story true? I cannot say. And yet somewhere I feel that Jason Croft is living to-day—that he is happy, that he has won his great adventure, and that Naia of Aphur, that maid of the golden hair and the purple eyes, is truly now his wife.

One thing I can set down with positive knowledge at the end. A week from the first time she called me, Mrs. Goss came to me again. I went with her to the great couch in Croft's study and—I found him dead! His body lay there lifeless, rigid and cold beyond any power of mine to help. It came over me that the man had kept his word and broken the subtle thread between it and his spirit, just as he had said he would. I straightened and told Mrs. Goss there was nothing I could do.

She wiped her dark, old eyes. "I knowed it," she said, "I knowed it! Somethin' told me I was goin' to lose him this time! I've knowed him from a baby, Dr. Murray. He was always a very strange man."

(The end.)

I REMEMBER

BY GEORGE FAWCETT

I REMEMBER the thumbed book,
And the whittled desk,
The teacher who awed me,
Whom yet I adored.
I remember the bobbing cork
In the hole below
Where the river eddied.
The dog rigid in his track,
Over his feathered quarry,
And the whir of the duck
While I hid in the sedge.
I remember a boyish triumph,
And a tragedy
That did not last long.
And I am thinking,
Sorely thinking,
That I was a damn fool
To grow up.

The Great American Novel

by Roy K. Moulton

WHEN I was still very young my parents knew I was an exceptional child. The neighbors knew it, too. I have always believed that my parents let the cat out of the bag. Oh, it was no secret. Everybody in our town was let in on it eventually. Of course, they didn't all learn of it the same day, but it was noised about very soon. Bad news travels fast.

There may be worse news than that of the arrival of an exceptional child in a neighborhood, but for the life of me I can't imagine what it is.

I was not like other children. Children never are like other children. It's queer, isn't it? It would seem, in the natural course of events, that children would be very much like other children. But no, indeed, they are not. If they are your children they are not like any other children ever born.

Of course, I had, I believe the average number of noses and eyes and mouths and things, but mentally and temperamentally I was exceptional. When I squalled at night it was not as other children squalled. There was music in my yipping which made me far superior to little Archibald Stebbens next door, who was just my age, but a very low-browed and unpleasant yipper. My crying was not painful to the ear, but Archibald's was something awful. I could scream all night with the colic and everybody in our house thought I was the most wonderful songbird outside of the Metropolitan Opera House; but if Archibald gave three short yips at any time in the night everybody in our house was up in arms against that noisy brat next door. He was like other children.

Archibald was not a synthetic yipper. He did not properly join the notes. His head-tones were punk and his technique was something terrible. His yipping did not suggest a trace of mentality. He lacked rhythm. He had not a poetic soul. He, in his yipping, betrayed his ancestry and exposed the family tree. To hear Archibald cry you would have known instinctively that his great-grandfather had been a butcher who used to take off his shoes and stick his feet out in the aisle and snore when traveling.

With me, of course, it was different. I was an exceptional child. By my very colicky wails, which were so refined and musical and full of poetry and soulful cadence, you would have known at once that my family had been one of the nine million families who had come over in the Mayflower and that it had brought its own antique furniture.

Nowadays, in my riper state, I have no particular use for exceptional children. I will walk around the block to escape one. The kind of a child I fancy nowadays is a soiled-faced child who doesn't look as though somebody had just shined up his family escutcheon. If I can find a child who is just in the process of standing on his head in a box of mortar or dropping the cat in the rain barrel, he is the sort of child

in whom I become immediately interested. The little *Rollos*—the exceptional children—don't seem to attract me.

But I had the right start. My parents often assured me of that. I think it is a rule, however, that exceptional children often reverse in later years, just as one reverses in waltzing. It is monotonous to turn one way all the time. There is nothing exceptional about me now. I am as unexceptional and common as Archibald was when he was a child.

I suppose, by the law of averages, Archibald is now a bishop, or a college professor, or a *vers libre* poet. I hope so. If he had kept up the pace he was hitting when he was three months old, he would have been in the penitentiary some years ago; provided, of course, my parents had him sized up right.

Children seldom become what they start out to be. One little friend of mine named Leonidas Peckham was going to be a Supreme Court Justice when he grew up. His parents, after much deliberation, had picked out that career for him. Leonidas is now a street-car conductor in Boston. He would rather be a street-car conductor in Boston than a celebrated artist or barrister in Denver or Omaha, and so long as he is satisfied, there is nothing more to be said. Of course his parents now place street-car conductoring above Supreme Court justicing, and are proud of the fact that he is the greatest street-car conductor in the world.

It is very difficult to disappoint parents. They always hate to admit that they were guilty of snap judgment when their offspring was an infant.

Parents never are visibly disappointed unless the eighth wonder of the world happens to land in the State prison, and then they generally manage, somehow, to make it seem like the thing to do.

Of course there never were any doubts in my case. I was going to be the greatest something in the world—the greatest musician, perhaps, or the greatest painter, or the greatest architect. This was all decided while I was yet trying to swallow my rattle and was trying to pull the cat backward by the tail.

Anybody who has ever tried to pull a cat along by the tail, over a parlor carpet, knows that it is a difficult thing to do. I was always tackling some big job like that. Nothing seemed to stagger me. Failure was nowhere in my program of life. I even tried to jam my head into a hammered brass umbrella-stand, and succeeded so gloriously that they had to send for a tinsmith to cut the thing off me.

But that was while I was in my exceptional childhood. The adventuresome spirit gradually wore off, and I became like other children.

While I was in school I was reminded by my parents that it was time for me to think of doing the big stunt. Everybody in town expected it from the exceptional child. It would never do to throw my parents down and repudiate their faithful and artistic press-work. There were one or two fatuous old doubters in our community who didn't believe there was anything exceptional about me.

"I don't care a damn what you do," said my father, who was a profane man only when addressing his exceptional child; "but do something, and do it quick. For the start we gave you in the public mind, you are the sourest quince in the family orchard. If you can't do anything else, win a high jump, throw a brick through a hack window, rob a hen-roost or elope with a chorus-girl. Only show a little speed."

I told my father that I couldn't be expected to become the greatest anything in the world while I was still suffering from growing pains, and he said I had given him a pain which had been growing for about eighteen years. My father was an exceptional man—exceptionally frank.

"Look at Archie Stebbins," he said. "We always thought Archie was a noodle, and look at him now. He stole a street-car and pulled it up on the campus flagpole last week. His ancestors were butchers and yours came over in the Sunflower, or whatever the name of it was. You act like a pole-bean. You have no punch. You're about as devilish as a vanilla ice-cream soda. You show some speed, or by hokey—"

"All right, pater," I replied wearily.

"Call me that again and I'll do something that no one should do to an exceptional child," he said. "I will hand you an exceptional jolt. Call me 'dad.' Don't be a milksop all your life."

Somehow I couldn't bring myself to believe that father's ancestors had come over in the Mayflower. Mother's, perhaps, but father's—no. I was a mayflower on my mother's side. Father's ancestors were here long before mother's arrived. I was very sure of that. Father's were waving the stone-hatchet and dancing around the camp-fire when mother's hove in sight of Plymouth Rock. Father's shot those cute little feathered arrows, while mother's entrenched themselves behind those miles of antique highboys and chairs which they had brought over.

"With an exceptional ancestry and an exceptional childhood behind you, you ought to do something, Heaven knows," said my father.

I promised him I would—and that is how I came to write the great American novel. I have given you a rather long prelude, but I have done that because I had a long line of ancestors and a long childhood, and each deserved a considerable degree of mention.

I did not decide to write the great American novel until I had cast about rather thoroughly. There didn't seem to be anything else to do right at that moment. Edison was doing most of the inventing, several members of the Strauss family were writing all the music, George Ade was putting up all the slang that seemed to be required, Peary and Doc Cook were both about to discover the short and ugly phrase in the far north, somebody happened to be President of the United States, and there was no chance there; somebody had already invented the high cost of living, the hook and eye, the vacuum cleaner and nine per cent interest, and the Wrights were just beginning to defy the laws of gravitation.

Fields of endeavor were scarce.

Suddenly it occurred to me to write the great American novel. Why not? Nobody else was doing it at that moment, and it was something that should be done. Writing the great American novel would be an achievement worth while. Many had tried it and failed. I would be the exception. I immediately sat down and wrote—not the great American novel, but a letter—a letter to my parents, telling them of my ambitions.

"I had hoped he would do something worth while," said my father after he had read my letter.

"Writing the great American novel is a harmless pastime," replied my mother. "He might be doing something worse."

"I doubt it," said my father.

"Well, while he is doing that, he isn't doing anything else," insisted my mother. "It will keep him out of mischief."

"I suppose he might as well be writing the great American novel as to be gadding the street with a wrist-watch on one arm and a girl on the other," said father. "But I wanted him to do something sensible like manufacturing furniture-polish or selling horse-liniment. I can't support him all his days."

Father finally submitted to the inevitable and the community soon knew that I was writing the great American novel. My parents tried to keep it secret, but those things will leak out.

I really was not writing the novel at that time. I was just getting ready to write it. One cannot jump into a task of that kind roughshod. It requires preparation. Anyhow, there was plenty of time. The world had struggled along for some years without the great American novel, and a few weeks' delay wouldn't upset the national or universal program to any appreciable extent. The world would simply have to wait. This was to be no premature explosion. Remember what Dewey said to Gridley in Manila Bay? He said: "You may fire when you are ready, Gridley!" or words to that effect.

I was the Gridley of literature. I would fire when I got ready.

While I was yet in school the writing of the great American novel was a cinch. I would just take a few days off, some time, and write it. In fact it was a cinch right up until the time I began it.

In order to prepare myself thoroughly for this exploit, I got married.

"I thought you were writing," wired my

father, when he heard the wedding had already taken place.

"I am writing," I replied by letter. "I am writing for money. Send some."

Father was not a short sport. He was so anxious to get a copy of that great American novel in his hands to vindicate his opinion of me while I was yet an infant, that he would have backed me in any enterprise. If I had told him that it was necessary for me to rob a bank and burn down an orphan asylum to get local color for my novel, he would have sent a stick of dynamite and a can of kerosene.

Of course the wedding delayed the great American novel a few weeks because my newly acquired inspiration demanded a honeymoon-trip. My father agreed. My father and my wife seemed to be running the show. It was stipulated in their agreement we should take the wedding-trip and then I should return home with her and suffer myself to be tied down to the novel until it should be finished.

"It is bad enough to have a novelist in the family," said my father, "without having a novelist in the family who isn't noveling. I am not going to spend much more time dodging people in this town who want to ask me where the great American novel is. If you had only gone into the glue business with me and stuck to it—"

"This is no time to joke," broke in my wife. "There's serious work to do. Philo cannot be disturbed by nonsense now."

For a new member of the family, my wife seemed to be taking hold fairly well, and I loved her for it.

It was arranged that my wife and my father should keep tabs on the novel.

"You ought to turn out a hundred pages, typewritten, every day," said my father, "if you begin when the glue factory whistle blows at seven o'clock in the morning and knock off at six in the evening. At that rate, the thing should be finished in two weeks, at the latest. Fourteen hundred typewritten pages ought to be enough great American novel to last the great American public for some time. When I get home to-night I shall expect to read the first hundred pages."

"That is absurd," said my wife. "I don't believe Philo will be able to turn out more than ninety pages the first day. Remember, he has never operated a typewriter before. And, besides, writing the great American novel is not like making glue."

"That's right," replied my father; "there isn't as much money in it."

"I honestly believe," snapped my wife, "that you think books are made simply to throw at cats and prop up disabled furniture."

"Well," replied my father, just before he slammed the door, "Philo is a piece of Mayflower furniture that needs to be considerably propped up—so, go ahead."

I labored all that day, and the best I could do was sixty-seven pages.*

"I have got a girl down at the office who can write faster than that," said my father as he adjusted his glasses that evening.

He read every line of the manuscript and then calmly walked over and dropped it into the grate fire.

"That's the flattest thing I ever read," he said. "Sixty-seven pages and nobody killed yet. What are you writing, a tract?"

My wife was indignant. I was not. I was totally indifferent to the whole thing.

"It was perfectly lovely," said she.

"That's the trouble," replied my father as he stumped off up-stairs to bed. "Start again in the morning and see if you can't get some pep into it."

I started next morning promptly on time and wrote the first chapter. In order to satisfy my father I had the hero run over by an automobile and badly injured.

"It would have been better if you had killed him," said my father that evening. "Why let the poor boob live and suffer?"

"We have got to use him later on," replied my wife. "*Jim* is essential to the story."

"Why do you call him *Jim?*" demanded my father.

"Because the hero of every novel is *Jim*," said my wife.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mr. Proudfoot's achievement will be the better appreciated when it is understood that one thousand words a day is considered good work by some of the best writers, and that typewritten copy averages three hundred words to the page.

"If you called him *Rollo* he would fit the conversation better," snapped my father. "I never heard of a regular hero who used soft-boiled talk like he uses."

"That is conventional novel conversation," said my wife.

"Well, it won't do," replied my father. "This hero is going to have some sort of manhood if I have to write it in myself. The way you have him lined up now a compound fracture of the wrist-watch crystal would put him in the hospital for six months. For Heaven's sake make him a man, not a spineless lounge-lizard!"

I agreed with father. My hero wasn't a *Jim* at all. He was a regular *Percival.* I didn't seem able to shoot any Jim into him.

In fact, before I had proceeded half-way through the second chapter I hated the great American novel. I was out of sympathy with its theme and its characters. I couldn't even muster up a friendly feeling for the pathetic old gray-haired aunt of the hero, who was about to make the hero a millionaire by passing out of the novel.

The great American novel haunted me. I would wake up in the night screaming, after having seen all my characters standing about my bed armed with poisonous gas bombs intended for the author.

I became so fed up with my heroine at one time that I really contemplated killing the hero in order to make her an old maid all the rest of her life. It has always been in my code to be kind to dumb animals and women, but my heroine was just a peroxide parody, to my mind, and, so far as I was concerned, chivalry ceased to exist. The more I observed her, the less right she had to live. I don't like to speak ill of a lady, but it seemed downright unconscientious on my part to make that girl happy. She was a simpering soda-fountain siren. I knew I would sort of discount the sale of the great American novel if I didn't let her marry the hero, but the duty seemed so distasteful to me that I left it until the last page and then made my wife write up the wedding.

My hero was a fatuous young fool, in my opinion, after I had remained with him through three chapters. He was the sort of person I never could stand in real life. I had to feed him language that I couldn't use myself and retain a shred of self-respect.

"What are you going to do with this charming pair of young daffodils?" asked my father as he finished the third chapter.

"Oh, I suppose they will have to be married," I replied.

"Certainly," said my wife.

"It will serve them both right," said my father. "But it is tough on the race to have people like that get married. I hate to think what the next generation will be."

"They are both very fine novel people," said my wife. "All story heroines and heroes are just like them."

"No wonder novel characters are getting worse all the time," said my father. "Their race is on the toboggan. Every generation gets a little weaker. The novel people are positively decadent when compared to those we read about fifty years ago. Where are the *Monte Cristos* and the *Charles O'Malleys?*"

"This is a modern novel," said my wife. "This couple simply *must* be married."

"All right," agreed my father. "I couldn't wish either one of them worse luck than that."

My villain, the fellow with the mortgage on the old farm, became positively insipid to me after I lived with him, night and day, for a few weeks. The more sinister I tried to draw him the milder he became. I would not have been surprised to have seen him jump out of my manuscript and run down to the corner drug-store after a nut sundae. My wife, who followed my manuscript page by page as it came dripping from my hectic brain, thought my villain was a regular man-eating shark.

"Your *Montmorency De Vere* is a blood-thirsty barbarian," said she. "He is a beast."

But *Montmorency* didn't strike me that way. To me he was a white-livered slacker. When I made him say to the heroine: "Now I have you in me power-r-r," it gave me the only good laugh I had in three months. With any other kind of a heroine he couldn't have gotten away with it; but, as I have said before, my heroine had no spirit. She was the weakest member of the

well-known and justly famous "weaker sex."

In my opinion a sincere slap on the wrist would have sent *Montmorency* to the garage for repairs. I didn't dare let him take a drink of malted milk chocolate for fear he would become intoxicated and spoil the story right at the critical moment.

My villain was to me a spineless cactus in the desert of romance. I worked over him faithfully, but I never got him to the point where he aroused my respect. I could have walked right up and cuffed him on the ear any time without the slightest trepidation, and I am not what you would call a daredevil in real life, either.

Montmorency appeared in the fourth chapter. My father read the fourth chapter and snorted audibly.

"There is about as much harm in that guy as there is in a thimbleful of church-social punch," said my father. "He hasn't got enough spunk to steal a door-mat off the front porch of an old-ladies' home."

But my father did not entirely lose his self-possession until he began chapter five, which introduced *Gordon Brent*, my shrewd business man, who was in love with a penniless orphan and wanted to marry her. She wouldn't marry him because the villain, *Montmorency De Vere*, was her uncle, and she was ashamed. But *Gordon Brent* persisted in his efforts to win her.

"He's a heck of a shrewd business man," roared my father, "wanting to marry a penniless orphan! And she is a nut for not grabbing him."

"There's no romance in your soul," said my wife. "You have no imagination."

"No imagination?" snorted my father. "Where do you get that stuff? My glue advertisements are the best you can find in any of the magazines."

Things kept going from bad to worse. By the time I had reached chapter twenty-three the people in our family were not speaking to one another with any degree of cordiality.

It came time to kill the villain, and I had to call a family conference.

"I have got to kill *Montmorency*," I said. "The question with me is how best to do it?"

"Make him wear a lavender tie with his green socks, or drop a pinch of real tobacco into one of his cigarettes," said my father. "There are several ways."

"Have him killed in an automobile accident," said my wife with a sudden inspiration. "That's the way they always do it in novels."

"Have him choke to death on a bonbon," suggested my father.

"There is one more thing that we may as well settle now," said I. "That is the name for the novel. I am drawing near the close of the story, and I believe it is customary for novels to have titles. They print it on top of every page in the book so one won't forget what it is all about."

"The name will be 'He Loves Her; He Loves Her Not,'" said my wife, with an inspiration.

Father began turning purple in the back of the neck.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "You will call it no such thing. The title will be 'The Great American Novel.' That's what the thing is, isn't it?"

"Wouldn't that title be slightly ambitious?" asked my wife.

"Not if you expect anybody to buy it," said my father. "The first rule of business success is to advertise a thing under its true character. I advertise my glue as 'America's Greatest Glue—It Sticks.' You can't afford to leave anything to the imagination of the public. If I advertised my glue by inference or innuendo, and called it something beside glue, I wouldn't sell enough in a year to stick a revenue stamp onto a quart of gin. The public has no imagination when it is buying an article. It has imagination only when it has something to sell."

We decided upon a compromise. The title was to read like this:

HE LOVES HER, HE LOVES HER NOT.

The Great American Novel.

BY PHILO T. PROUDFOOT, JR.

The critical time came with the last chapter. I had killed the villain. I hadn't dared offend either my father or my wife, so I hadn't adopted any suggestion made

at the conference. I had made the killing of the villain a mystery. He had simply disappeared. I had allowed it to be inferred, however, that he had committed suicide by wearing evening clothes to an afternoon lawn-party.

"How will I wind this thing up?" I asked the folks one evening.

"Wind it up," said my father, "with the battle hymn of the republic — Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March.'"

It was a good idea, at that, and, in my opinion, the only sane one my father had suggested.

But I had to worry through a long love-scene, and it was this love scene which proved to be the true *casus belli* in our family.

It was a struggle on my part.

I have seen men struggling to overcome the drink or the drug habit, but no one of them ever suffered the mental anguish which came to me when I had to pen that love scene. I wrote it along conventional lines, in the true novel style; but it was an effort, believe me. I pulled down all the curtains so nobody could see me, and I removed a large cheval glass from the room so that I could not see myself. I ordered my wife out of the room, put on a gas-mask and went to it.

The following is a rough sketch of this thrilling scene. It seemed like old stuff to me, for I had read it in at least fifty novels:

Jim, his well-knit frame casting a long shadow upon the shimmering and restless waters of the bay, leaned against the deck-house of the great, white yacht and sighed. His wrist-watch told him that the moments were flying. His wrist-watch, faithful to the last.

"Fudge!" he exclaimed in an undertone, "she ain't came yet. Can it be I am still unforgiven?"

At that very moment a soft, willowy, spongy arm stole out of the darkness of the night, and silently crept about Jim's alabaster neck—and he know it was her (or she) come back.

He held her off at arms' length and read a great truth within her soft eyes.

"And so, it is you at last," he murmured.

"Yes, Jim," she replied, melting into his rugged arms. "It is I. I can prove it."

"Ah," said he.

"Ah," she replied.

"Ah-ah," he said.

"Ho-hum," she replied.

"Darling!" He whispered the sacred word, and slowly her glorious eyes filled with tears.

"Dearest," she sobbed.

"At last!" he said, with an emotion that shook his great frame.

"Uh-huh!" she slithered.

Closer she came to him, and, as his breath came in quick, short pants, he clasped her to him and whispered a question: "Gwen, will you be mine?"

She sobbed her answer. It was in the affirmative.

Jim carried her tenderly to the dory, and rowed to the faint light on the shore which marked the curate's residence near the old church, and—

At this point I lost my mind entirely and ran shrieking to the living-room of our home where my father and my wife were awaiting the verdict.

"It has got me!" I screamed. "I can go no further. I am going to murder both of them if I have to go on for another page."

My father took the manuscript from my shaking hand and scanned it through.

"What's the gal weeping about?" he demanded. "In real life she would be tickled foolish to get him. Why must she soak all his laundry by raining on him? Leave this love scene to me. I'll dictate it to my stenographer. Luella can write the wedding scene, and Philo, you'd better go fishing."

The next night my father read the love scene to us. It ran as follows:

"Jim was peeved as he waited on the deck of the yacht. The woman was late. His watch told him so repeatedly.

"Finally she came. Jim turned upon her angrily.

"'Where the —— have you been?' he demanded.

"'I have been having a fitting,' she replied.

"'This is a fine night for a murder!' he growled.

"'It is a finer night for a wedding,' she laughed joyously, and, throwing her arms about his neck, she dragged him to the dory, and tying him firmly with a heavy rope, she rowed him over to the mainland. She had telephoned the curate and procured the license in the afternoon.

"And they lived scrappily ever after."

I let father's love scene go through. I didn't have the heart to delete it. I was so weary of the great American novel that I didn't care what happened to it. When we sent it to the publisher I even begrudged the forty cents postage.

Just before it left my father rewrote the title and made it read:

HE LOVES HER, HE LOVES HER NOT.

The Great American Novel.

BY PHILO T. PROUDFOOT, JR.,

Son of

PHILO T. PROUDFOOT, SR.,

Manufacturer of the Celebrated

PROUDFOOT'S GLUE

America's Best Glue—It Sticks.

So Will This Novel.

I thought so little of the novel that I wouldn't even enclose return postage, and, when the letter came from the publisher, it vindicated my opinion.

He went into a detailed criticism, and his ideas of the novel tallied with mine exactly. We agreed even to the last hair in the heroine's eyebrow. He suggested that it would have been a good idea if I had blotted out my hero and heroine and villain in a railroad wreck in the first chapter.

"It's no use," I said as I handed the letter to my father. "It isn't the great American novel."

"It *isn't?*" roared my father. "Who says it isn't?"

"The publisher," I replied.

"What does *he* know about it?" demanded father.

"It won't be published," I said.

"It certainly will be published," he yelled. "It's *the* great American novel. It *must* be published. What good is it if it isn't published? There are a hundred million people in this country. We can't hand the manuscript around to all of them."

So, after knocking every line of my novel during a period of three months, my father suddenly developed into its champion.

"It is not only the great American novel," he said, "but it has got the best love scene in it that ever was written. The only true love scene in the history of twentieth-century literature."

That love scene was father's *chef d'œuvre*. He would have fought, bled, and died to have it published.

"The idea of turning down a novel with a love scene in it like that one," he stormed. "It's scandalous."

My father took the train that night. He was going to the distant city to call on the publisher. He was going to have the great American novel published if he had to buy the publishing business.

I don't know what my father did to the publisher, but he returned home three days later flushed with success.

"The first hundred thousand will be off the press in two months," he said. "I put a good ad for the glue on the cover. It will read: 'This great American novel is bound with Proudfoot's Great American Glue—It Sticks.'"

The cost of the first hundred thousand copies was guaranteed by Proudfoot's Glue, Limited.

Finally the great American novel arrived. It arrived in dray loads. That was the day I went up into the mountains fishing. My wife is a brave woman. She stayed at home and saw it through.

My father sent out five thousand copies of the great American novel to the glue trade, and it was said to be the best advertising in the history of the business. The book was so funny that it didn't leave a gloomy spot in the trade anywhere.

The remaining ninety-five thousand copies were given away indiscriminately. Every resident of our town was remembered, and no home is complete without eight or ten of the great American novels.

Every time I hear a cat squeal and scurry away in the darkness of the night I know that the great American novel is performing the mission for which it is best fitted.

About a year after it was published I mustered up the courage to ask my father about his trip to the publishers.

"It was a pretty expensive deal for you, wasn't it, dad?" I asked.

"Not on your life," he replied. "I signed that publishing firm up to a contract which provides that I shall furnish all the glue for their fifty binderies for a term of ten years. They are keeping our factory working extra hours now. It takes a business man to make money in literature."

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

IT was more than three centuries ago that the Bard of Avon wrote:

> And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
> Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
> Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

Yet it often takes geniuses to find the innate good—or charm, or poetry, call it what you will—in some things. Clive and his men saw nothing of good or beauty in the "heathenish" peoples of India; and it wasn't until Kipling opened the eyes of the world that it began to understand. We were accustomed to laugh at the quaint modes of thought and frail daintiness of things Japanese until Lafcadio Hearn unlocked the marvelous storehouses of their legends and customs. And to the early plainsmen the only good Injun was a dead Injun—until James Fenimore Cooper showed their inherent nobility and the real romance of their lives.

And just what Kipling has done for India, Hearn for Japan, and Cooper for the Crees and Sacs and Foxes of the plains, Herman Howard Matteson is doing for the immensely picturesque and in many ways deeply mysterious Siwashes of the Pacific coast.

Therefore it is with great pleasure that we will present for your approval next week Mr. Matteson's first novel—and what's more, we shall present it complete in one number. A full book-length novel that you'd have to pay at least $1.35 for on the news-stands—*and then vow it to be worth every cent*—as only one feature of next week's ten-cent ALL-STORY WEEKLY!

DAUGHTERS OF THE SEA

BY HERMAN HOWARD MATTESON

is crammed full of action and jam-full of life and color and romance and surprises for every page of its fifty thousand words. As any one of his own delightful characters would say (and as a potential one of them *has* said), it is, like all the rest of his stories, a "*Hyas skookum ekhanem—hyu pukpuk, hyu mesatche man, pe mox delate klosh klootchman.*" In other words: "Heap bully tale—plenty fight, plenty wicked men, and two mighty fine women."

It's all of that and more, and it will introduce you to some of the finest primitive savages to be found in America, the Haida Indians. Also you'll learn—

Did you ever hear of the Aleut crown? Pray Heaven you never meet it in real life!

FRANCE! There is something in the very name that charms—and *thrills*—the heart; uplifts the soul; intrigues the imagination. It is, *par excellence,* the land of romance. From Clovis to Foch its annals record the names of an unbroken succession of heroes and heroines of undying fame. The pages of its literature are crowded with immortals. Not a square foot of its fair land but can boast of being

the scene of some mighty deed or high adventure of its great ones. It is for this reason, perhaps, that so many novels with a French setting fall almost unintentionally under the designation "historical." The author's painfully conceived brain-children are dwarfed and relegated to the background by giant characters that lived, and still live, and will not be denied.

It is a story of that sort that we are giving you next week. A serial in four parts entitled

GATE OF ST. ANTHONY

BY MARY IMLAY TAYLOR

Author of "A Candle in the Wind," "Children of Passion," etc.

and it deals with one of the most romantic, vital, and dramatic periods in French history. With King John a prisoner in the hands of the English, the dauphin, scarce more than a boy, and wholly under the influence of the idle and corrupt nobility, who are plundering the peasants and Parisians without mercy, a strong man is needed if France is to be saved. And a strong man rises—Etienne Marcel, *le Prévôt des Marchands*, and soon practical dictator of Paris. Etienne Marcel, the king-maker; the Warwick of France—almost. You will like this story of the fourteenth century, not only because it is laid in one of the most dramatic and interesting periods of French history, but also because of the charming romance—two romances in fact—that runs through it. The first of the four instalments next week.

ONE of the great questions that brings forth every variety and shade of opinion is the exact status of *circumstances* in human existence. To just what extent is a man justified in being guided by circumstances? Or isn't he justified at all? Should he, in fact, do the guiding himself, and mold and turn circumstances to meet his own ends? We think it is safe to say that a pretty large majority believe that the answer to this question is a fairly conclusive test of character. In other words, the stronger the man, the more he is master of circumstances.

But how about it when two or more strong men set out to bend the same group of circumstances into quite different forms? Well—something quite exciting is apt to happen right then and there, it seems to us. At least when something of that sort develops in the new three-part serial beginning next week—

THE EMPEROR'S PLAQUES

BY W. E. SCHUTT

Author of "Stone of Madness," etc.

the excitement begins without an instant's delay.

Joe Eaton, football star and law student, is working his way through college as secretary to the venerable and wealthy Professor Daunt, a savant of international repute and an authority on Japanese letters. To visit them, ostensibly to give an opinion upon a book upon which the professor is engaged, comes Dr. Hendrik Vanzan, supposedly a Dutch savant of great learning and also an authority on things Japanese. But Joe does not like the man in spite of his fame—perhaps at first because Ethel Harrington, daughter of his patron's distant relative and housekeeper, seems to like him too much; and when the doctor offers him ten thousand dollars to let him have just a five-minute glance at the famous Idzura Plaques, gifts from the Mikado to Professor Daunt, Joe's suspicions of the man crystallize.

But the doctor is not a man to be easily foiled; he is a strong man, ruthless, a guider of circumstances to meet his own ends, and Joe— Well, what happens is the story.

"AFTER a long life of close observation," remarks Shorty Kilgour, "I contend that there *is* such a thing as fate, because if there wasn't how would you explain about this Bonaventure P. Maloney?" And after reading "HATS AND HARDWARE," by Frank Condon, it would certainly appear that Shorty is right. Nothing on earth *but* fate could account for what happened to the said Bonaventure P. Maloney, and if this evidence isn't enough, we have the added testimony of Rover the Nut, which proves his case beyond a shadow of doubt. Even if you are not interested in the academic question itself, you will be in the story it is the basis of, for Shorty tells it himself in his own inimitable way, which includes a laugh or three on every page.

ARE you a girl, and fat? Then do you know anybody that's a girl and fat? Because if so, you or she must be sure to read "PEACH BLOSSOM AND THE PERFECT FORTY-TWO," by Octavus Roy Cohen, next week. It is a

charming little story that goes to prove that a mere overplus of avoirdupois isn't always the whole cheese. Nor, on the other hand, that a pretty face and a swell figure—

But wait. On the face of it, Sally Cavener hadn't a chance in the world, even if she did hold all the cards to start with, because where she looked like a bag of potatoes, the other girl was, as she admitted herself, exceedingly restful to the eyes. So how *could* Billy Fogarty escape?

ROBERT BROWNING, who sometimes varied his Chinese puzzles in verse by writing something we can all understand, somewhere says something about "a man's reach must exceed his grasp, else what's heaven for?" Just so all the real values of life lie below the surface, and only those who look beneath ever find them. If you were to trust your eyes alone, you would pardonably infer we were conducting life on an entirely *quid pro quo* basis. True, we Americans, no better and no worse than the rest of the world, are equally intent on the pursuit of "the long green," but there are certain things we value above the price of all money. "BILL," by Thane Miller Jones, is one of these big chaps who prove the fundamental goodness of life's guiding stars. How big Bill was, and what particular star held his hitching strap, you can discover in next week's issue.

YOU have all heard the frequently alleged reason for the superiority of the old actor over the present-day star—the long and varied training of a stock company. Valentine West, as you are aware, is not directly implicated in the theater, but one reason I think why West's career is so efficiently superior to the ordinary detective's work is that West has been trained in a sort of State Secret Stock Company. In any event, you will find it vastly entertaining and most diverting to stumble upon our friend in his capacity as the Man from Naples. Until you come to the end of "THE ROPE LADDER" you may not recognize him, but when you do— But we will let you speak your own appreciation. Valentine appears again on the boards on August 17 with "THE ROPE LADDER," the next story in the series of "VALENTINE WEST, SECRET AGENT," by Percy James Brebner.

A READER FROM THE BEGINNING

TO THE EDITOR:

Having read the *All Story* almost continuously since Vol. I, No. 1 of the *All Story* magazine, I think it is time that I write you and give the praise that is due this splendid publication. Have read most of the works of the great masters—Dickens, Hugo, Dumas, Cooper, Balzac, Thackeray, Scott, and others—and consider myself able to judge. Will say that for an all-fiction magazine the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is second to none, no matter what the price. Other magazines howl about their two or three big serials a year, but you go along year after year and give us a big story nearly every week, by writers that are really capable.

In recent years the four stories that I considered superior were: "The Quitter," by Jacob Fisher; "Clavering, the Incredible," by Robert Simpson; "The In-Bad Man," by Lee Robinet; and "The Way of the Strong," by Ridgewell Cullum. Can't you get more such remarkable stories by these men?

Next best I liked the following: All the *Tarzan* stories (wonderful tales); "Opportunity"; "Captain Velvet" (Franklin's very best); "The Sin That Was His" (a beautiful story); "The Beloved Traitor" (lovable characters); the *Crewe* stories (good punch in these); *Semi-Dual* stories (extremely clever); "The Lone Star Ranger" (thrilling, gripping); "Between Heaven and Earth" (a perfect detective story); "Darkness and Dawn" (great imagination); "The Alibi" (intensely interesting); "The Shyster-at-Law" (good all through); "The Sealed Valley" (beautifully written); "The Fugitive Sleuth" (*Wonderful Archie* was delightful); "Curious Quest of Ernest Bliss" (how about more *Oppenheim?*); "Alias the Night Wind" (great stuff); Means's negro stories (the work of a genius); "Those Who Walk in Darkness" (certainly different); "Voyage of the Nantook" (one of the best adventure stories of them all); "Three in a Thousand" (clever again); "One Glass of Wine" (charming); "The Argus Pheasant" (another wonderful novel).

The above are just a few of the best that come to mind now. There are hundreds of others. Must certainly congratulate you on those two clever new writers—Ben Ames Williams and Max Brand. Their stuff is all good. Taking it all in all, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY surely gives more big stories by first-class writers in a year than ten other publications together. Have read only one really "rotten" story, and that was "The Cosmic Courtship"; that was punk, fierce, abominable. I am very much afraid that you have lost Edgar Rice Burroughs. You haven't had a Burroughs story for over a year. How about it, Mr. Editor? Let twenty others go, but not Burroughs. Every week I expect a Burroughs announcement in the "Talks," and I'm getting scared.

Would like sequels to the following: "Mr. Shen of Shensi," "Tarzan," "The Argus Pheasant," and, of course, more *Semi-Dual* and *Crewe* stories. Well, Mr. Editor, keep up the good work, and I'm your life-long friend.

Yours truly,

640 Fortieth Street, G. H. BELL.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

NOTE: Mr. Burroughs is still on the job, and another story from his pen, and in his best vein, will be announced in the near future.

ANOTHER BURROUGHS FAN

To the Editor:

My favorite authors are Burroughs, Sheehan, Clauson, Chalmers, Stout, and W. P. White; in fact, I like nearly all of them. "Draft of Eternity," "The Lad and the Lion," "Black Crosses," "The Whispering Chorus," "Black Wolf of Picardy," and "The Bronze Helmet" are some of my favorites of the latest stories. Has Burroughs stopped writing for the All-Story Weekly? We see very little of his stories any more. As he seems to be your finest and most popular writer, I don't understand this lack of his stories. I would like to see more of his Martian story romances as well as other interplanetary stories.

O. A. Gonzalez.

Pensacola, Florida.

A BRAVE LITTLE "SHUT-IN"

To the Editor:

Just a few lines to tell you that Mr. Albert V. Guthucerez voiced my exact sentiments concerning the All-Story Weekly. I could write a lot of nice things, but every All-Story Weekly reader already knows them without my saying a word. I am confined absolutely to my bed; have been for over one year, and I surely appreciate the All-Story Weekly and *The Argosy*. They help me wonderfully to spend the weary, long hours. I am unable to see any persons excepting my M. D.'s and my parents. I can read, write letters, and *think*—that is all; so if any of the All-Story Weekly readers care to drop me a few lines, I will be more than pleased. I am nearly twenty years old, and it surely is hard to be "tied to my bed" for so long. Excuse pencil, please; am unable to use ink here in bed. With heaps of good wishes to my beloved All-Story Weekly (never change it to a monthly magazine), I am, always,

An All-Story Weekly booster,
(Miss) Louise M. Harrington.

134 High Street,
South Portland, Maine.

"ONE GREAT MAGAZINE"

To the Editor:

This appears to be my initial bow in your department, so I guess it's necessary to "come across" with the usual flattery; but you have one great magazine, and such flattery as a reader can give only says about one-third for its actual worth. While in the army in two enlistments I enjoyed many pleasant hours reading your collection of world adventure. Life ordinarily is a commonplace affair, yet once "buried in" a good tale that has some unusual interest or logical doings in the world of real adventure, we should at least remember the man who writes it and, more so, give a kind word to the editor man. Being what you might call a theatrical man, I naturally enjoy stage or "movie" stuff. Incidentally, in my eleven years around the theatrical profession I did things, saw things, that some writers truthfully recall; and, having acted, these moving-picture tales add a fresh touch to what reminiscences I had of present-day stars during show days agone.

The few errors that sneak in occasionally are not detrimental to the value of the stories; we are not perfect, so why expect the other chap to be in describing out-of-ordinary existence. To your readers I can say no magazine is so perfect that errors are beyond discovery, especially in technique concerning unusual settings or science. I have found technical errors in several theatrical stories; if I brooded over them and roast the writer, I would spoil the good features of his work, so I just "pass 'em up" as being ordinary mistakes made by ordinary people. In conclusion permit me to thank you for all the happy moments I spent reading your cleverly edited magazine. Success to you.

Sincerely,
John Edward Barnett.

"Machine Gun Barney,"
Cumberland, Maryland.
In U. S. N.

"MIMI"

To the Editor:

It is a great pleasure to learn from your announcement that "Mimi," by Mr. J. U. Giesy, is to be published in book form. (Harper Brothers, New York; seventy-five cents net.) I shall avail myself of the opportunity to possess this most exquisite and charming story in enduring form. I have refrained from writing you to felicitate you upon securing such an unusual literary gem for your magazine, not from reluctance to thank you, but from a sense of timidity, as it were; but at last I have summoned sufficient courage to assure you of my appreciation, not only of "Mimi," which I liked so much and thought so beautiful, but for many other most charming and entertaining stories. Please extend to Mr. Giesy my sincere wishes for his continued success and thanks for the lovely story. Please accept my best wishes for the future success of your most interesting magazine. Believe me,

Very truly yours,
Caro Alice Knapp.

4652 Woodlawn Avenue,
Chicago, Illinois.

THE FACE ON THE COVER

To the Editor:

This is the first time I have written to you, and I would not be writing now for any other reason than to tell you that the face on the cover of the April 27 All-Story Weekly is, in my opinion at least, the most beautiful I have ever