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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

The Yellow Lord

by Will Levington Comfort

Adventure, Mystery and Romance in the Celestial Empire

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME XCIV — NUMBER 4

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY
VOL. XCIV NUMBER 4
SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 1919

The Yellow Lord

by Will Levington Comfort

CHAPTER I.

FROM SHANGHAI TO PANDIÑAO.

WITHOUT stopping to turn back or tell why, I arise to state that I was broke in Shanghai. It was raining and there had been a thin fall of snow in the night, the last of which was running in the gutters now. In upper Soochow Road, I passed the door of a Portuguese tobacconist's where formerly I had found an admirable blend of cigarette tobacco, and in whose wicker chairs I had passed an hour or two from time to time.

Now I entered apparently with no other thought than to get in out of the rain.

As a matter of fact it was a turning, as abrupt as my turn from the street to this door, into a new roadway of life.

The tobacconist came forward, nodded to me and returned—his single entrance in this narrative. Over in the shadows by the big wicker chairs, was a small low table with a carved teakwood top, and upon this table was yesterday's issue of the *North China News*.

I opened its vast pages, close print, no inky flares anywhere, to the section in which yellow, black, and white men modestly expressed their desires, their finds and losses, inclinations to work and offers of reward. In the midst of these I came upon the following paragraph, modest as any:

> WANTED—A number of uncncumbered white young gentlemen desirous of dignity and good pay for management of island estates, tea plantations. Official military war knowledge necessary for qualification. Do not appy unless cultured to house and gallant of service is contained. No marriage or ancestral dependencies preferred. Apply leisurely, Tsui Tsing Trading Company in Longmead Street, Singapore.

It was a queer moment. I sort of went "out" as they say, over that advertisement—a peculiar abstraction in which the personality was lost. In that flash it seemed I saw a narrow Chinese face—very wise, sinister possibly, unreckonable as to years, a deep shine on the chin from some old wound, but distressingly suggestive of the need of a napkin—just a vagary.

After that I almost committed to memory the queer collection of expressions in the ad. I could see the blend of the trade mind and the *literati* mind of China—a blend

also of the dignity of the east and the west. That was the quality of it. Nothing absolutely of itself—a piecing, a patch-work. "Desirous of dignity and good pay" bored in upon the academic English like the screech of a street coolie in the midst of a courtly function. An hour I sat there. Two or three customers came in and went out. Presently I discovered that the rain had ceased.

I pinched the corner of the paper, near the advertisement, and tore out a wafer containing it. At the edge of Terrace Drive I picked up a Chinese second-hand dealer who accompanied me to my quarters and presently took away the larger part of my personal possessions, for which I obtained an amount that would enable me to live graciously for a few weeks longer, including a passage to Sinapore.

At Rider's, I found that the Shoreham was lying down the river off Woosung; that she would sail for Southern ports at six. The old coaster pulled her hooks up out of the yellow water almost exactly on schedule, and turned her nose for Hong-Kong that evening, and I, Jack Bowditch, was aboard—"unencumbered white young gentleman, no marriage or ancestral dependencies preferred."

For ten days at Singapore, at eleven in the forenoon, I called at the office of the Tsui Tsing Company in Longmead Street and lingered an hour, sometimes lunching with certain Chinese or English officials, equally hard for me to get accustomed to.

I was encouraged to believe from day to day that I should be given a post presently, and yet I had received nothing so far but courtesy and postponement of various kinds.

I was challenged by the mystery of the whole affair.

During the ten days I heard of no one else seeking to be allowed to manage island estates. The conviction grew that the advertisement had not been placed in Singapore; in fact, that it had been printed only in one issue of the *North China News:* that I represented the single response.

In the most courteous way I was questioned and tested, but I had not the faintest idea during those ten days of the length and depth of scrutiny and examination to which I was subjected.

Authoritatively I learned that the Tsui Tsing Trading Company was an ancient Chinese house in lease and possession of many valuable tea plantations, insular and continental, the firm now operated by European capitalists, but with restrictions of a most peculiar nature retained by descendents of the original Chinese firm-heads—the name said to be familiar for half a thousand years along the Asiatic waterfronts.

I heard in the city that the survivors of the family were brilliant members of society and the empire. I also heard the exact opposite. The whole thing was fascinating as an old ship. I hurry on, for there is much to cover and much to catch by the way.

On the tenth day, as I was leaving the office, the native office-manager begged me to remain a few minutes longer this day. At the end of a half hour a young Englishman entered. I took his cool, limp hand, and was informed of the name, Mr. Guthrie Catten.

"Thank you, Mr. Catten," I said.

He was a spectacle, confronting me in that quaint old waiting-room overlooking the yellow junk-strewn harbor—tall, narrow shoulders, soft, brown beard, and long, limp legs, tailored in pearl-gray tweeds. All in all, he was innocent enough to frighten one—that kind of smooth, unobtrusive suavity that you wouldn't be surprised to find belonging to a scion of royalty or a bank clerk about to be married.

Only the eyes were to be excepted. They were blue-gray, with a quizzical, piratical expression that comes from long dalliance under tropic skies.

I didn't like him. I recall that I was afraid of him. I recall that I was instantly aware of a brain and a kind of devil, too. I felt a personality so hard and cool on the surface at least that I was left more isolated in his presence than when alone with myself.

We sallied forth into the sunlight, pressed through the noisy mob that closed and eddied about us — go-down coolies, *boy*-children, and beggars, who plucked at our

sleeves. Catten made no explanation, but led the way to Florentine's in Marine Street, where we had tiffin. He seemed nervously curious about world affairs and things doing in England since the war began. He hadn't heard accurately about the assaults and defenses on either the eastern or western war-fronts, and yet I drew the suspicion that he wasn't showing me anything like his real intensity.

"I've been over on the island for a few weeks, Bowditch," he said. "I see a white man from time to time, but only trade minds—living Chino, thinking Chino, trading Chino. That's what white men do here. You'll do it yourself, Bowditch."

Up to this time in life I was utterly innocent of mercantile affairs; the fact is, I was disturbed a little lest my aloofness from such matters might hurt my standing with the Tsui Tsing people. I told Catten this.

"No, that won't hurt you," he said. "Old Hoy Mon wants a real soldier, a cloak, a plume, a sort of soft-handed-tornado gent."

"Who's Hoy Mon?" I asked.

"Well, Hoy Mon is Tsui Tsing's prime minister over on the island. Secretary to the Yellow Lord himself."

"The Yellow Lord?" I repeated.

"That's Tsui Tsing. But tell me, what are the boys doing in the air?"

Thus Catten would launch back to the world war, as I was endeavoring to get light on my advertising quest. As near as I can remember, Catten's interest in my own personality was chiefly what I liked to eat and drink. He had a little saying that he worked in at absurd intervals, to the effect that he hated to drink alone. He appeared to enjoy my culture, as he expressed it, talking of tea, of brews, distillations, and evaporations.

Later he asked a particular or two on how I happened to qualify in a military way. The fact is, I had been to school on the Hudson. A military career was cut off in my case at the end of three years by the call of foreign climes and a marvelously attractive young person who would not remain near the Academy. My disgrace at West Point was not serious enough to prevent me from joining the American service, but this was early in the second year of the war, and there was no serious thought as yet of America taking on. Tsui Tsing's service looked as attractive to me in those early days of the war as a return to Europe.

Catten left abruptly, saying he would like to see me in Longmead Street at four and possibly for dinner in the evening. Promptly at four I was on hand in the trading-office, but was informed that Mr. Catten couldn't be present as he had planned. The next moment I was formally accepted for service in Pandiñao and informed that the steamship Virgin, which had just come in from the islands this morning, would leave to-morrow night for Pandiñao, and that Mr. Catten would be aboard at seven to join me at dinner.

The following evening saw all dunnage aboard the Virgin. I strolled forth from the stateroom at dinner time to look for Mr. Catten on deck. I had a suspicion that it was his coming yesterday that decided the Singapore office to take me on. A Chinese touched my arm and asked me to the captain's quarters. Here I was introduced to the skipper himself, one Abner Hemiter of "Paumanok, Maine, sir." I remember that his port of hail and the "sir" were twice repeated with an air of defiance against all powers of earth or below.

Captain Hemiter was alone. He sat in his chart-room, facing the door as I entered, a gaunt, raw-boned frame of a man—a bearded, frosted face. There was something of actual terror, too, in the stark absence of humor, in the blunt, terrible hands, the very manner in which the ancient blue cap of office was clamped upon his head like a cylinder-drum. Evidently Hemiter had a fixed set of emotions and a groove in his countenance for each.

Speaking in an awesome rumble, he commanded me to sit. I did so. There was a long silence in which I underwent a most damning scrutiny from a pair of eyes that were the color of the sea under an east wind. Then he informed me that Mr. Catten had his "yellow bilin'" aboard, but that we would not sail for three or four hours yet, also that Mr. Catten had left word for us—for Hemiter and me—to join him at Florentine's for dinner. The un-

utterable scorn with which he spoke Catten's name is wholly indescribable.

In the next five minutes, drink, drug, the godlessness of island women, and Catten's utter depravity were discussed.

Captain Hemiter explained that he was called to say all this as a warning to me, adding that it was no less than his dead wife would have done, and that she it was who had given him the word of salvation twenty years ago.

"Them's her lineaments there on the wall," said he, pointing to a dark-framed picture. I've nothing to say against Mrs. Hemiter. By that likeness I felt she had suffered enough.

We were pulled ashore and found Catten at Florentine's. For two hours I was present while the old skipper was mauled and baited, twisted and guyed by Catten's swift and sharp-fanged faculties. It was brilliant—Hemiter quite innocent that he was being played with—but I had wearied of the man-handling long before dinner was over.

Sixty hours later we had passed the Meelcahan Keys, and the Virgin crawled into the little harbor of Pandiñao, making a queer and tricky entrance that I watched more closely once afterward, and tying safe at last to her wooden drum-buoy some distance from a beautiful auxiliary yacht of six hundred tons, called the Jezebel.

"That's Tsui Tsing's private conveyance," Catten remarked.

"He is here in Pandiñao then?" I said.

"Oh, yes, this is headquarters. The Yellow Lord has built his castle here."

The shore of the little harbor was narrow, the cliffs surrounding very high, especially to the north where I saw a wall jutting down to the edge at two points. Catten saw what I was looking at.

"The old master built his castle in a walled garden," he explained.

CHAPTER II.

THE COMING OF THE STORM.

QUEERLY enough it was four months afterward that my life really began in Pandiñao.

Meanwhile, I rode the plantations and did some clerical work which might better have been done by Chinese, played some draw-poker with Catten and the two other white men, Major Carrington and Jerry Comitu, a pair of soldiers of fortune long used to Asia and the South Seas. I like them both distantly, and was amused to find that they hated each other and were opposed on every point. Each had an interesting daughter, and Comitu's wife was with him. There was never a word from any of these white men as to their coming into the Yellow Lord's service.

In the main, life was a sort of polished idleness for me. I had not seen the Yellow Lord, though he was said to be present. I had many times met Hoy Mon and felt a queer haunt from his face with its shiny scar on the chin; a thousand interesting suppositions had come to mind about him, but really I knew nothing at all.

I had dined with the Carringtons, even with the Comitus, and affiliated almost steadily with Catten, even to the point, as I fancied, of angering Jerry Comitu, who had been Catten's crony before my coming.

However, in the ten hours following the opening of hostilities by the island Malays against the Yellow Lord's Chinese, I seemed to learn more about all these people and affairs than in the hundred and twenty days previous.

Of course I had tried to learn why an "unencumbered white gentleman" was worth good pay and unquestionable dignity in Pandiñao, but I hadn't found out anything that satisfied me. Catten was always cryptic unless in a hurry. His explanation was that the Yellow Lord was seeking quietly to interest some English capital (the holders liable to appear on any arrival of the Virgin), and that Tsui Tsing fancied he could add tone to his establishment by the presence of a few Europeans or Americans to handle the Chinese.

This failed somehow to satisfy me. Catten suggested it with bland sarcasm. I found that he had been in the Yellow Lord's service for two years, and that he had been to Singapore only once, before his recent trip, timed by my arrival there.

No two ways, it was a ruinous life for all of us, so far as character went.

I would find myself "listening" suddenly to talk at table, hearing it with a stranger's ears, and then would realize the big emptiness of men who talk much, say little, and do nothing.

Another thing that troubled me was that our Chinese were a hopeless lot from opium. This drug habit seemed actually to be encouraged among the Yellow Lord's field workers.

Catten never expressed surprise. He had a tantalizing way of showing just enough quality to keep a comrade from being bored, occasionally springing an unexpected flash of speed or humor or courage, but never giving much of himself.

There were said to be five or six hundred male natives on the island—a mixture of Malay and Singhalese, but we whites of the Yellow Lord's establishment were completely folded in by the Chinese, two hundred in all, including the field hands, and no women folk. There were at least three master-*chefs* in the castle *menage*. Things were done with game and fish designed to make a man forget that life is a vain and passing show.

Catten and I lived in small separate bungalows, close together and across the compound from Tsui Tsing's low cement castle, somewhat back from the southern cliffs. Altogether too well, we had lived for two lonely and restless young male persons, on this isolated but sumptuous island of Pandiñao, as perfect an Eden as any island anywhere, with an abundance of natural facilities, fish, fruits, nuts, and game.

"But why did he want a white man of military training?" I asked.

"It's his little vanity," Catten answered. "The old master thinks a man can't be a gentleman who hasn't had a touch of the clinking-spur stuff."

The Yellow Lord was said to love himself—to love the feel of himself, as Catten once said, in comment on the unctuous way Tsui Tsing rubbed his hands together and stroked his cheek and chin. It was even hinted that he kept himself in a kind of health with masseurs and bath arrangements, at the same time smoking and drinking and feeding out of all proportion for three ordinary men.

I was told he was past middle age. Catten allowed me to retain the suspicion that the thing Tsui Tsing liked best about his Pandiñao plantation was the fact that he had white gentry working for him.

"It's his little vanity," Catten had often repeated.

There were his special agents, Shen Yan and Tin Mong, often back and forth to the mainland, who had inherited more tea-knowledge than I could ever hope to accumulate, who had the whole Asiatic banking systems at their finger-ends, and surely could cope with my highest hours in general culture and urbanity, yet Catten and I, mere ornaments, were higher on the pay-roll. The latter was strangely tormented, actually hating himself as much as he could hate anything, for not taking a hand in some wing of British service, yet there was a secret something that kept him from leaving Pandiñao—as perfect a hiding-place as a man could find, a most admirable island from every point of view for a young man to forget a big mistake.

Catten and I, each in his separate bungalow, were lying up for siesta as usual on this particular afternoon, when we heard the firing outside the wall. It was shortly after midday. I moved sedately to my front door and found that Catten had come to his. I smiled, partly because he looked so utterly sleepy and bored, and partly because I remembered what he had said to me, not over an hour previous:

"I tell you, Bowditch—I tell you, we're a lot of he-honey-bees, and we're about to be exterminated. Drones always catch it sooner or later."

Catten referred to the slaughter of males which takes place once or twice a year in well-ordered hives. His idea had been that we were taking it altogether too easily in Tsui Tsing's little island tea plantations while the whole outer world was in conflagration. He had thus complained to me, in his English fashion, taking off his Rajput helmet and mopping his pale narrow brow with a silk handkerchief of canary yellow, adding that Tsui Tsing was a slave driver; that no white man but a renegade or a badly used younger son had any business to work for a Chinaman anyway, and

that we were rapidly becoming less than normal from need of a drink.

I want to place Catten before you in something the way he placed himself before me—leisurely, dryly commonplace, and with no particular friction to show his quality—and yet neither you nor I will ever get him all. We were standing at his little sideboard, for he had beckoned me to his bungalow. His servant let down the swinging *calaban* — the great blanket-covered tub in which bottles cooled amazingly without ice, evaporation from the soaked wool covering, sending cold waves to the glassware within—his servant had just let down the *calaban*, as I say, and brought forth two black bottles with their labels sliding, when the intimation actually got to me that we had an island war on at last.

Catten glanced my way quizzically, tapped the arm of his servant to make haste with the corks. Now the firing sounded a little closer and had become quite peppery. Something like relief had come to Catten's eyes. He looked strange and young and calm to me. There was a kind of rejoicing in his voice, as if suddenly to find that we still belonged to this windy old planet and could have a war of our own.

Catten's servant was admirable, too. With steady hand he poured the two tall glasses and withdrew, silently and without haste. That was a good drink, and as the Irish would say, well shared. Then we walked to the door together and looked out. One of Hoy Mon's *boys* ran across the compound that separated the castle from our bungalows, calling out that the islanders had undertaken to take over the tea plantations.

CHAPTER III.

CATTEN COMMANDS.

I NEVER forgot that last drink in the bungalow. Crossing the compound was crossing into a new era. Many things dawned on me: first of all, that Catten wasn't afraid of anything unless it was to appear afraid.

"The fact is, Bowditch," he repeated, "the natives have turned against Tsui Tsing. They want their island back."

Right now, peculiarly enough, I thought of the Virgin due in the harbor in two or three days. She only called once a fortnight, and I wondered at the islanders choosing this time for opening hostilities—almost immediate interruption to be reckoned with.

I was seeing everything differently now. Major Carrington was running toward us across the compound. He was blotchy with excitement, and pushed Catten and me apart to get by, though there was room enough for an airplane to ground. I don't remember what Carrington said exactly. He seemed to infer that we were taking it mighty easy for young men called to defend an island — that there were women folks in the house to take care of, and that Tsui Tsing's Chinese out on plantations must be called in.

Also Carrington let drop that the Malays were likely burning up our shipping and that it would be a fight for Chinos of the more distant plantations to get once more into the fold. Something like this he left with us as he ran past, most of which was perfectly evident before his appearence. I recall his heavy steps on the stones—poor Carrington who hadn't used his legs to run with for two years at least.

The castle was a broad, white, one-floored structure of many rooms, built around a brick-paved court with a pool in the center. The first face I saw under the dim arches back of the pool, was that of Laura Carrington, daughter of him who had just passed. She looked rather white in the shadow. Many times she had brought tea for me, brought little things of her own making to my bungalow, put queer little laundry-marks upon my linen, caring for my things in such ways as were possible in an establishment where there was altogether too much service—a Chinese in fact, for each boot-tree.

Laura's expression now was altogether new in that half-light of the doorway of her father's quarters—a sweetness in it that touched me deeply. That minute I realized I had never before looked right at Laura Carrington. I saw just then, in

strangest synthesis, the other side of a thousand little actions. Poor Carrington! The Yellow Lord had played havoc with his morals as he had with us all, but nothing of the island softening and taint had touched his daughter. Laura's brother, Lance, a boy of ten, with his she-hound, Shiela, stood back in the room.

Comitu now emerged from his quarters. Here was the puzzle of the whole piece—this booted and showy slave driver, a Portuguese, who sort of rode range for the Yellow Lord and bossed the different sets of field hands. One of his most frequent sayings was to the effect that Chinese coolies do their best under a white man. The sounds back in the room which Comitu had just left, were as if he had struck some one at the last moment. I confess this startled me, for the big ex-soldier had fascinated me somehow, and I always felt his brutality was chiefly harmless and external.

His daughter, Magda, ran forth now, plucking at his arm and looking up into Comitu's face—a mute appeal which neither Laura nor I understood. He jangled forth, clapping his hands on the veranda for a pony to be brought, announcing his idea to send out parties of natives already in, to cover the retreat of those in remoter fields. Comitu's wife was wailing back in the quarters. It was she, not the daughter, who had taken the blow, if there had been one.

It suddenly dawned on me that somebody must take command mighty sudden, and at this moment, Hoy Mon, secretary to the Yellow Lord, appeared in the court, the same buttery shine upon his chin and a look that drove straight through Catten's forehead.

This was rather an intense moment for me.

I had seen Hoy Mon many times since coming to the island, but not until this moment did I relate the face to my queer vision in the tobacco shop back at Shanghai—the face that seemed to look forth for a second from that memorable advertisement.

I stood back and watched the quiet passage between Catten and Hoy Mon. My friend approached the Chinese with hand lifted deprecatingly as if to say: "You don't mean it," and yet, at the same time, accepting a proffered plan. Hoy Mon disappeared and Catten turned to me. The fact is he had just now been given command of the defense of the island.

"Take a dozen or so Chinese already in, Bowditch," he said quietly, "and hurry down to the Jezebel. I'll reenforce you as the tea-pickers come in. We've got to hold that ledge trail open. Watch for fires in the tea go-downs, and remember the Jezebel and the small boats must be saved as long as there is a straight spine left among us."

He hadn't informed me of his command—left me to grasp the fact, adding thoughtfully:

"I'm taking a few natives out behind Comitu. He may have some trouble in bringing in the field hands. We must all be walled up tight to-night. Keep a spare eye on the front gate of the wall. I won't be far from the rear gate."

We stood apart on the big low veranda for an instant, a laugh in my throat, a queer laugh back of Catten's eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

A YELLOW SOLDIER.

THIS affair appears complicated at first from a writing standpoint; it needs so many words. I have put down a set of desultory sketches so far, rather than a straight picture, with the idea to furnish points of inception for action and character to be lined in later.

Pandiñao, the incomparable, as said, was inhabited by Malays, but ruled by the Yellow Lord and his Chinese. You will know what kind of climate and what kind of soil it was, when I tell you that the quality of tea grown on Pandiñao brought the highest prices in the world and went to all the kings from Moscow to Khyber Pass, either way.

Peking sent an agent to Pandiñao three times a year to bid for portions of the Yellow Lord's crop. Tsui Tsing was said to know as much about tea as any man alive.

Recall that there were five or six hundred island Malays within two days' tramp,

and two hundred Chinese under the Yellow Lord within ten miles. We were altogether cut off from the world right now, until the next call of the Virgin, unless Tsui Tsing chose to sneak off from the island in his little craft Jezebel. That would mean leaving the main part of his Chinese for leisure massacre, not to mention a crop of choicest tea unshipped and many cargoes of household treasure.

There were eight white people in the establishment: Major Carrington, his daughter Laura and son, Lance; Comitu with his wife and daughter, Magda, Guthrie Catten, and myself.

The Yellow Lord's house staff numbered at least twelve Chinese, Hoy Mon at the head of all departments; his second-in-command, a queer Chino, called the Crane. The bunk-house for the Chinese field hands was within the wall, but at the far end of the grounds, in a corner of jungle. It was fully a third of a mile from the castle court, but connected by an underground passage.

The castle was built of cement blocks made on the island. The wall was of similar construction, ten feet high and topped with broken glass. This protected garden contained twenty-five acres. The house was equipped with every conceivable luxury and more firearms and ammunition than the wisest islander imagined.

The harbor was too tight-mouthed for a battle-ship; the island itself exposed little less than a rock-facing to the sea, affording not the slightest idea of the wonderful fertility within. Many small craft of Tsui Tsing's lay in the shadow of the Jezebel; the nearest island was ninety miles away, the closest port of the regular travel lines, Singapore, five times as far. So much for the close-up after the random sketches; the rest must be caught on the way—even as I caught the story.

The Chinese tea-pickers were already crowding in to the rear-gate from the plantations, a sick-looking lot. There was still a rattle of rifles outside. It was three in the afternoon. I gathered two of the household servants and perhaps a dozen of the field men, crossed the compound through the grove of pepper-trees toward the trail that led down the cliff.

The astonishing part of the whole thing to me was the assumption of leadership by Catten after the single glance of Hoy Mon. It occurred now, especially as I thought of the way Catten resisted the call of his country, that there must be something more than a salary arrangement between him and the Yellow Lord. My English friend was altogether lip-locked about all his affairs.

A step behind, as we reached the edge of the cliff, broke these ruminations, and I turned to face Laura Carrington, who touched my arm, saying:

"Isn't there something we can do—Lance and I?"

"Catten is in command," I said, somehow enjoying the novelty of it. "He won't be gone long from the grounds. Comitu and your father will see to the Chinos getting in. I'm on duty down in the harbor for the present. I'd suggest that you keep in out of the rain, Laura."

She knew I meant the thin scattering of shots from the hills that was more or less steadily making dust-spots on the compound. I looked for a second longer than necessary into her white, eager face. She was altogether different this day. I almost asked her what she had been doing. I saw she wanted to say something else.

"I don't like to—if I'm wrong, it would be terrible to suggest such a thing," she began; "but I'm afraid for the Comitus—the mother and daughter! They seem terribly wrought up. The mother calls upon the girl to come to her, yet will not let her in. The major struck her as he was leaving. There is a smell of powder through their room."

I sent my party down to board the Jezebel, walked back hastily with the girl and knocked at Comitu's door. The mother opened when she heard my voice. She was a huge, sallow creature, black hair, black welt on her forehead, absolute panic in her eyes. I smelled powder smoke, but could find nothing amiss, and concluded that it was from the ancient rifles of the islanders breathing in the windows from over the hills. After investigation of the room, I asked Laura to tell Catten what she had told me, when he came. I left her then.

It was very quiet and hot down below

by the jetties. The sharky harbor was too little and high-banked to have much of a breeze of its own. It could show a scavenger's fin now and then, but scarcely a ripple of weather. A third of a mile across I saw the natives bringing up their four *sanguinaries*—ancient lumps of ordnance which Tsui Tsing had left in the possession of the islanders, bits of salvage from some ship that had broken up outside the harbor.

The next hour or two was about the liveliest period in the sense of enjoyment I had passed so far on that lonely little island. I was full of zeal for awakening activities, the secret treasures uncovered in my friend Catten, and the altogether new dimension which Laura Carrington had opened for my belated vision.

This was our work at last—four ancient brass dogs confronting the Jezebel on the opposite shore, their snub noses shining through the shimmer on top of the yellow-green harbor. Meanwhile we were putting things shipshape on board the auxiliary—a bit of ice left in her cuddy, a frosty bottle or two. Life took on an altogether new and relishable touch—a war, a woman, a friend.

I saw the Yellow Lord and his admirable little tea island moving at last into the mad pulse and fever of the rest of the world. Possibly I sent a bit of a laugh out through the narrow harbor entrance where the big sea water showed flecks of white.

At dusk I was relieved and joined Catten in quarters. I gripped his hand and told him about the four guns which they appeared to be emplacing on the opposite harbor bank.

"Old Comitu always was interested in those pieces," Catten remarked.

"What's that?" I said quickly.

"Comitu won't be back," he answered. "His woman was left to blow up the works, but balled the job a bit. I think her heart wasn't in it."

"You mean our Comitu has proved traitor to the Yellow Lord?" I said.

"That's a good literary word—that *traitor*," Catten answered; "but a bit big for an *opera bouffe*—soldier's change of side."

I was thoughtful.

"The natives outside must have pulled off the signal at the wrong time," he added. "Comitu wasn't ready, apparently. He had to wallop the missus as he left—"

Catten's manner of narrative always left me in a half-insane unrest.

"By the way, we've got a real white woman in Laura Carrington," he remarked later. "She saved the powder magazine. A time-fuse was working in there from the moment Comitu left. Magda's mother must have wanted to go with him. Comitu wanted her to stay and hold the room against investigation until the last minute. The old woman had no sooner left when Laura Carrington went in to look again—"

"She had an idea something was wrong earlier in the afternoon," I intimated slowly. "In fact, I took a look-see in there, but I missed what was doing."

"Anyway, she found the fuse in time to save the castle from being blown up," Catten said.

"What became of Magda?" I asked.

"That little bear-cat's too much for me," Catten reflected. "I don't get her at all. I let Hoy Mon lock her up for the present, much as I hate the idea."

"But Comitu himself," I muttered, slow to get his part straight.

"I know," Catten answered. "Hoy Mon says the Yellow Lord is sick about it. He would have sworn by Comitu. Hoy Mon says Tsui Tsing never made a mistake in a man before. Anyway, we know who's running the natives against us now."

CHAPTER V.

PARLEY WITH THE PRISONER.

THAT night, after things were quiet and Catten had chosen a bunk for me in his own quarters, I dropped down, realizing for the first time what these recent weeks of island stuff under the Yellow Lord had done for me. This sudden activity was wearing on my dull and somnolent faculties like a stiff shoe.

Not yet thirty years old and here I was tired. I might have blamed the tropics, the inimitable cuisine, the management of the Yellow Lord's establishment, the bins and bottles in the basement, the storage vaults

and perfect service, but as a matter of fact I blamed myself.

I saw an early future under the awnings of a fat and barefoot sot, doing two hours' work a day with bluster, with fourteen hours of placating various appetites, and nursing a bad temper like Carrington's, which wouldn't have been so bad except for the futility of it.

It was clear to me that an angry man is always futile; an angry man is never right; that a man can't be right and angry.

Carrington was overfed and sick with himself, and not the man I saw even the first day of my arrival. All his fierceness and commanding personality was front. Somehow I had read as much in the blotches this afternoon. As for Comitu, he hadn't had enough to do to keep himself out of the treachery business. Altogether I despised myself thoroughly, and the cause of it dawned presently.

It wasn't the new war altogether: it wasn't the spur of infinite things to do to save our lives and the tea plantations: it was something in those pure deep pools of silent womanhood which Laura Carrington had let me look into for the first time that day.

"That's all fatuous," I said suddenly, "to think that Tsui Tsing never misjudged a white man before. I've got a suspicion he's only a rather clever sort of trade mind. A man must include another—must be able to drown the other in himself, in order to understand him."

Catten made a queer sound in his neck which meant for me to go on.

"A lot of these people," I said, "with weight and solemnity and a house full of *lares* and *penates* and butter on their chins, get a reputation for being infallible because they keep their mouths shut."

I had even included the sanctified Hoy Mon in my momentary skepticism.

"You may get a chance to see how infallible our Yellow Lord can be at times, Bowditch," Catten said absently. "I don't feel right about this girl of Comitu's," he added. "She stayed even after her mother got away. What in God's name did she stay for? She could have cleared out all the afternoon. I don't like locking her up. I fall for this Magda sort."

My mind glanced back over the past months, trying to find reality of any kind in the relation between Catten and Comitu's daughter. There didn't appear to be anything significant. I had seen Magda roll a cigarette for him from time to time, while she was deftly making up little smokers to fill her father's gold case. Yes, occasionally she had tossed Catten one of her rolled ones with a laugh—even lighting one for him. She had often brought over his coffee after dinner when Comitu was being served on the veranda.

But from none of these things could I construe more than the lightest sort of interest.

In fact, Catten had always appeared queer to me, regarding men and women not as detached entities, but the opposite sides of the same thing.

"Tell you what, Bowditch," he said, after a silence, "you go look Magda over. Here's the key. Talk to her. She's been one of the household for a couple of years. She may be against her old man. It's a shame to keep her under lock and key. I'll do as you decide. Personally I'm a buzzard on these feminine affairs."

I was on the point of suggesting with a yawn that Magda Comitu could wait until morning, when it suddenly occurred that this impulse of mine was of a brand of inertia I had decided to destroy forever. Then I laughed. Catten was in command. Suggestion from him meant an order now. I had very nearly missed the fact, and he had been big enough not to change an iota his attitude to me—because of his transfer from comrade to chief.

As I fastened on my slippers, I thought of Catten's cryptic remark about the Yellow Lord. Evidently his opinion of the wisdom of the old Chinese was deeply grounded.

The frightened voice of Magda answered my knock:

"Who is it?"

"Bowditch."

"But I am locked—I can't let you in."

"I have the key. I wanted to know if I might come," I said.

She was in Hoy Mon's small quarters. The secretary had taken his place in the Yellow Lord's part of the house since the firing. A single desk-lamp was burning. The place was orderly in a way, but cluttered as a bird-cage from the standpoint of an American.

Magda seemed larger in this little place—a black-eyed girl, reedy, yet hard as a whip. She had been altogether too inclined to polo-pony, surf-bathing activities to be interesting from my point of view—a prejudice possibly. She had too hard a hand, too cold a control of her nervous system for games and external bits of daring to attract my eye more than casually. I fancied her completely devoid of that deep dazzle of inner luster such as I was beginning to attribute to Laura Carrington.

These were only opinions. The more a man knows, the less he hazards this sort of thing about other men's girls. Magda took me by the shoulders, saying, with an inexplicable kind of fervor:

"Where's Catten?"

"He's been bunked for an hour. Rather a strenuous day," I began.

"Why did he send you?"

I suddenly felt blown about between them, quite the same as I had found myself between Catten and the Yellow Lord—playing a sort of negative plate all through.

"He locked me up," she said, no anger in the tone. "I should think he would dare to come to me himself, since he locked me up."

"He didn't like the feel of you being shut up here."

"It's pretty cruel if he takes me for the daughter of Jerry Comitu and no more than that," she said. "It's pretty cruel with all he knows, if he doesn't give me credit for having a point of view of my own."

"Catten isn't cruel. He sent me here because he didn't like the thought of you being detained. There isn't any yellow play going to be put over on you, Magda. We're all at loose ends for the present, but Catten has the look of being altogether four-square to me. I have learned more about our little household here in the last five or six hours than I did in four months."

At that moment I meant to leave her under lock and key, at least till morning.

"Does he mean to keep me locked up?" she asked.

"What do you know of your father's deal with the natives?" I said.

She drew back. She appeared to have no thought but of Catten's part even now.

"Did he send you here to question me? If he did, you can go out and turn the key."

"My little part is to be cheerful and good-natured," I said. "Catten appeared to think that I could help him and you, too. Your father negotiated this uprising of the islanders. It's rather a rich picking if he wins. He knows all about us here. We were saved by a squeak from being blown into rock-dust in the first hour."

She neared me again, her eyes dull and flashing in turn, all emotions that go to make good drama under clever control.

"Does Catten think I'm in on all that?" she demanded.

"I never know what Catten thinks," I said impatiently. "Less and less have I the slightest idea what Catten thinks—or Hoy Mon or the master himself. Catten told me to turn you loose if I thought best. I think I do. Here's the key to this room. Your old room is impossible, of course—a hole in the floor to the powder magazine, and all that. It is under guard, anyway."

"Tell Guthrie I want to see him," she said.

"Yes, miss," I answered.

"Tell him I must see him to-night. If he does not come, I'll go to him."

"Exactly, miss," I said.

I told Catten.

"She's a bear-cat all right," he said.

He left the room, and I lay inadequate on the flat of my back, staring up into the silent flounces of the punkas.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GAME OPENS.

CATTEN came back in twenty minutes. He reported that one hundred and seventy-five of our two hundred Chinos were smoking their dope-canes safe-

ly within the walls. This was characteristic. Catten would explain even in detail, something absolutely foreign to the thing he had just come from, and about which one was set to hear.

"Carrington picked up one of our parties of tea-pickers over on the other side of the harbor," he resumed. "He rounded them up over there, but they couldn't explain what they were doing so near Comitu's headquarters—only that they must have unconsciously blundered among the trails."

I grunted a little, but said nothing, having shown as much ignorance in various ways as one man should be allowed in a single day. Catten couldn't sleep. After many minutes he reached over to relight a partly smoked cigarette—one that he had saved for the first thing in the morning. He always started a cigarette the last thing, so that he could find the remains partly steeped and seasoned for the best smoke of next day, which was the first. I was just dropping into a doze when he asked lightly:

"Who was that second Chino foreman under Comitu?"

"The lame crook, Jim Hassey?" I suggested.

"Thanks," said Catten. "It was his outfit that Carrington found around across the harbor way, only Jim Hassey didn't come in with them."

I didn't answer, but lay wondering if Catten had anything more to say, and presently dropped into a dream of long ago about a water-spaniel I used to own 'way back in Connecticut, as fine a friend as a small boy ever had—and I awoke with the excited barking outside in the hall—Lance Carrington's hound, Sheila, in an altogether unusual frenzy of excitement.

Catten was on his feet and flashed on the switch, swinging a two-gun belt around his hips and reaching for a rifle over his bed. He strode out, laughing to see me reach for my bath-slippers before following suit.

"Come on, you dude," he said. "There's need of us."

The broad court was lit from end to end. Fifteen or twenty Chinos were crowding at the door of Hoy Mon's room, which was shoved open.

It was Magda Comitu they wanted.

The Chinese were close about her, making a rush toward the forward entrance where the boy, Lance Carrington, with a small-bore rifle and his dog, stood together, a kind of hair-raising thrill to me in the lad's gameness. I joined forces with Lance joyfully enough before the Chinese reached there. At the same time I perceived, leading the Chinese, the second foreman Catten had inquired about a half-hour before, Jim Hassey.

I let go a quick shot and was somewhat disturbed to see the result.

The "lame crook" forgot his assignment suddenly, shook himself loose from his crew and sort of crumpled his members against the wall. I was sick of it all. Now I noticed Lance's sister at my side.

"For God's sake, Laura, get back!" I begged. "They're going to rush over us. They'll trample you. I'm no good, with you here."

She slipped into a near doorway.

Catten was now firing at Hassey's party from the rear; Carrington, from his doorway, was emptying a pair of six-shooters into the spoiled outfit of Chinese, but always shooting at the edges to avoid hitting Comitu's girl. Lance Carrington and I and the dog took them going over, as they charged out of the doorway with Magda.

Right there at the door the prize changed hands. It was like a football slipping out from a massed play, the way Magda cut loose from that yellow outfit—but a black minute or two after that. I was down, covering the little man. That stiff-tendoned beast, Sheila, was doing her fighting over my face and chest. It was like being tunked with a crowbar—the drive of those clawed feet as she dodged and tore into the knifing Chinese.

They didn't tarry. They had lost all thought but to get away.

Lance's beast left her marks upon me as they went by, for my body was the turf she fought from. The girl Laura came to me through the smoke.

"I think he's all right—the little master," I said, meaning Lance.

The boy and I sat up at the same time.

"Sure I'm all right, Mr. Bowditch," he answered, shaking a little as he eyed me.

I thought he was hurt internally from the look of him, but it appears he was choking at the sight of my face. One of the yellow boys had opened me from chin to cheek-bone, and I had to hold my tongue still. There was fighting out in the compound, Catten's voice raised laughingly. Laura was leading me to her room, stanching the flow from my cheek as we walked. It was an ugly place to bandage.

"What kind of a hound is that?" I said to Lance, as Sheila came in presently to find us.

"She's just hound," Lance answered, and I remembered asking that question and receiving the same answer weeks before when I first reached Pandiñao.

The fact is, I was a bit embarrassed by all this care, and continually recurring to my mind was the crumpling fall of that Chino, Jim Hassey, whom Comitu must have sent to bring in his daughter by force. They had taken his body away when I emerged. Most of my shots had been at the mass, but there were no two ways about the first shot.

It's a personal matter to kill a man.

Laura was telling me how grateful she was about my saving Lance. She couldn't hear my explanation that I was very busy most of the time saving myself from those steel-shot drives of Sheila, as she attacked. There was something in the touch of the girl's hands that bewildered me. I had not known it elsewhere in this life.

Catten and Magda came in, but the latter turned back, seeing Laura Carrington and me together. Laura was speaking to Catten about my cut—and I saw a look upon her face as she talked as if she had infinite patience and was in no danger of losing control of herself, but still disliked his proximity. You know I had never really seen Laura Carrington before this day.

I joined Catten in the cot to try it again. It was one in the morning.

"That's a queer thing about Jim Hassey," he said in a detached tone. "That chap must have come over the wall alone to join his outfit. Comitu wanted his daughter pretty badly. Magda appears satisfied to play it from this end. That will sort of cripple old Jerry. Everything must have gone wrong with him to-day. He wasn't ready here when the firing began outside."

"He couldn't have been ready," I added. "Otherwise he would never have muffed the plan to blow up the magazine. I wonder how many more of our Chinese are tainted?"

"I'll go after the Yellow Lord himself on that," Catten remarked. "I wouldn't swear by any but Hoy Mon and the Crane."

The latter had been acting head timekeeper of late, and appeared never to sleep. There was a long pause, when Catten rose abruptly.

"What now?" I ventured.

"I think I'll see Hoy Mon for a little social chat," he announced.

CHAPTER VII.

A HAND THAT'S HIGHER.

I SAT up with a jerk after he had gone. For the first time I realized why the Yellow Lord had wanted his "white young gentlemen" to have military training. This lotus island stuff was in reality ballasted by a powder barrel. Doubtless the Tsui Tsing company had realized all along the possibilities of fighting for their island privileges. The Yellow Lord was said to know the Malay mind also. He had one.

I thought I saw it all now. Both Comitu and Carrington had been soldiers of fortune in Asia. Comitu was merely playing true to the old *opera bouffe* ideals of war-making in casting his lot with his idea of the winner—ideals he had learned on both sides of the isthmus in the Western hemisphere.

Still, I wondered why he picked the islanders to win.

Also, it was very clear to me that I had been sleeping, mind and soul, for several weeks, my more or less hungry and thirsty body moving about the castle with only one invalid's lamp working out of the whole

switch full. Pandiñao, with its full lotus fragrance, had actually drugged me—until the firing began.

Catten was gone for a long time. I was casting off at length again for the night's sleep, when I came to with a full-length shock. Hoy Mon was standing at my cot. Hoy Mon's hand was placed most lightly upon mine, touching the knuckles.

"" Excuse me, Mr. Bowditch. Follow me. Our master suggests you join Mr. Catten. Follow me."

This time I arose with the sense of needing a shave. Altogether that was an addled night.

Hoy Mon was utterly mysterious and unreadable.

His hands were covered now, under the folds of his blouse where he kept his keys. I think he would have had his paints and pots and brush-boxes on their little trays beside him within a half-hour after shipwreck and being picked up from an open boat. All these little implements were part of him; yet his was not altogether a clerical mind. No one gave Hoy Mon credit for more than he had.

I couldn't forget that the Yellow Lord had his whole empire to choose from for a secretary, and had picked this Oriental to be sort of extension of his own brain.

The Yellow Lord could buy what he wanted, I had been told repeatedly. In all hours of the night or day I had seen Hoy Mon, tireless, silent, courteous, absolutely a master of the weaknesses which were supposed to have mastered his master.

Tsui Tsing sat like a tailor, rocking upon his ankles—a heavy, swollen kind of effigy, waiting as it seemed to me, for some kind of paralytic stroke. Actually my first thought was that he was marked for death—red lights of dropsical brightness in the thick of his neck.

An ancient temple somewhere had been desecrated to furnish this room—the place of a thousand treasures. It was a study of somber shades, a revelation of what could be done with blacks—densities and suggestions of shadow pointed off with soft grays and delicate, steely blues. The lights were all sheltered—dull gleamings upon the hand-smoothed woods of priceless simplicity, scent of El Madir incense—everywhere the flow of faint light and shade, the like of which is not on land or sea—a subtle sumptuousness of coloring which psychics profess to be aware of, but which ordinary individuals can only imagine in the flare of drugs or drink.

The Yellow Lord's hand came forth from beneath his dusky robe. It did not seem to belong to him; it was as if he were handing forth a priceless ivory treasure, still, cold, neither fleshy nor attenuated, steady, in perfect preservation—the inimitable hand of the Yellow Lord. It touched my wrist lightly—something familiar, even affectionate, in the pat, as one's relative might do when saying: "We have just been talking of you, my dear."

My eyes were held to the hand instead of the face, and the thought in my mind was one of shame and premonition that I had talked lightly, scornfully, of this man's brain.

Catten had been gentle about that. There appeared enough brain to rule an empire back of this man's hand—at least, the reflection of a brain. Catten, altogether at his ease, squinted sort of rakishly at me as if to intimate that some time, ages hence, I would begin to understand. Then Hoy Mon came closer, saying:

"Excuse me, Mr. Bowditch. Our master could rest until he thanked you tonight. I offered to carry his word to your bedside, but our master resisted the thought. He expressed himself eager to go himself, but there being an *incumbency* to his limbs at this time of day, he ventured to allow me to presume—to which Mr. Catten gave heartfelt accord. He thanks you."

In the silence that followed I had a brute impulse to turn Hoy Mon upside down and shake out any lingering verbiage in his system. That instant a squeaky voice became audible in the room—a most mysterious and terrifying phenomenon:

"I would like to have been there to see you hold the door!"

No man would forget that.

The voice was like the twang of a tuning fork, and yet far off. It seemed to come out of the mound of flesh below Tsui

Tsing's chin, as if an invisible ventriloquist were directing the words toward this fat throat, from somewhere outside the room. I had the sense of being forced to accept this, as one having been admitted to a certain family, is finally shown the skeleton; or one who has served and worshiped a certain king through hard years, is finally admitted to the presence of a—monster.

Tsui Tsing was officially complimenting me for holding back Jim Hassey's Chinese with the help of Lance and Sheila. Catten eased me for a moment with the ancient remark about the Roman who held the bridge. My left hand was reaching for my right, like a child not sure of himself. I bowed and backed out.

Catten had remained. I walked back across the court in a daze, passing Carrington's door, which was ajar. None had gone to sleep in there. The boy and the dog were on the floor at the door—sentry work of their own choice. Laura came to the aperture as I passed.

"Hello," she said, answering my greeting, an intimacy in the depth of her tone which I had never known before.

"Hello" can be spoken with the most astonishing inflections.

All that did not answer to Laura Carrington in my make-up was utterly wastrel. She stood for strength and integration. All I had known before was diffusion and beating myself thin around the world. Something starry in that moment.

"Don't you sleep?" I asked.

"Yes. We're just getting ready. I think it will be quiet the rest of the night."

She was slow in shutting the door. I found myself lingering to see or say something more. Words slipped, but she helped by asking if I thought my cheek bandage would do for the night. I had no sooner told her that it was quite all right, when I was consumed with regret, and added an altogether useless "Good night," as I passed on. Nothing ahead but the thought of a fresh bandage in the morning.

Catten joined me. We were in the dark.

"Are you awake?" I asked presently.

"Huh?" came from him with a yawn.

"Does our master always talk like that, Catten?"

"Like what?"

"As if he were used as a mere sounding board for some speaker outside the partition."

"You'll get used to that," Catten said.

"No," said I. "Oh, no, I shall never get used to that."

No audible answer.

"Catten," I began again. "Catten, did Hoy Mon tell him to say that sentence?"

"What sentence?"

I repeated in as like a tone as possible, but softly:

"'*I would like to have been there to see you hold the door.*'"

"Hoy Mon's a clerk," I heard Catten growl.

"It sounded as if our master had rehearsed it," I went on; "as if he went over it with Hoy Mon word by word before I came."

Catten had nothing to say to this. I pursued presently:

"Do you suppose the Yellow Lord would undertake to speak for you, if you were looking him straight in the eye?"

Abruptly Catten clapped his hands three times. A servant entered.

"Mix up two—"

He mentioned the Chinese name for a drink we called the Sequestered Isle, a drink designed to end the day or night. Light was turned on with refreshments, and we crawled out of our bug-proof nettings for the fourth time. When the glasses were drained, and we found ourselves loath to try the couch again, I suggested calling the servant once more.

"This is a Sequestered Isle, not an archipelago," Catten said; "but I'll go you."

We might still have slept if it hadn't been for the appearance of Hoolie, Comitu's little monkey.

Hoolie was lonely, no doubt of that.

With his Portuguese master gone, Hoolie insisted upon making his camp under our nettings. He wasn't much bigger than a man's two hands—a most silky and melancholy little tree-man, with the saddest, most shadowy eyes I've ever looked into.

Comitu was a kind of Messiah to him: would brush him off the table carelessly,

and Hoolie would appear all animated as if by the caress. Any one else had to be mighty gentle with the little chap or he would show his teeth and make noises in his throat like a rattle of gold coin in a thick leather purse. The night seemed to be getting hotter. Hoolie left Catten's bunk presently.

"It's magnetism he wants, Catten," I remarked. "Something he gets from a man's hand."

"He'll get a wallop from a man's hand if he don't keep away from here," Catten said.

"I think we're all reaching up for some hand that's higher"—I muttered dubiously—"woman or God—"

Catten broke in, demanding that I repeat that again. I obeyed.

"I always knew you had a pious streak somewhere, Bowditch," he remarked.

After a moment I heard his bare feet on the polished floor, and I had a secret suspicion he was about to bring his wheezy old brier into action. Catten never worked up that pipe of his, except in the most degraded moments. He lit it standing, and I saw the baleful glitter in his eyes and the sick yellow of his narrow face in the flare of the match.

"It's no use," I said. "Hoolie has let in a whole glee club of man-eaters."

The little monkey was moaning and rocking in the place I had left. It was all silent about us. The dawn moisture was distilling itself upon the earth; the bulbul sang in the jungle announcing in watery notes that it was daytime; the breeze came to us from the tea-plantations to the north—the sweetest, most delicate breath of all nature.

Chinese will tell you that you never get so wise, never so holy, that you can't be made better by breathing the moist dawn breath from flowering tea-lands.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LIFETIME STAKE.

CATTEN and I were at breakfast when the shriek of a shell from down in the harbor brought his eyes to mine with a quick glance like a true mate.

We arose and crossed the compound through the pepper-trees to the edge of the cliff. The Jezebel lay lovely and unharmed at her moorings.

The Chinese sentries on the cliff path informed us that the shell had dropped pitifully short of the Yellow Lord's launch. I somehow got the picture of old Comitu standing dismally across there in the shine of his own boots and spurs.

Many day-fires on the far shore indicated a sort of feast on the part of the natives. It was the wrong end of the game, I reflected, for this sort of celebration. I could see nothing but failure for an outfit that started to feed up before action. My reflections might have reached the point of a humorous remark if Catten had not moved off just then to give certain orders to the remoter sentries.

Back at our quarters we found that the *savant* of the breakfast-room had kept our portions hot. I glanced at the little board between us—a deep dish of gold-brown griddle-cakes, covered dishes of toast and eggs served together, brown fishes radiantly hot, each in a palm leaf of its own. There was a pot of tea for Catten, the kind that is said to be served in only one other place outside of the Yellow Lord's castle—the boudoir of the dowager at Peking. I preferred coffee, rejoicing to pour many small cups from a silver urn. At our left was a bank of fruits and jugs of clotted cream.

The tension that morning was indescribable.

It was more than missing a night's sleep—this heaviness of the silence and the looks that passed from one to another as we moved in the court and the compound. I remembered the face of Laura Carrington as she unwound me from a head bandage and turned me loose with a set of plasters on my cheek instead.

I remember Catten and Magda talking together as I emerged across the compound at the edge of the pepper-trees.

The whole thing was so natural that I had almost forgotten her father's attempt to snatch her out of the Yellow Lord's establishment in the night. Was Comitu's attempt the ungovernable fervor of a parent, or was Magda against his free lance

tendencies as a revolutionist? Was he afraid that she might be prevailed upon to do or say something against his interest?

It was complicated.

Catten lifted his hand presently for me to come across. Magda passed me on the way back to the court. Catten and I walked on toward the edge of the cliffs again.

"I don't get her," he said. "She's a great little Magda. Wouldn't it be queer if she really wanted to be good?"

I had nothing to say, being unable to penetrate the glassy glitter in his eyes, and refusing to trust my own opinions on Comitu's daughter. We stood on the cliff together and saw the fires of the natives on the shore opposite. The sun glanced on the brass work of the four little pieces of ordnance. The corrugated iron roofs of the Yellow Lord's tea go-downs lay like large, loose, woven tweeds spread out at the edge of the water.

"Run back, Bowditch," Catten said presently, "and keep your eye peeled around the grounds. I'm going to saunter down to the Jezebel for an hour or two."

It was a drowsy day. I moved from the court to the compound, across the pepper grove to the patio and out to the rear gate, it seemed, a score of times. Hoy Mon frequently accosted me to inquire if Catten had returned. Sentries from the Jezebel reported that Catten had only stepped on board for a moment early in the morning and had not been seen since.

The five hours till noon passed, and my eyes stung from searching the grounds for Catten's rajput helmet. Laura Carrington joined me for a moment or two, but I had not the nerve to take a lift from her companionship.

Night was on and I had changed the guards in the compound; Chinese were stationed at different parts of the wall and the gates were heavily guarded, when I saw Hoy Mon emerge from the Yellow Lord's quarters and move rather intently toward the front gate.

I followed and saw Catten's narrow countenance in the flare of a match as he lit one of his interminable cigarettes.

"Hello!" he said to me over Hoy Mon's shoulder. "Have you got the kettle on? I've been tied up all day between two sand-dunes—yellow flowers on one side, purple flowers on the other, lying still as a lizard."

It appeared that he had made a reconnoiter over Comitu's territory, and seen much that was interesting, but had been unable to cross an open stretch of shore to reach the castle trail until darkness. The islanders had extended their guards to our walls on either side.

"Comitu's four guns command the channel," Catten added. "He is not so interested in the Jezebel as we thought—not yet."

"Day after to-morrow the Virgin is due to come in," I observed.

"Yes, she's due day after to-morrow," Catten drawled. "Only she'll come in to-morrow morning instead. In fact, she's lying up outside in the offing now."

Emphatically this was news.

"Of course," he said, "it would be to Comitu's advantage to prevent her carrying back news to Singapore that there's war on down here," he said.

"But do you think he'd try to sink the Chinese insular's best trading ship?" I asked.

"He may figure on it taking some days to acquire the castle," my friend mused. "He isn't going to run the risk of letting old Hemiter sail his Virgin back to the mainland with the news of these doings. A lot of people get interested in an island when she takes on like this, whether they have any particular call or not. Comitu's out to make a lifetime stake," he added.

"We've got everything here, Catten," I said with suppressed jubilation. "The whole game is right here—island, castle, troops, treasure and everything at stake, besides two or three women to stand by—"

"Have you been sequestering?" he asked.

"I haven't taken a drink to-day."

"We're due right now," he responded, and cleared his throat, adding: "This is going to be a sea war. And, say, don't you get honing too hard for action.

"Comitu is Portuguese. They don't make war just as you do in America, but they have made war for a lot of centuries, those Portuguese.

"He's got the natives dazzled over there. Mustache waxed stiff, red uniform for midday, green for dinner. The island chiefs move delicately around his quarters. It wasn't just a whim, his passing out from our midst yesterday, but I think he meant to leave us devastated a lot more."

"And the Virgin coming into harbor in the morning," I repeated.

Catten was quiet a moment.

"Our little Jezebel has been getting more and more important, from where I stand, all day," he said. "If Comitu takes the Virgin to-morrow, it looks to me as if we've got to stand by the Jezebel as our one way out. She's worth her weight in tea-flowers to the Yellow Lord."

"I have doubled the guards down there this afternoon," I said briefly, "but are you going to let Comitu take the Virgin?"

Catten cooled his eye on me for several wearing seconds.

"He's got the artillery," he answered. "The Virgin will pass to-morrow morning along the channel directly in reach of his four sanguinaries, and Comitu is Portuguese —also he plays a good game of draw poker."

"If you don't mind, Bowditch, I'll take over the naval end of this thing and leave you to handle the land forces. I'm going down to sleep on board the Jezebel tonight," Catten added absently.

We drank, and I found that I liked him dangerously well that minute, as we stood together.

CHAPTER IX.

CATTEN WELCOMES THE VIRGIN.

CATTEN sent for me in the first light of daybreak. Things were shipshape in the court and compound when I hurried down the ledge-trail to the decks of the Jezebel where my friend stood watching the mouth of the harbor. His left hand came out to me, but his eyes did not leave the entrance.

"She's under way," he remarked. "I'm looking for her nose to be shoved in any second now."

He referred to the Virgin. I knew from the lurking devil in his eye that he was about to speak of Hemiter. He chuckled, and sure enough:

"He'll need to be told the word of salvation once again," he muttered. "The old girl will have to lean down and whisper it again when Hemiter passes along the channel under Comitu's brass-throated quartet. Oh, Gawd, if I could only be aboard when that string's pulled!"

His hand gripped me again. With the first sunlight, the Virgin entered. She was moving like a clay-white shadow against the brown wall of the far cliffs. Catten's eyes were on the small boats directly below, lying forward and abaft the Jezebel. He had a look of calculation as he said quickly:

"Comitu may not fire after all. Oh, I say, Bowditch, run up and get thirty or forty of your little tea-planters with their rifles—just their rifles. Bring the liveliest of them."

I didn't grasp his plan, yet I had a string of sleepy yellow boys coming down on the trail behind me, within fifteen minutes after Catten had mentioned his idea. Sleepy—yes, drugged and more or less helpless in the first hour or two of the day, for they passed the nights with their dope-canes. A very complicated little island and a most Malay-minded person, this Tsui Tsing. Catten took the Chinese as they came and filed them into the small boats gathered at the stern of the Jezebel.

Meanwhile the Virgin had slowly passed the entrance rocks, and sung her siren announcement of arrival—a signal which all the islanders knew. I imagined hate in it this morning. Catten's eye gleamed balefully in the screaming diminuendo.

"Yes, you're here, old top. We hear you. we welcome you as never before—you and the missus from Paumanok, and the word of salvation that will die with you."

Even now I hadn't grasped Catten's thought in sending me for the Chinese. It was not until the Virgin was sliding into the perfect range for this coup that I saw what the next move from across was to be, and which Catten had been keen enough to anticipate.

A long, snaky island canoe, fourteen-paddle craft, slipped out toward the channel

from the opposite shore. Catten stood still, I glancing into his face from time to time. Another canoe followed in the frescoed line from the outriggers of the first, and still others.

"Yes," Catten drawled, "Mr. Hemiter is going to be welcomed to feed his soul this day! Come on, Bowditch, we're part of this ceremony."

"You surely made a fine guess," I muttered.

"I used to play draw-poker with old Jerry," he answered, and added: "Take charge of the tail-boat, Bowditch, and follow in close."

His Chinese were already at the oars; boat followed boat until the fifth and last, which I boarded. All this time the seriousness of the prospect sank deeper and deeper among my faculties. Catten stood up in the stern of his leading boat and, making a trumpet of his hands, announced to me from thirty yards away:

"They've got numbers, but remember, we've got rifles."

This was almost identical with my run of thoughts, and so was the following:

"Comitu would like to pull our whole outfit down here from the wall to meet him, and then send around a flanking party to get control of the castle."

I nodded that I understood. Also I saw that Catten considered it as mighty important for me thus to get the exact situation, inasmuch as he explained aloud like that. I never knew a man who so hated to raise his voice. I tell you again, I didn't care for the prospect—a battle on decks for the possession of the Virgin, and the possibility of a big party of natives slipping around to scale the wall, with only poor old Carrington back there in command. At least, it wasn't for myself that I grew chilled and slowed up that moment crossing the harbor.

Now, of course, the Virgin was between us and Comitu's canoes; also they had less distance to reach the steamer than we did, yet we were close up to the green rusty plates, and still Comitu had not boarded.

Presently out of the silence we heard old Hemiter's voice faintly over the bulge of his craft and from the far rail:

"No, Comitu—no, mister, I ain't allowin' even in good feelings a passel of Malays runnin' these decks—no, not even in inducements of friendship."

CHAPTER X.

CATTEN CALLS ON THE CAPTAIN.

HEMITER was like that. If the island sent out a delegation to greet him as Messiah, he would have insulted the commission and considered himself honest and dutiful. I heard Catten chuckle and the big voice of Comitu now, still from the water-level:

"Look here, you fool skipper, we've got something for you!"

There was a blur at this point. Comitu's voice was heavy and low; it lacked carrying qualities; it smeared and ran together. On the contrary, Hemiter's sleety tones were not to be missed. Comitu's struggle reached me again after the hiatus:

"It's important to your company, old skipper, and while these little islanders don't make much of manners—"

Right here Comitu blew up.

I heard his crude curse—crude and crawling and prolonged. It wouldn't wear ink—a curse like that. He had doubtless been pleading and cajoling and commanding, perhaps for several minutes, with his face turned up from the water. He resumed that the islanders didn't intend to suffer any kind of "fish-chested burnt Canadian" like Hemiter to make light of Pandiñao's most grandiose society and overtures for perpetual friendship.

True South Sea talk. I saw the calm satisfaction on Catten's face, and that Hemiter's imperviousness was incalculable strength to our cause.

And now we began to be busy on our side of the ship. Lafferty, Hemiter's first officer, appeared at the rail above us, the shady and neglected side of the Virgin. His mouth opened and he slowly announced to his amazed self that he would be forgotten as a husband and father and cast in the uttermost parts if here wasn't Catten and five boat-loads of the Yellow Lord's "tea-picking black smokes."

"Exactly," Catten drawled.

I never admired my friend's nerve more than this moment. I had a dozen ideas on the tip of my tongue to blurt out, in a fierce pressure of hope to get to the deck before Comitu.

"What's it all about, Catten?" Lafferty asked.

"It's a holiday. Toss a jumpin'-rope over and I'll come up and tell you about it."

Lafferty bawled for a rope-ladder and dangled it overside a moment later. Catten managed to get close enough to me to whisper as he began to climb:

"Follow me up, Bowditch, and tell your men to follow after you, one by one, rapidly, without words. I'll keep Lafferty's eyes busy."

He rode the treads of that rope affair leisurely. I saw his long, thin leg swing over the rail—broad hips and narrow shoulders almost like the time I saw him first in the frock coat at Singapore. I didn't know Catten yet, but I knew a lot more than on that day. I was close behind, and below me the ladder was crowded with Chinese, according to Catten's order. Lafferty had just loosed my friend's hand to take mine when the first of the natives tumbled over the rail behind me.

"Hai, none of that."

The words were from Lafferty as he bent forward to shove the first Chino back. Just in that second his eyes bulged because he saw the ladder crowded with Orientals down to the green of the water. Catten caught him securely, closing the passages of speech.

"I'm sorry, Lafferty," he said. "This isn't personal. I've nothing against you Irish, but I do want thirty or forty of my body attendants to board with me. A misunderstanding on your part—"

Catten turned to me at this point and remarked:

"Good, Bowditch. I didn't think you had the wallop in your left hand."

I had just put to brief sleep the boatswain of the Virgin. He had come forth a bit gorillalike to the rescue of his first officer.

"Toss him overside for the present. He's coming to and will raise a row," Catten added.

A Chinese helped me raise the boatswain, ankle and wrist. The rest was heave and splash. I observed with relief that he could swim like a seal.

Between us, Lafferty, who was inclined to continue the struggle, went over after the boatswain. Catten now remarked:

"Mr. Hemiter appears still to be occupied with the intrusive Mr. Comitu. Jerry really ought not to insist on a welcome like this. I never could push myself on anybody."

"No, you'd just commit assault on the door-tender," I answered.

Catten looked playful as he ordered the five Chinese still remaining below with the small boats to assist Lafferty and the boatswain out of the water and mount guard over these two prisoners. Leaving our force in array on the shady side of the ship in the lee of the main-deck cabins, Catten and I now moved forward.

Perceiving Comitu lose his temper, Hemiter had ensconced himself more firmly in the idea of his own infallibility. He stood on his bridge now, daring to be silent, arms folded, engrossed in his own power—the most morally unappetizing spectacle I had seen yet. From far forward Catten and I ventured a glance overside where Comitu stood in the prow of one of his canoes, his face flaming with rage against the barrier which the person of the skipper had raised against him.

Just at the moment we glanced, Hemiter craned over from the bridge and caught Comitu's eye once more, like one who tantalizes a caged animal. At this point we heard the Portuguese say slowly:

"Right now, Deacon Frog-mouth, I'm going to blow you out of the water! Hear me?"

The threat continued:

"I wanted to spare you this, Hemiter. I came to spare you and bring you safety for your ship and all hands, but you threw me down, wouldn't listen to reason, and now I'm going to blow you out of the water."

Catten didn't move, though it appeared to me that Comitu was really about to give the signal to his gunners ashore. I jerked my friend back from the rail, looking him in

the eye, doubtless catching some of his coldness of manner as I inquired:

"You're not going to let him do that, are you?"

"Do what, Bowditch?" he drawled in his most exasperating way.

"Blow her out of the water!" I said patiently.

"No gentleman would permit anything like that," he answered, glancing overside again.

At this moment I saw one of Hemiter's waiters report something to the old man that stirred him far more than Comitu's presence had done. He turned with a rush to our side of the ship and at the exact instant of his looking down, the first shell of the day shrieked over the Virgin's hurricane-deck, puncturing one of the life-boats forward and passing on in haste.

My legs turned weary for a second, and I heard Catten's voice:

"You see, Bowditch, we can play rescue party for Mr. and Mrs. Hemiter now, instead of being taken for an attacking force, as would have happened before Comitu showed his hand."

"Forgive me for being slightly affected by your flashing intelligence," I said.

"Besides, we should have been forced to murder Comitu to prevent him from giving that signal—"

"That's what I thought you were about to do when you leaned overside," I observed.

"One hesitates. I've played a lot of draw poker with Comitu. One hesitates, you know."

CHAPTER XI.

GETTING THE RANGE.

SOME things are run rather well on this little red earth, after all. I mean from the inside.

Hemiter always thought well of himself —extremely. No doubt about that, and never more so than a moment since, when he saw Comitu's mind break training before his own calmness and self-control.

A man so strongly entrenched as Hemiter in his own sense of right isn't seriously disturbed by the curse of another, the curse being an expression of failure.

But suddenly to realize his own Virgin under fire from the shore of one of the stillest and sunniest harbors in the world, and at the same moment to find her irreproachable decks the parade-grounds for thirty-five armed Chinese, himself caught between these two ultimate disasters — altogether the captain was loosed and let down considerably, to the calm delight of Mr. Catten, who helped none whatever.

Captain Hemiter ran from one side of his bridge to stare down at the row of tea-pickers, and to the other to see if the sunny shore had heaved forth volcanic wrath; his frightened eyes then roved from the smashed boat down to the sardonic face of Comitu, at present in the act of withdrawing from the inhospitable sides of the Virgin.

Finally Captain Hemiter settled on Catten, his own peculiar and natural devil, and now his eyes were held, his thin gray lips making round Os of amazement.

As I knew Catten, he was not at his highest best this instant. He wasn't what you would call spiritual.

A second shot had just crumpled the reenforced rim of the Virgin's brick-red smoke-stack, and words came at last to the skipper — feeble and futile and gasping— words addressed to his soul's enemy.

"And now what have you got to say for yourself, sir?"

"Me, sir?" Catten asked.

"I'm looking at you—"

"Just greetings, Captain Hemiter, and to Mrs. Hemiter—greetings and—"

The third shell breezed past the bridge without touching.

"Greetings and suggestion—that you order some speed up, if you care to save the ship, sir. Just a suggestion—"

Catten would not have offered the cue if he had not some personal interest in the Virgin. Never before in that tight and tortuous channel did the engineer get bells for full speed. The throb of returned power was under the Virgin's decks. The skipper cooled himself somewhat in bringing his ship around the harbor to the Tsui Tsing buoy, as he alone knew the passage.

Four or five shots went wide in the next three minutes; then one undertook to bore a hole for the anchor chain far forward above the forecastle. This gallied Hemiter's wits a second time, and he called to Catten in tones a man never forgets from another. Still below, I saw my friend stroll across the bridge — saw his shoulders grasped in Hemiter's two hands, and heard the words:

"Take 'em off — for me, Mr. Catten! Take 'em off—"

"Take what off, captain?"

"Your Chinese. That's what they're shootin' at, isn't it? No one would shoot at *my* ship."

"It might not look so, but we're the rescue party, skipper. See Comitu's war boats?"

Hemiter was cruelly frightened and distracted. He followed Catten's pointed finger overside, where seven canoes were streaking back toward shore. For the first time he seemed to understand what he had missed in refusing to let the natives come on aboard. The whole harbor, the world, and life at large was betraying Hemiter's ideas just now.

I turned away, as I had done at first, from Catten's mental mauling of the sorrowful old innocent. Hemiter's face had something I would have covered up out of pity—a bearded man in fright. It somehow made me ashamed to be in the world at the time.

Meanwhile, below in the spray, our small boats were in tow, with five Chinese in charge of Lafferty and the boatswain. As a rattler would turn negligently from a rat already stung, Catten left Hemiter and remarked almost affectionately to me:

"I don't think you'll lose any time by riding with us over to the Jezebel landing—"

I didn't pretend to get his plan. The remark seemed superfluous, since the Virgin was making the delicate passage across the harbor at a speed only permitted in wide sea-room on charted waters.

"The point is," Catten added, "you're to hurry back to the castle now. Leave me most of these Chinese to keep the Virgin. We may have to take her outside of the entrance if Comitu's cannon begin to negotiate the distance across the harbor."

"His first shot fell short of the Jezebel moorings yesterday," I said.

"He might have been feeling for range—"

"But," I said, "if you ever get outside of the harbor, Hemiter won't slow up until he sees Asia."

"No?" Catten said quizzically.

I signified that I regarded it so.

"Hemiter doesn't know it yet," Catten drawled. "I may not have to tell him to-day. This has been a hard day for Captain Hemiter so far, and I may spare him to-day; but, rightly speaking, he isn't in command of the Virgin for a day or two. He only thinks he is."

My friend glanced back toward the native's side of the shore. It was about time for another shot. The sun flashed into his eyes as his head turned, and I saw the coldest glint there—an integrated deviltry altogether challenging, yet I had a suspicion this was only the surface armor. He couldn't have pulled me so with that alone.

Anyway, he was running this campaign to suit me, except, possibly his baiting Hemiter. I couldn't forget how he had outguessed Comitu so far at every point, proving himself ready and on the spot for all the moves the Portuguese made.

Especially I was touched with Catten's strange mercy when he let pass the chance to put Comitu out of reach of further damage.

This was something to keep secret; it wasn't good service to the Yellow Lord, exactly, to let Comitu escape a few moments before, as we looked over the Virgin's rail at the native canoes making for shore. Catten was a pistol-shot. He could even have winged Comitu without killing him.

No, Catten hadn't forgotten. I could see that much in his eyes as I pulled him back from the rail.

You'll smile, but I harbored the suspicion right there that Catten had been afraid of stopping his war altogether if he put over such a *coup* in the beginning of the game.

The last shot of the forenoon was widest

of all. We were slowed down again, coming into the buoy anchorage close to the Jezebel, which lay at dock. I saw that the bigger craft formed an admirable protection for Tsui Tsing's auxiliary as the former lay at the company's moorings. Catten had declared that the Jezebel could be cleared from dock in half a minute. No surprise was deemed possible since the shores were guarded, and the walls held the heights.

"Send up Lafferty and the bosun," he ordered, as I climbed down. "We can use them here."

"Do you think you've got force enough to manage the ship and Lafferty and Hemiter, too?" I asked softly.

"Your motherly spirit fans me to deep peace," he answered. "Send me down anything particularly choice you happen to have for luncheon. You know what I think of Hemiter's pantry."

I waved at him, and presently, as I was being pulled toward the ledge-trail landing, I saw that he was turning the stern of the Virgin out toward the hostile shore—a new use for the anchorage, but no broadside exposed.

I never knew how narrow-chested the Virgin was until that moment I saw her in the turning. And now a gladness came over me at the thought of going back to the castle. It seemed as if a big task had been well done out in the harbor, and that Laura Carrington would be pleased when I told her. Before reaching the top of the ledge I heard Shiela's barking. Lance was there, beckoning in excitement.

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

THAT the terminus of the Palmetto Limited was romance and mystery, young Chandler Reed had had no suspicion. By nature he was a practical youth. Just as there was nothing knightlike in his flawlessly, modern apparel, so there was no hint in his busy brain of decayed castles, maidens in distress, or enchanted dungeons.

A twentieth century young man, from his correct tan shoes to his pinchback suit, it was fitting that his meditations, as he had sat in the observation car, had run upon gears and treads and cylinders and sparkplugs and that the only glamour that had hovered over the spirit of his dream was of the startling number of motors the great Moore would now sell in a certain Southern town in consequence of his, Chandler's, remarkable business ability.

Even after he had arrived at his journey's end, and a somewhat moldy taxicab had carried him along the picturesque thoroughfares, he had been too absorbed in his

glitteringly accurate calculations to yield to the witchery of the old town, festive today in its gay bunting. He had been impervious alike to the mesmeric rhythm of the vendors' cries and the stirring fans on the palm-trees.

But now, on turning into a little street arched by a great sign bearing the words, "Moore's Motors" and the familiar trademark, a scarlet wheel of flame, there must have been borne in upon him, together with his first view of the company's garage and sales-office, some recognition of the fact that there are other worlds than those he had known in his Western home.

At sight of this remarkable building, he must have felt himself tumbling head over heels into this story, like *Alice* down the well into Wonderland. He must have guessed that the most businesslike manager in the world is apt to have no mere workaday existence when his cars are housed within the lofty gray stone walls of an ancient church and when the display-room, in modern, too-candid fashion, is but a crystal tumor grown out upon its sacred portico.

It was amazing, you know, first, to gaze upon the latest model Moore with chaste accompaniment of paper roses making a scarlet splotch against the dusky satin of its side, and then to lift unbelieving eyes to the towering fluted columns and stained glass of a church of other days. Startled, Chandler sat in the now stationary cab spellbound by the fascinating anachronism. Then, when he went inside and introduced himself as the new manager, still under the spell, he found himself acquiescent to the plan that all go out to view the parade.

"What is it about?" asked the barbarian.

"Didn't you know it's Mardi Gras?" The capable assistant was frankly shocked.

"Do we just walk out and leave things?" the new manager wanted meekly to know.

The assistant waved a nonchalant hand toward a negro dozing on an upturned box in the cavernous aperture through which the cars were wont to roll into their dim and stately home.

"Pork Chop can look after the plant while we're gone," he said.

Pork Chop's ebony face and missing-link head were not encouraging to the manager, who was all for efficiency, but at least his giant frame could insure the safe-guarding of the property. So Chandler suffered to be led away.

The young assistant, Louis Le Comte, was a native and something of a raconteur, Chandler discovered as they threaded their way through the rapidly gathering crowds. He knew a tale or two of yonder staid, old mansion, whose ancient wrought-iron balustrades were so airy in their fresh, white paint as to make it look like some sedate old dame, who, with innocent unseemliness, displays the lacy frills upon her petticoat. He explained why the maskers disporting themselves in the February sunshine along the pavements were for the most part children nowadays and why the ball of last night was not half so splendid as the balls of other years.

They paused upon a corner famous as a vantage point these many years, Louis said, and strained listening ears for the coming of the bands. They even allowed themselves, like children, to be tugged out into the middle of the street by the current of the crowd, and then had to be driven back to their curb by a mounted policeman.

"Look!" said Louis. "The stingy old Yank!"

Chandler looked, as indicated, across the festive crowd, whose colors shifted kaleidoscope fashion in the confines of the street, to a gray and moldy house, on the porch of which an old man waved an angry arm at a young woman shrinking before him, a dirty urchin on each side of her. It was the only house in the street that flirted no hilarious bunting and the only porch that was not packed with eager holiday faces.

"She must have called those kids in so they could see from the porch," Louis explained. "She might have known it was no use."

As he spoke, the boys came down the steps with a hangdog look in their faces, and the tall young woman bowed her head and turned toward the door.

Since the strains of band-music were unmistakably drawing nearer and nearer, and spies and runners were momently arriving with shrill bulletins on the progress of the

floats, Chandler was quite unnerved to see the young woman of kindly intent go inside and close the door behind her. There could be little chance of her seeing even the tiniest morsel of the parade from those close-shuttered windows. It would serve the stingy old man right to miss it. That was his own affair if he chose to turn his chair about with his face to the wall. But with a young person it is different, especially if the young person has the bearing of a goddess and a wealth of blond hair.

He wondered if the young woman was parsimonious, too, that she could thus deny herself the color and frolic of Mardi Gras. The house itself was distressingly pinched in appearance, built in imitation of some ancient castle. As a house it mightn't have been bad, but as a castle, you know, it really was despicable and stunted-looking. Its turrets and battlements were but wretched mimicry in boards of the nobility they strove to recall. The walls scowled, dour and weather-worn; its windows were blinded by dirty shutters.

"Who are those people?" Chandler asked.

But the first band was already arriving and back of it came swaying, above rumbling wheels, a structure of froth and tinsel, a fairy tower between the live-oaks that fringed the street; and Louis's Gaelic soul was swept away from his little perspiring body. His round face was upturned in rapture to receive the bright paper streamers that the merry make-believes tossed down from their perch on the rocking floats.

Afterward Chandler might have lost, in the chaos of that first day's memories, both girl and castle just as he did lose the street in following the parade, had he not chanced upon them in the most unexpected fashion in the days that followed.

By the magic influence of "a want ad," he installed himself in a furnished room upon a street entirely unfamiliar in its every-day sobriety and was entirely unconscious of what had happened to him until he stepped forth upon his balcony, on the evening of that first day in these quarters, to find himself face to face with the odd old house, now tight-closed for the night and as dark as a tomb.

More romantic it was by moonlight, with its battlements silhouetted against the luminous sky, more like a real castle seen from afar. Chandler stood looking at it a long while, but saw no living creature within its shadows.

Standing so, he had the passing thought that almost any adventure was possible in a town where the automobiles lived in churches and beautiful girls in castles.

Not many days later, on going into the temple converted by the money-changers, he came upon a withered old man huddled in an uncomfortable split-bottomed chair near the place where the altar should have been. He was hunched forward, his hands upon a knotted cane, his face lifted in a peculiar, rapt way toward a large memorial window, through which the rainbow glow sifted weirdly on his hawklike face and thin white hair. He was recognizable as the stingy old man, Chandler's neighbor, the lord of the castle.

"You the new manager?" he began.

"Yes. My name is Reed."

"Mine's Carth," returned the evil-looking old creature. "You don't mind if I come sometimes and sit here, do you?"

Chandler assured him that he did not, artlessly looking up at the window that had held the old man spellbound as he entered. The legend upon it bore the name, "James Edgar Carth."

Afterward Chandler sought Louis, his mine of information on all the lore of the town. "Say, Louis, why does old Carth come here and sit among the automobiles?"

Louis swung about from his desk and threw himself back comfortably in true narrator's style. "Likes to look at that fine window he put up to his son. When the congregation moved to the First Avenue church, he made them leave it here so he could look at it every day."

"He must have been crazy about his son," deduced the alien.

"Hell, no!" Louis said mildly. "He killed him with cruelty—the same way he drove the son's wife to the grave, and the same way he's killing their daughter."

"But the window—" queried Chandler.

"Oh, he just happens to be nuts about stained glass. Most of the windows in that

crazy castle are colored. And there's a story about his love of sparklers—but, say, Mr. Reed, hadn't I better get off that letter to the firm about the new motor for Hirshbaum's automobile?"

The same evening, as the rather blustery March dusk closed in upon the plate-glass offices of Moore's Motors, Chandler lingered long after Louis had gone, telling his troubles to the dictaphone. The sound of his voice in the stillness had the effect of isolating him from the street, although he could be so plainly seen sitting there at his desk.

Feeling eyes upon him, he looked up to find a very white face a few feet away from his outside the glass, and he realized that it was a woman trying to attract his attention. He rose at once and admitted her. As soon as she came in she put out her hand in a gesture of relief and some of the hunted look left her eyes.

Chandler observed immediately that she had the bearing of a goddess and a wealth of blond hair.

"I am Lisa Carth," she said to him in a voice, hauntingly musical like the wind in the pines. "Is my grandfather here? I have been terribly frightened."

"We can see," offered Chandler soothingly, although he was thinking it was hardly possible at this hour.

As they went through the yawning portals of the church where she had very likely been christened, he gave her his arm and he thought she sighed relievedly as she took it. When the lights had been snapped on, they found the negro, Pork Chop, asleep in an automobile. Chandler wakened him and hustled him out. Then as they neared the altar-place they saw the old man in his accustomed chair, sleeping soundly with his head on his cane. Chandler wakened him with the reproach: "Miss Carth was dreadfully frightened about you."

The narrow eyes glittered as the old man perked up his head. "Frightened, I'll guarantee," he rasped with a smile that was meant to be facetious but was rather like a leer, "but not about her old grandad. Tell the truth, Miss Lisa, you rather hoped you and this nice young fellow would find the old man dead, now didn't you? And as to being frightened—have you told him about the ghosts in the castle?"

The girl's face was linen-white, and her hands were pushed hard together. "I was alone," she whispered with effort, "and there were noises."

"Noises, were there? Ghosts of my wickedness, eh? You know, sir, my son married a damn rebel, this girl's mother, and she hated me like poison, called me a carpet-bagger! The vixen! She told this chit when she was dying that the house was full of the ghosts of my wickedness. We've been cowards ever since, haven't we, Lisa?"

Lisa moved off without answering him, her footsteps echoing on the chancel floor. Chandler gazed after her pityingly and writhed for the impotence that resigned her thus to her tormentor..

After this episode, the irreproachable manager of the Moore's Motor Garage and Sales Station found himself mixing incongruously with his accurate thoughts on gears and valves and spark-plugs, less accurate puzzlings about a beautiful girl, helpless in the grasp of he knew not what torment.

When the warmer nights came on and he could smoke his cigar on the balcony, he became conscious of certain fixed habits in the odd old house across the way. Regularly at nine o'clock the light just discernible through the chinks of the immobile shutters of a certain third-story room went out, and a few minutes afterward some one came out of the front door and sat down upon the steps, a spot of white against the gloom.

It occurred to Chandler that Lisa came out to sit thus only after her grandfather was asleep in his room above and that she did it because it was less lonely than in the dreary rooms.

Many times he tried to go over and call upon her as he would have called upon any other girl. For a while his impulse always ended in confused debates with himself. And then one evening he extinguished his cigar against the balustrade almost as soon as it was lit and ran quickly down the stairs and across the street without giving himself time to waver.

"I was lonesome," he said without greeting of any sort, "and I saw you sitting here—"

She looked up hastily in the direction of the window where the light had gone out a few minutes earlier.

"We can't be seen from that window," Chandler argued eagerly, forgetting his intention of being natural. "I've figured out how the cornice sticks out just far enough below it to prevent any one's seeing us."

"But our voices?" she said nervously, her eyes still watchful.

"There are noises in the street."

And so she moved her skirt and let him sit down beside her, but there was nothing ordinary and commonplace about it. It was a visit that reeked of secrecy. And instead of Chandler's saying sensibly as planned, "The old man's asleep, let's run down to the movies," he found himself whispering ever so adroitly and starting nervously at any soft noise behind him.

None of the visits that followed were conventional calls, either, and Chandler had to admit to himself that Lisa was no pink-tea débutante. She was as unlike the girls he had known as was the weird haunt that she called home unlike their stucco homes with summer porches all gay in cretonne and wicker. He wanted to think of her as a normal girl and tried at first to treat her as one. For ever so long he thought of telling her, in tone of comradeship, that she really should not allow that old man to dominate her so, since she was head and shoulders taller than he, but the words choked him. Perhaps he was a coward, but he couldn't forget the old man's narrow eyes.

He was sorrier for her than he had ever been for anybody, and one night after he knew her better he did say to her: "You need some tennis and dancing, you really do." But he never got beyond that in urging her to throw off her yoke.

Now, when people hold their only converse in frightened whispers, banalities are at a minimum; and a friendship whose only glances are through rounded eyes, straining to pierce the darkness, soon gets down to essentials.

It so happened that Chandler's pity quickly turned into something more in those strange evening calls, which now came to be a habit with him. And one evening when things had been especially hard for Lisa and she had confided meagerly in him, he surprised himself and her by drawing her close to him and kissing her white, tense face.

"Ah, my dear," he whispered, "you must let me take you away from it all. You cannot stand much more."

She started in his arms. "But I cannot bring my shadows into your life."

"You needn't," said Chandler. "Let's run away from the shadows." She shook her head hopelessly, but he went on. "Don't you see what you mean to me? This sort of thing is getting on the nerves of us both. Why, I have never heard your beautiful voice speak aloud but once."

"It isn't fair to you. I can never be like other girls."

"If you leave this atmosphere of fear and depression," Chandler began, but she interrupted him.

"I knew if you ever loved me, I'd have to tell you," she said. "And now I must. Listen." She looked about her, and they both strained their ears to catch any sound that had not its lawful share in the noises of the street and the stirring leaves on the lawn. A street-car clanged down at the corner, and a group of roistering youngsters passed on the pavement, but the walls behind them were silent. "Are you afraid to go in the house with me a moment?"

He shook his head and stood up at once. She took his hand as if he were a child and led him softly through the door, then she left him standing in the dark hall while she lit the gas in a room on the left.

From the threshold he looked upon the shell of grandeur that had been the castle drawing-room. The painted ceiling, the carved marble mantel, and a few dim pictures were all that were left to tell what the empty room had once been. Lisa beckoned him nearer the light and then laid in his hand a miniature of a young girl.

As Chandler gazed at the beautifully poised head, the radiant hair, and the dimpling expression of complete good humor, he saw as by miraculous demonstration, the exact portrait of his dream of Lisa.

It was Lisa as Lisa would have been with the fear gone out of her eyes and a

smile upon her lips. It was Lisa as Lisa should be if the gods were kind and he had half a chance to make her happy and secure.

He opened his lips to ask a question, but the girl implored silence with a fierce gesture and he remembered that they were standing below the old man's room.

Once on the porch again she could speak. "That was my mother before she was married," she told him, "but not at all as I remember her. She always had a haunted look and a fearful habit of looking over her shoulder that used to make my heart stop still."

"How old were you when she died?"

"Thirteen, but I felt much older. She was sick so long and I waited on her. The last year or two she used to cling to me and weep and weep."

Chandler did not hurry her, but let her tell the tale as she liked.

"As long as my father had lived, she said, things had not been so bad for her, because he stood between her and Old Sir."

"And whom?" questioned Chandler.

"Old Sir. It is the name my grandfather made her call him by, and me, too, when I was a little girl, but I have almost dropped it now." Then she went on: "Even before father's death, though, she knew that Old Sir hated her. He was jealous of my father's loving her. He claimed that she despised them both for being carpet-baggers. He gradually sold all the beautiful things she had brought here to furnish his crazy house. Then my father died. That was right after she knew I was going to be born.

"After that the persecution was open.

"The only possession she had held back for her own was a lacquered box containing the jewelry that had belonged to her and her mother and her mother's mother. And now Old Sir tried to get that. He wheedled and threatened, but she was firm for a while, because she wanted to have something for me. But he said he was afraid for her to have such valuables in her bedroom and at last made her leave the box in a cabinet in the library for the night. She secretly instructed old Aaron, her servant, to sleep on the library floor."

Chandler had pulled a bit of vine tendril toward him and sat twisting its spiral about his forefinger.

"That night," went on the girl, "she was wakened by a cry. A faint light glimmered on her ceiling, and she ran to the window whence it seemed to come. Her room was in the turret there—it's mine now—and the curving wall brings one window around so that it almost faces the outside wall of the narrow back corridor. The only window in the corridor is a long, high one, more like a transom than a window.

"No one can see into it unless standing directly above, just as mother did now.

"There was the old man half dragging poor Aaron along the floor of the corridor by the light of a candle shaking in his other hand. Aaron was limp as though already dying, stabbed, my mother thought, because if it had been a pistol she would have heard it—and he was clasping in his arms the lacquered box. Old Sir dropped him on the floor while he set the candle down and opened a trap-door that opens in the corner at the end of the corridor.

"Then he wrested the box from Aaron and shoved and pushed him down through the opening. As he fell, mother said, his arm was thrust back up, the palm open in one last pleading gesture for the treasure he had given his life to guard. She used to see that black open hand in her dreams—"

"But didn't she tell?"

"No, I was born that very night, and she almost died. Afterward she was afraid."

"Surely some one must have suspected."

"Perhaps," agreed Lisa indifferently. "He is terribly feared and hated."

After a pause in which Chandler tried to realize he was just Chandler Reed, a young automobile man who believed in efficiency and other neat maxims as a guide to life, he said: "But what became of the jewelry?"

"Mother never saw it again, but I have seen it often, open on the table in front of him and have watched him hold my great grandmother's ruby up to the light and lick his lips over it. Since I grew up and he has come to hate me, too, he never lets me see him so."

"But what about your mother's people? Why did they stand for all this?"

"There wasn't anybody," answered Lisa. "She was an orphan before she married."

"You poor little thing," Chandler said, trying to put his arm around her again, "you've had a rotten time of it. But, never mind, we'll find a bungalow that's too new for ghosts and leave the old man to enjoy his rubies alone."

But Lisa shuddered away from his embrace with a sigh that was almost a sob.

Chandler wanted to be very gentle with her because of all the things her shrinking soul had been made to stand. He had no wish to hurry her, but a rooted determination to be on hand when she should need him. Not once did he waver in his belief that a happy, normal life was all she needed, not once did he fail to smile at her fears until one cruel night in June.

It was the night following that on which Louis Le Comte was attacked in their offices and left for dead by some burglarious person, presumably the oft-trusted Pork Chop, who simultaneously with the crime had vanished from the haunts of men. What with his natural distress over Louis's critical condition and his efforts to help the police find the criminal, Chandler had had a harassing day, and he reached the end of it feeling seedy to say the least. He had got through his visit to Lisa without adding this tale to her horror-burdened mind, and that was something. They had sat upon the steps talking in whispers as usual, and then Chandler had crossed the street again.

His fellow lodgers were all sleeping and the house was very still when he seated himself for an hour's reading. The book in his hand failed to hold his attention, because he was worried, worried about Louis, of course, and much worried about Lisa—not simply concerning her happiness this time, but about her actual safety alone in the house with that madman.

For some weeks the old man had harbored a delusion that Lisa was trying to get possession of the lacquered box, the one thing in life that he loved. He never left home now even to sit beneath his beloved window in the garage. His fear had become so apparent as to be really funny to Lisa, and she had even laughed in telling Chandler about the clumsy cunning with which he nightly roamed the echoing halls in search of new hiding-places for his treasure.

But Chandler had not laughed and his voice had sounded harsh in his own ears as he had asked, "Do you keep your door locked at night?"

Oh, but she wasn't afraid of Old Sir that way. She knew she was stronger than he—and so did he, as far as that went, and he had long shown a queer sort of physical fear of her.

"But do you lock your door?" Chandler had urged.

"I will after this," she had promised him.

But the young man could not read for thinking of the girl's new danger now that the unscrupulous old creature had this obsession about his treasure. He had murdered to get it, what would he not do now to hold it against the rightful owner, his imagined enemy.

Chandler's thoughts were lurid and overcolored, because he could not forget that Louis was hovering between life and death because he had worked late last night in their transparent office and so tempted fate. There was Lisa asleep in her bed while the cunning old man crept stealthy about the empty house. Avarice is deadly in its craftiness—Louis had not even seen the hand that struck him down. Ah, Lisa, why should you lie thus unprotected night after night within arm's reach of evil?

A voice spoke to him softly as though at his very elbow. "Chandler!"

He started to his feet.

"Chandler!" It was Lisa's voice in the guarded whisper he knew so well, but now it was drowning in waves of fear.

He ran to the window and leaned out in the warm fragrant darkness. The smooth, stiff leaves of the magnolia stroked his cheek.

"I am here in the tree," said the panting voice. "I saw your light, and I didn't want to rouse the household. I need you."

"Wait for me," he told her, and then ran quickly from his room and down the stairs.

She was standing on the ground when he reached her and trembled so that she could scarcely speak. She was unhurt, he

quickly ascertained that, but she clung to him so desperately that a terrible chill drove the blood back into his heart. In that moment he realized what suffering there is in fear and he drained with the girl the very lees of her familiar cup. He felt himself shiver as uncontrollably as Lisa herself.

"What has happened, Lisa?" he implored her.

It was a hot night, and the noise of the locusts in the trees about them was ever afterward confused in Chandler's memory with the sound of Lisa's panting words.

"I hadn't gone to bed," she told him, "it was so hot. I had put out my light and was kneeling on the floor by the window, the window where mother stood that night. I could hear him moving about through the house, but I wasn't afraid. I knew he was just looking for a new place to hide the trinkets. Then I saw a candle down in the corridor. It was moving. It stopped at the end, and everything grew bright. I could see Old Sir quite plainly with the lacquered box in his arm. It was all so distinct that I saw the wrinkles on his face when he stooped to put the candle on the floor by the trap-door." Her voice was growing calmer now, as though she found comfort in telling the details. "I thought how afraid of me he had become if he would dare to hide his treasure below that door. I even smiled as I saw how he trembled and hesitated before lifting the leather latch-string. Then he opened the door and leaned over the blackness with the box in his arm—"

Her voice trailed away into nothingness, and her hand grew icy in Chandler's.

"And then?" he prompted her.

"I saw"—she said *huskily*, and her voice broke piteously—"I saw a hand—a negro's hand, a hand and then the arm reaching up from the dark. The palm was turned upward as though asking for something. When the old man hesitated, the hand shook—shook twice, impatiently. Then he laid the lacquered box on it and—and dropped the door. He slid the bolt and fell on the floor. The candle—" Her speech was lagging again, but the detail seemed important to her so that she prodded her tongue into finishing. "The candle went out."

"Couldn't you have dreamed this, Lisa?" Chandler heard himself begging her.

"I hadn't been to bed," she reminded him.

The young man's brain was in a whirl. With infinite gentleness, he coaxed her to cross the street with him and to go into the strange house that she called home. She begged him desperately not to do it, but he prevailed upon her, talking so much common sense to her that he half persuaded himself it was all a dream she had had there by the window. Indeed, once inside the bare hallway, with the gas lighted, it seemed a foolish thing even to investigate, with old man Carth liable any moment to appear at the turn of the stairs with murder in his eye. They penetrated to the unlighted corridor, Lisa clinging to his arm, and Chandler struck more matches.

"Ah," breathed Lisa, "now, do you see?"

There indeed lay the old man, a tiny heap to have held them all in such terror, there was the overturned and extinguished candle under his hand, and there the trap-door, with its iron bolt pushed, but that was all.

"Are you sure he opened the trap-door?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then," mused Chandler, lighting the candle from the match at its last gasp, "after we pick him up, I shall come back to see if he dropped the box inside."

"Is he dead?" the girl asked when Chandler bent over the little bundle of shabbiness upon the floor.

Chandler nodded. "I think so," he said.

They carried him up-stairs to Lisa's room, for there was no couch or bed down-stairs to receive him, and his own room was farther away. Then they went together to the corner drug-store to telephone for a doctor.

Heart-failure, the doctor called it when he came; and he wanted to know if the old man had had a shock.

"We found him on the floor in the hall beside"—Lisa began; and then, as Chandler looked at her warningly, she finished lamely—"the candle."

When the doctor had gone, promising to send back a woman to spend the rest of the night with Lisa, Chandler wanted to go down to look for the casket of jewelry

below the trap-door, but he did not like to leave Lisa while she clung to her wild terror. Restless, however, he reopened the painful subject. Lisa was calm now, and he thought she might be brought to renounce that demoniac hallucination. Persuasively he offered reason as salve to her unreason, but she only shook her head vehemently.

"But I saw it—a negro's hand with the palm up, extended as if to receive its due. My grandfather saw it plainly. He seemed to—to recognize it. He knew what he had to do. If you could have seen his expression as he gave up that box! No earthly power could have compelled him."

"I don't even see how you can see into that hall from this room," insisted the young man, looking about him in an effort to solve the labyrinthian architecture.

Lisa drew him eagerly toward the inmost window of the rounded room. "Look!" she proved. "There is the outside wall of the corridor just below us. You could see right into the window if there was a light."

As she spoke, a star of light appeared at the farther end of the corridor and threaded its way along the darkness. Instinctively Chandler put his arm about the girl and drew her tense form close to him.

Was he going mad himself?

If a ghost could come after twenty-two years to claim its reprisal, could not the newly released soul of avarice return to recover its treasure? As the moving point of light became stationary and flared up into a flame that lighted the corridor end, he half expected to see the ghost of yonder old man take form before his eyes.

But the glow of the candle revealed, instead, the bandanna-crowned head of a negro woman and lower, in her hand, a tray of edibles.

"Why," exclaimed Lisa, "what can Doanie be doing here at this time of night? She went home after she washed the supper dishes."

The woman set both candle and tray upon the floor to give both hands to the rusty iron bolt. Then she lifted the door and bent over the dark opening in the floor. Out of the blackness came the forearm of a negro, the palm extended as though to receive its long-expected due. The woman was a little slow in her movements, and the hand made a gesture of impatience. Then, when it had received the tray, a second hand came up to steady the load, and then a cautious ebony face set in a missing-link head appeared as well.

"It's Doanie's husband," said Lisa.

"It's Pork Chop, the brute that knocked poor Louis out and disappeared," said Chandler grimly. "Let's go and telephone the police. They'll be crazy about getting him. They have said all along that he couldn't be far away because they found the car he stole stranded with a blow-out a few blocks from here."

"You go and telephone," Lisa urged excitedly. And then, with a new-born heroism, she added capably, "I'd better stay to see that he doesn't get away with the lacquered box."

PRAYER FOR COURAGE

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

OH Lord,
I do not seek
Thy throne to ask Thee
That I may be meek,
Long-suff'ring, patient;
No—I beg Thy might,
To give me strength
To battle,
Aye, for Right.

Pug-ly-gug-lo

by Joseph Pettee Copp

Author of "Allatambour," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WHEN ex-Sergeant Alonzo Zuriber, onetime member of the Guam Constabulary, was asked by Captain Jack Flanders to visit the neighboring island of Tabu and learn what mischief two white men, who were reported to be there, were up to, he hesitated; he claimed to be a peace-loving man, and had been married only a few months. But the influence of his old commander was potent, and he accepted the mission. Alonzo, who tells the story, left the office and found his Chimoro friend, Urido, in desperate combat with a native as big as himself. The only explanation that Urido would give was that his opponent was "no good." Alonzo forced a truce upon the fighters and took them aboard his father-in-law's schooner, where he was surprised to learn that his friend spoke the stranger's language.

With Urido acting as interpreter Alonzo learned that the stranger's name was Pug-ly-gug-lo; that he was the only son of King Gig-Gig, of Tabu; that the village of his father had been attacked by the warriors of the outlaw chief, Biggo, and had been saved by the arrival of two white men, Selig Bremen and Gustav Reiker, with a machine gun. These men had been rewarded by the king with the gift of valuable pearls and the freedom of the island, where, in the past, white men had not been allowed to stay. They had used the privilege to stir up trouble among the people; there had been an uprising, and King Gig-Gig and his beautiful daughter, Princess Pylanpin, had been made prisoners. Pug-ly-gug-lo had escaped in a canoe. During the interview Alonzo had noticed that there was bad blood between the two natives, but could get no explanation.

Taking the two men with him, Alonzo, disguised as a native warrior, sailed for Tabu in his father-in-law's ship. The three men landed in an old whale-boat, which was wrecked in the surf, lending color to their story of shipwreck. Pug-ly-gug-lo then left them, with the understanding that they were to meet later. Alonzo and Urido were made prisoners by Bremen, beaten, and taken to the town of Gutto Tabu, where they were confined in a hut near the king's. Urido saved Pylanpin from insult by Bremen, and that night she eluded the guards and came to their hut.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE OF TABU'S GEMS.

PYLANPIN came in fearlessly, noiselessly and without any false modesty or sense of impropriety to say her nay. With her she had brought a bucket of the giant bamboo, it was about the size of a long, round coco can, and a smaller one, which held water.

The water she handed to me at once, as she had heard the order about no more water. Urido and I made short shrift of the refreshing draft.

As soon as she was accustomed to the light she went about the errand of mercy that she had come on. Starting with me, she had me turn my back, then, dipping her hands in the big bamboo pail, she brought them forth, dripping with some kind of oil, and smeared it over my raw wounds.

The concoction was cool. It felt good. Her touch was so light that a brushing butterfly could hardly have been any gentler.

Upon the second application more than coolness was apparent—some potent drug in the oil worked, for after a slight smarting the pains from my cuts gradually ceased. I sighed with relief, relaxed, and felt like going to sleep. But until Pylanpin was acquainted with the fact that her brother was on the island, sleep was out of the question.

She went over to Urido, and she was as silent as a sphinx as she gave him the

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same treatment that she had given me. Not a word did she speak, not a move did she make that was not necessary to the anointing of our backs. She worked away, bathing Urido's back with the pain-killer, using it sparingly, yet plentifully enough, to allay the pain.

I might say here that later I tried to get the formula of the oil, and the only satisfaction I got was from an old witch doctor of the Tabians, who told me that the base was coconut oil, then she added liquor distilled from plant leaves, but just what plant she refused to divulge — it was a trade-secret with her, only to be told to her successor.

Pylanpin, being with us, did not seem the least bit out of place—she came as a nurse, and when her merciful errand was finished, I knew she would leave as she had come. Her coming clandestinely was merely a necessity brought about by the conditions controlling her own as well as our status on the island.

When Urido let out a deep sigh of comfortable satisfaction, she quietly picked up her pail and started for the hole in the back wall of our hut.

"Pylanpin!" I said, and I tried to add as much of dignity and authority in my tone as I could without raising my voice above a whisper.

I sat in the doorway, with my back to the light of the bonfire which burned brightly in the plaza. She was in the center of the little circular room.

She paused—a bit startled, it would seem, at my tone, as well as the seeming familiarity with her name. I presume she was wondering how I knew it.

Then she turned and faced me. The flickering flares from the fire lit her face. She had a quizzical expression, but not one of alarm. For a native girl she had remarkable poise.

She made some quiet response in Tabian. Urido came over to my side to interpret.

"What do you wish?" she said.

"To talk with you a moment and tell you that Pug-ly-gug-lo walks the woods of Tabu!" I said.

I watched her closely as Urido interpreted for me. The expression on her face changed for only a moment. She was startled, but she had great control of herself. She was suspicious of us, and would not give any sign that might in any way betray her inner fears.

"Why does the stranger lie to me?" she asked with feeling.

"Pug-ly-gug-lo came with us from Guam in a big ship, and we came ashore in a small boat, which we wrecked on purpose. He went into the woods and we came here," I said, trying to make my tone ring true. It is hard to carry on such a conversation in whispers.

"Why did you come?" she asked, as she yet doubted me.

"To help rid you and your people of the great sickness that has come to you," I answered, and she understood. I did not dare even whisper Bremen's name, for fear the walls might have listening ears.

Yet, if I had known what that fiend Bremen had planned for Urido's, and my future I might have yelled my opinions to the housetops without materially easing our lot or making it much worse.

"May the gods of Ugluee help you!" she said fervently. And I could see that she was gaining confidence. "How will you do it? The sickness is bad, and has a strong hold on the fears of the people," she said.

"I am here to learn how bad the sickness is and to make a remedy," I told her.

"What is Pug-ly-gug-lo doing?" she asked, speaking the name of her brother with a tone of clinging affection that touched me.

"He is learning what he can from the people of the jungle, offering sacrifice to Ugluee and trying to get the help of Biggo," I said.

And I might pause to explain that Ugluee is the native name for the immense, active volcano occupying the center of the island, and, like most simple people, these blacks worship the god of force that is supposed to control not only the fiery pit but the destinies of the whole island and the people on it.

"From Ugluee help might come if we can quell his anger, and I do not know what we have done to deserve his wrath—but

from Biggo, look for naught but treachery!" And she said the last with such bitterness that I realized the depth of the harsh feeling between the two tribes.

Then to my great surprise and before I could make reply, Urido rose from the floor beside me, and, standing proudly erect, much like a big chief, he delivered himself of this: "Biggo will help—I, Urido, promise it!" And he looked with quiet dignity at the girl before us.

I knew that Urido had taken a fancy to her, but now I knew that he was in love with her, for how else would a man make such a rash promise?

She started to laugh scornfully, but something in Urido's manner, quiet and dignified in his serious attitude, checked her.

"I do not know you, Stranger Urido, but I am sure, from your tone, that if you are able to bring such a surprising thing to be, you will do so; and I thank you for the people of Gutto Tabu as well as for myself."

As she said it she looked searchingly at Urido, as if trying to place in her mind something familiar about him. But she was at a disadvantage, for she looked against the light.

To say that I was surprised at this outburst of Urido's is to put it mildly. It seemed to me that he was taking on a mighty big contract without doing any figuring as to where he would come out of it.

But if he wanted to play the game to the limit, in his eagerness to win Pylanpin's favor, it was up to him, so long as he did not bungle up our real plans. But I figured that he was due for a tremendous drop some day in the future.

"Where did you learn Tabu, Stranger Urido?" Pylanpin asked bluntly.

"I was here when I was a boy. I have been on ships." Urido gave answer in what I thought was an evasive manner.

"You speak it well," was her only comment.

"Tell me, please, what the sickness has done to the people since Pug-ly-gug-lo left?" I asked.

And just then the irritable voice of Bremen came to our ears. It seemed to be very close. He spoke in Tabu.

"Listen!" Pylanpin said, and held up her hand for us to be quiet. "Every evening at this time he comes to my father, the king, and talks thus." And Pylanpin turned as if to leave us.

Urido and I listened, he whispering what was said for me in English.

"Come out of that corner, you black devil!" came the rasping order of Bremen.

"Yes," a deep, dignified voice sounded in answer, and it made me more angry at Bremen for his insulting tone when the black king could so well keep himself under control. And I could well imagine the kind of a man the owner of that deep voice might be, a man whose pride was being dragged through hell, but whose spirit was unbroken.

"My father, the king," Pylanpin spoke in a whisper, but the pride in her voice was unmistakable. Then she slipped quietly away out of the hole in the rear wall and went back to her father's side.

"Come now, you black fellow, we want to know where you have put those pearls!" Bremen said in a harsh voice.

"Of what pearls does the white man speak?" came the deep-throated question from King Gig-Gig.

"You damned dog, you! You know damn well what pearls I mean! The ones you have made me come here every night for the last month to try and find out where they are."

"Of what pearls does the white man speak?" Again the calm voice repeated the question. I marveled that the old king could keep such an even temper through the insulting ordeal. Urido chuckled.

"The royal pearls, damn you, that are spoken of in every port in the Pacific!" Bremen became more angry.

"The royal pearls of the Tabu are not for Bremen," boldly declared the king.

Urido chuckled again as he interpreted for me.

"Good for King Gig-Gig!" I commented. I could hear Bremen give a snort of rage at the retort courageous, and I could hear him sucking the air in between clenched teeth as he tried to think up some

scathing words to express his inner passionate heat.

"Gig-Gig!" And Bremen paused, as if to regain some control of himself before continuing: "I have come to you every night for a month to get from you the whereabouts of the hidden royal pearls of Tabu. Each night you have given me the same answer.

"Now I have also threatened several punishments for this insolence, but as yet I have leniently held my hand, hoping that I would not have to resort to violence with you, and that you would come to your senses about telling me where they are without my having to force you to. But again you refuse, and I must go ahead with measures that will make you tell, whether you will or not."

Bremen stopped to let this speech soak in.

"I have spoken!" was the quiet answer of the old man.

This complacence of the king did more to gall Bremen than anything else, I knew, for it was the very thing which he lacked most.

"King Gig-Gig, listen! To-morrow we go on a trip inland to this mountain Ugluee, for I hear strange tales of hot steam, mud and water that blows out of the ground. Possibly a bath in this cooking heat may change your mind for you. At least we may but try!"

Bremen paused again for a moment.

"And as for you, girl," he said, evidently speaking to Pylanpin, "get your things together, for you move into my hut to-night!" Then I heard Bremen stamp out of the hut next door.

Urido, who was close to me, stiffened up at Bremen's last remark, and I could hear his breath come and go in quick gasps.

Then I heard a woman's voice speaking very low, indistinctly. I knew that it was Pylanpin talking to her father. He spoke in answer, and we could hear his words.

"Bremen is as the snake in the swamp—you free him from a trap and he turns treacherously and stings the friendly hand!" Then there was quiet.

Urido walked restlessly up and down. His hands would clench and unclench, as if he longed to have a hold on Bremen's flabby neck, and there to sink his fingers in—in deep to the bone. And of a sudden I realized that I was doing the same thing.

"So help me, Urido—but I think we're going to have a good vacation—what do you think?" I asked.

"Much play will we have," Urido said, demonstrating with appropriate motions of his long arms, as if he were getting into a fight. "Much work!" And he sat down beside me, with his head resting on his hand, which position, I understood, to mean heavy thought—which was what he meant by work.

"Yes, Urido, we've got to use our heads, for this duck Bremen's a shrewd one. But what does he mean to do to King Gig-Gig?" I asked, to see if my man had any ideas regarding the fate of the old man next door.

"I think Bremen one two-tongued snake—like King Gig-Gig say. He say one thing—he do another," Urido made answer. And his idea matched my own.

A scraping of something against the supports of our hut caused me to peer down into the darkness under our floor, to see what was going on down there. The pigs which slept there grunted as if disturbed, and I could hear them moving restlessly about.

But the thing that attracted my attention was an ungainly, live something, bigger than the hogs, that was wriggling from this sty out from under the floor-props toward the next hut, where Pylanpin and King Gig-Gig lived.

I looked through the slit in the bambo wall, to see what this animal might be. With a grunt and wheeze it stood up when clear of the hut-underpinnings, and the darkness made it hard for me to distinguish just what it was.

But an extra bright flare from the plaza fire gave me a chance, and I saw that it was a man. It was Reiker.

"What is it?" Urido asked.

"That big, fat slob, Reiker, down in our pig-sty, along with his own kind!" I said.

"What did he want?" Urido asked.

But I didn't answer him, for I was busy with my own thoughts. I wondered if he

had been there when Pylanpin was with us. Although we only spoke in whispers, that I doubted if he could hear, yet we may have been a little indiscreet in the height of our wrath after Bremen's visit to the hut next door.

"The play starts!" Urido muttered in answer to his own question. And from the way he said it I really believe the big fellow was glad. I admit that I did not feel so confident as he seemed to.

Next we heard Bremen's clatter.

"Hello, where's that girl of yours?" he yelled. Very likely he had sneaked up on the king's hut very quietly, then bobbed into the door before Pylanpin had a chance to get to her father's side where she seemed to want to be when an interview was taking place.

"Get her, for I want her to hear what I have to tell you this time—it might interest her," Bremen shouted coarsely.

There was no response, but I heard some one moving about, and supposed that a search was being made for Pylanpin.

"I am here," I heard her musical voice say.

"Oh! here you are—are you?" Bremen sneered. "I thought you might be off on another visit to your friends next door." I could hear his sneering snicker as he said it.

If he had been watching Urido and me instead of the king and Pylanpin next door, Bremen might have seen some real effect from his speech. Urido grabbed my arm and squeezed tight.

"The play starts!" he whispered in repetition of what he had said just a few moments before. And as if of the same thought Bremen said:

"They think that they will have much play here on Tabu, and that I am a shrewd one, and that I am a snake-in-the-grass, the same as you, too. Your girl, there, seems soft on them, for she was just over calling." And again the fellow stopped as if to let this news sink in.

I could see very clearly that Reiker had heard the talk that Urido and I had foolishly, in unguarded fashion, had, after Pylanpin left us. Our talk with her had been in whispers, and I thanked my lucky stars that it was so.

"Who might the poor fellows be who are in your unmerciful hands?" King Gig-Gig asked.

"Two men who were wrecked on my beach this morning in an old boat that they said had brought them from Guam," Bremen said.

"I have no friends from Guam," quickly spoke up the old, dark-skinned warrior. And I knew that he said it so that we might not suffer from any reflex harshness that might otherwise be directed against him.

"Ha-ha!" Bremen laughed in disbelief. "You won't own them, huh? Well, they're goin' to take the trip with us to-morrow, and maybe you'll make their acquaintance in a manner that 'll make you all *warm* friends," he said, with an accent on the "warm" that was unmistakable.

CHAPTER VII.

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL.

URIDO and I sat listening, after the retreating footsteps of the shuffling Bremen and his wheezing partner had gone from the hut of King Gig-Gig and disappeared toward the back part of the village.

Murmurs of conversation between the king and Pylanpin reached our ears, but the words were unintelligible. Occasional grunts of surprise or disapproval from the old man sounded to me as if the talk was of importance, and I could imagine Pylanpin telling him what she had heard from Urido and me. Soon all was quiet except for the catlike stepping of our barefoot sentry out in front.

Then I heard a little rustle from the hut next door, a muffled noise, as if a girl sobbed and cautious movements as of some one trying to be very quiet while they slipped out of the hut.

But I could make out nothing more. I guessed that Pylanpin had gone to join her brother.

I went over to where Urido sat calmly in the doorway.

"I guess it's about time we made a move!" I whispered in his ear.

Without a word he merely raised his hand and pointed out of the door. I looked as he directed. In the center of the plaza a group of men stood around the dying embers of the fire, and in the darkness they were nothing but a disturbing blur.

Something was thrown on the fire as I watched, and a blaze sprung into being. This light fell on a moving column of men that I had not seen before.

Fully a hundred armed men were marching in double file close to the huts and coming our way. They were not over fifty feet from where we were imprisoned. The flickering flame spurts glittered from their shining spears and oil-rubbed shields of shark skin.

"Too late!" I exclaimed.

"Too late!" echoed Urido.

Even as I spoke the marching men turned in behind the hut next door and went around the rear in an encircling movement, including our hut. Extra guards had been posted. We were effectively locked in.

Urido looked up at me, and in the half-light from the fire I could see an anxious expression on his face. He nodded his head toward Pylanpin's hut.

The same thought had come to me. Had Pylanpin made good her escape? We listened intently for some sound from the black guards who were on post in the rear.

All was quiet. After a tense five minutes I breathed a sigh of relief. Urido got up and went to the hole in the back wall of our hut to peer out.

I knew that he would be unable to see anything. He came back soon, and I wondered if he was satisfied that the girl had escaped.

"I go to sleep!" he remarked in a matter-of-fact tone as he lay down on the floor. I knew that he felt as I did—that Pylanpin had made good her escape.

Urido slept almost as soon as he was stretched out. I lay down, and, thanks to Pylanpin's tender ministerings to my back, I was fairly comfortable, but I admit that I did not get the heavy slumber that Urido seemed to enjoy.

To him the morrow was another day—why worry about it? I did not hold my lease on life quite so stoically. Thoughts of the warm time that we were to receive in the morning kept entering my mind, and it was a fight for me to rid my head of them and doze.

At sun-up we were rudely roused—and I did feign sleep for the benefit of our guards. The burly blacks roughly shook us as we lay on the floor.

They had no particular care for our sore backs. And the effects of the drug in Pylanpin's oil which had lulled the hurt was worn off so that every move was a reminder of the unmerciful lashing that we had been submitted to the day before.

After being given a bowl of water, one of rice and fish, and a word to hustle through with our eating, we were left alone for the moment. Then Bremen himself appeared.

"We're going for a little walk this morning," he announced with what I imagined he tried to make a pleasant smile. He seemed to feel good—I presume the prospects of the delightful day he had planned for us made him happy. But I wished that he wouldn't look that way—his face was bad enough to have to look at when he was natural, or in bad humor, without this added, unnatural, distortion of a smile.

And I believe the man did not know that we had overheard his talk with King Gig-Gig the evening before, for he seemingly was trying to be pleasant to us. The hypocrite!

"To-day we walk with a king," he said in an attempt at levity, and laughed raspingly at his own joke. "Kings are men who, by superior powers of cruelty, teach other men to fear them.

"In other words, they are greater beasts, thus greater men. They have learned how to will power, as I have, and passed beyond good and evil, as I have!" he added.

I was too surprised at this startling statement to make any answer.

"The master has told us in his great book how it is done—I am a ready student and an able disciple of the master—he is gone, God rest his soul!" and it sounded as a blasphemy to my ears to hear this fellow ask the blessing for his departed *master*.

"I take his place!" he egotistically proclaimed. "I have willed to power here—

I am the power here!" was his final speech. Then we were ordered to get up and follow him.

From our hut we were only marched a few steps to the hut next door, where we were ordered to stand while Bremen went in.

The plaza was crowded with black people—men, women, and children stood solemnly waiting for the will of Bremen to be declared. They were all curious, half-frightened, and did not crowd the space kept clear by a row of guards, rather they edged back to make more room. None seemed anxious to be in the front row.

Therefore there was a wavelike movement caused by those in front edging back like receding water on a beach and those behind constantly pushing forward as an oncoming breaker, to curl, turn, and retreat.

Facing the mass of natives, menacing them, was the automatic gun. With awe they looked at it, with dread they backed away.

I could hear Bremen talking in loud tone inside the hut.

"Well, Gig-Gig, this is the day we take the trip I told you of, unless you've changed your mind and will tell me where you have hidden the pearls?" Bremen asked in a coaxing voice.

"Of what pearls does the white man speak?" came the booming tones of the king's voice, and following it I could hear the stamp of impatience that came from Bremen. I nudged Urido. Urido nudged me, and gave an emphatic "H-m!" of approval.

"Very well, Gig-Gig, you continue to be obstinate, I see! I have a remedy for such obstinacy. Come, get a move on you, we're going on a little trip, and I would not have you miss any part of it for the world!" There was a sarcastic twang in this speech that boded evil.

"I come," was the dignified answer. And, somehow, just how I do not know, the king slipped ahead of Bremen and came out of the royal hut with a slow, majestic tread, while Bremen wrathfully followed at his heels.

I nudged Urido again, and he grunted gleefully, for he recognized the advantage the king had gained in thus leading the way from the hut out before his people, followed by the usurper.

The people saw their rightful king. He was a well-favored man, standing tall and broad like his son Pug-ly-gug-lo, who had breadth greater than ordinary men. His skin was a deep tan rather than black, and his features were strong, his jaw massive, his eyes wide placed, and his forehead high, while his nose was not flattened like those of the common people, but shapely and with a pronounced Roman curve, and not a concavity in the bridge, as is common among islanders of the Pacific.

His hair was black, bushy and crinkly, standing well out from his head. In it he wore a fanlike ornament of five monster oyster shells, with the pearl side to the front. On his chest was tattoed what I took to be a representation of the volcano Ugluee. This was the tribal sign, I learned afterward.

Gig-Gig paused a moment on the top step and looked out over his people. A look of pity was on his face. A murmur of welcome and affection went through the throng.

The king heard, and, apparently remembering the plight he had brought his people to, his head hung in shame, and he came down the other steps with his head bowed.

Bremen heard the pleased hum of the Tabians at the sight of their king, and he roared petulantly: "Be quiet!"

For an answer he got an angry growl from the crowd. He did not at first seem to know just how to take it. It was good to hear, for me, for it meant that Urido and I had a chance to work upon this natural sentiment of affection for the old king, if we got free to work that chance.

I meant to take advantage of Bremen's weak hold upon the hearts of the people, for I contend that it's a man's heart, more than his fears, that controls his loyalty.

Bremen's indecision caused a demonstration. Some of the people saw his uncertainty, and a cat-call came from somewhere among the black sea of upturned faces. Then more calls and some jeers. The sentiment was fast taking hold of the blacks, and, turning, I could see the crowd

begin to sway as some of the more restless spirits, not in the front line, pushed forward uneasily.

The jeers changed to angry shouts, and when the voices were becoming a roar in a chorus of nearly the whole assembled multitude, and the first line was slowly but surely being pushed forward so as to be closing in on us, who stood in the clearing in front of the royal hut, Bremen awoke to his danger.

He jumped from the step on which he had been standing and rushed to the automatic gun. It was but the work of a second for him to throw open the box that hung in the tripod and take therefrom a belt of cartridges.

This act had the desired effect upon the crowd. Their dread of the gun, their lack of a leader, and the spontaneity of their sentiment caused them to cool down as suddenly as they had roused up.

When this calmness was restored I expected to see Bremen leave the gun satisfied. He continued to load.

With the belt in place, and the piece cocked, he turned the muzzle on the tightly packed crowd. The expression on his face was diabolical. He was in a frenzy—of fear, I think.

And when he had the gun trained on the now quiet people who stood looking at him awestruck, and with dread written on their faces in expressions of horror, I, indeed, expected him to call it quits. He paused, and a craven grin bared his teeth.

Then, squinting through the sights, Bremen pressed the trigger.

Pit! pit! pit! pit! pit! the gun spit forth death and destruction. Bremen's hand jumped up and down with the kick of the gun. At each kick ten negroes, each behind the other, wilted.

Each kick meant a bullet. Each bullet went through at least ten human beings at that close range and with a target so closely packed. Six hundred bullets a minute could be fired from that gun.

I sickened as these thoughts went through my head, and, as I watched, paralyzed for the moment by the fiendishness of this thing he was doing.

Then I jumped forward. I cared not for the manner of my going. So that I got there in time to put a stop to this cruel slaughter. I hit Bremen about shoulder-high as he sat on the gun tripod. I did it by diving straight out at him.

We went down together in a heap. The gun fell on top of us. Bremen was cursing. I was clawing to get free of the hot gun.

I knew what to expect next. Bremen had his pistol at his hip—I was unarmed. I got the hot iron barrel from next my back and an arm around Bremen's middle just as he, cursing and struggling, drew the pistol from its holster.

"Damn traitor, you!" he was hissing. "I'll learn you what traitors get from me!" and he swung his hand around to bring the muzzle of his weapon against my side.

But he never fired, for I showed him a trick at wrestling that I had learned when I was more active on the Constabulary. My hand that was around his waist went up searching for his pistol hand, my head and shoulders went down, and as my fingers closed around those which gripped the weapon, I heaved with my shoulder in his side, pulled with my hand, and he went spinning through the air like a top flung from a string.

He was light and I threw him far.

He yet had the pistol, but before he had time to collect himself I was atop of him, pinning the weapon to the ground and squeezing the hand that held it until I felt the bones crack.

He screamed with pain. He let go of the pistol. I had him fair. I was going to finish him while the chance was mine.

"Hands up!"

The cold menace of the command made shivers run down my spine. I looked to see who ordered. Reiker had come upon the scene.

He stood on the top step of the royal hut with a rifle at his shoulder. The rifle was aimed at me. He had seemingly very steady nerves. I certainly was at a disadvantage. He had not fired for fear of getting Bremen.

For once I was glad Bremen was there, for that fat man surely had a disconcertingly steady hold on that rifle. I saw Urido standing in the ranks of the stupid

guards before the hut. His hands were restless, and he was edging toward the fellow Reiker. It would be suicidal for him to try to do anything.

"Urido!" I called, and it was enough, for Reiker was lowering his gun. My man went back to his place. Bremen rose from the ground. He was purple with rage and couldn't speak. He sizzled like a bad firecracker.

But he didn't shoot. He only laughed unpleasantly, and in a manner that led me to believe that he anticipated a speedy revenge. I went back to my place by Urido and looked out over the plaza.

Ten times ten black forms lay on the ground, and my heart bled for those left alive, who yet knelt by their loved ones, very likely hoping that a merciful bullet would come and take them, too. The most of the people had fled to their homes. Our hundred guards yet remained.

Selig Bremen replaced his pistol in its holster, then he turned on the man who was captain of the guards and kicked, cuffed, and cursed him for not watching his prisoners well enough to prevent this attack on him. All of the blacks in the company were trembling with dread anticipation.

Bremen had the captain seized and his hands were tied, then Bremen yelled for his rattan stick, and when it came in the hands of an eager guard Bremen worked off the extreme heat of his wrath in flaying the poor chap. The guards had really been as much awed and paralyzed by the gun-play as the victims, for they were no more used to it.

As I stood looking out over the sad sight in the plaza I felt a touch on my shoulder and, turning, I faced King Gig-Gig. He had tears in his eyes, and some not yet dry shone on his dark cheeks.

Without a word he took my face between his two massive palms and rubbed his nose against mine. Then he looked at me affectionately before going back to his place in the line.

Urido was uneasy. Finally he sidled up to me and said: "Good work, friend Alonzo!" That was a lot for Urido to say, under the circumstances.

I wondered what punishment was to be served out to us for the outbreak. Reiker had come down from the step of the royal hut, and stood a few paces from me, with his rifle carried at the ready.

I noticed that he was well prepared for action. Across his shoulder and over his chest hung a cartridge belt with shells for the heavy rifle, while from his hips hung an automatic pistol, and pouches of ammunition, for it bulged the belt around his waist.

Now that I had time to think, I realized that if my act had not been so precipitate, Urido and I might easily have gained the mastery of these two unskilled usurpers. But it all happened so quickly that neither Urido nor the king had a chance to grasp my intent when I hurled myself forward on Bremen.

It was an opportunity gone—another would come, I hoped, and I would surely keep a sharp lookout for it. But none so easy came our way again.

Bremen, breathless from the exertion of flaying the black captain, ordered him secured with a thong about the wrists, and that he should be taken along with us. Then he turned to me.

An ironical leer played about his mouth and a wicked gleam shone from his eyes. He had apparently formulated some plan for my punishment. And from what I had heard of his philosophy, I had no doubt of the diabolical nature of what would come my way.

"Fellow," he began, speaking slowly in English, "I'm goin' to learn you to go against my will. Do you know, fellow, you don't have the look of a native and you speak English too damned well.

"You're a white man. You've come here to interfere with my rightful discipline of my slaves. You're another one of them fellows what makes a play about other people's rights, I suppose.

"Bah! You're all wrong. I'm goin' to learn you that a fellow's rights is only what he makes them. You've butted into my affairs with an idea that you're upholding these here people's rights—well, I'm goin' to learn you that you're off on the wrong foot, bo!

"And I'll learn these folks, what's my slaves, what happens when such as you cross my will—they'll remember what I learn 'em!"

Although he was pale with the rage that was consuming him, he spoke with a calmness that comes to some men as a sort of second wind. However, his voice frequently choked from the ferment within.

"First—whether I'm a native or not—I try to be a man!" I said, meeting his eye and trying to hold his gaze. But his eyes dropped, for he could not look straight at me.

"Bla-bla—" He started to say something, but his tongue could not seem to frame anathemas fast enough to keep pace with the angry thoughts that must have been rushing through his brain. He turned away and walked toward Reiker, standing with his back turned toward me for a moment, while, as I figured, he was trying to regain control of his speech.

Then he said something to Reiker in a low tone, and that ungainly brute nodded assent. Dropping his rifle in the hollow of his arm, Reiker stepped back a few paces to where he might cover us prisoners from the rear.

Bremen mounted the mahogany blocks in front of the royal hut and shouted some order in Tabu. Ten of the guards detached themselves from the company around us and went into the town.

Shortly after that the villagers again began to appear, timidly and with fear. From all of the streets emptying into the plaza people came. They came unwillingly, driven in by the guards.

Urido explained that Bremen had ordered that the people of the town be brought to the plaza to hear him speak. When the plaza was again crowded and all of the inhabitants seemed present, Bremen harangued them. Urido whispered the sense of the speech in my ear.

"Black people," began this fiend; "you have seen what happens when my anger is aroused—remember. You have seen a man attack me when I was delivering a just punishment. He would oppose my will. He shall be punished. You are all ordered to follow and see that punishment.

"Five pearl divers refused to go out on the reef at my bidding and bring me back pearls. They would go against my superior will—they shall be punished.

"And you who dive for pearls shall go out on the reef to-morrow—and wo unto him who comes back empty-handed—for you shall remember the punishment of these five.

"Black slaves, you have heard me speak—obey!" And Bremen climbed down from the mahogany step.

From a neighboring street the five mutinous pearl divers were brought forth, each with his hands bound behind him. They were a sorry-looking lot. The welts on their black, stalwart backs and the broken scabs showed stronger than words that the punishment they had already received had not been light. They were marched to a place in the procession behind us.

Finally we were ordered to march. I wondered where this day's end would find me.

I wondered what my punishment would be. I'm glad, now, that I did not know what was ahead of me—just over the mountain.

CHAPTER VIII.

UGLUEE.

WE passed through the village as we had entered, but at the clearing a different path was taken. A general direction toward the rising mountain slope was kept.

Soon after we were in the dense shade of the jungle the ground rose perceptibly before us. As we went up I looked back, and through a clear space in the trees below I could see the black people following. Some were yet in the town, which was plainly visible, stretched out on the lowlands. The procession was at least a half-mile long.

Urido, the king, and I walked together, with a special line of guards on either side of us. Urido walked between the king and me.

Without turning my head I spoke to my companion in a low tone—low enough so I thought that I would not attract the at-

tention of the guards or Bremen, who was only ten paces ahead of us, stalking along by himself.

"Tell the king I think his village a pretty place," I said.

Urido interpreted, and the talk was done so quietly that I could hardly tell that they were doing more than breathing hard.

"He says he's glad if the white man likes it," Urido told me in English. And at the words, "white man," I glanced in surprise at my interpreter. He was smiling at my astonishment.

"You may fool other white men, friend Alonzo, but not the real natives!" Urido explained. "He says he wishes it had been you who had come to help against Biggo instead of Bremen," he went on.

"I wish it might have been me!" I exclaimed sincerely. "Ask him how Bremen got control." I wanted the king's version. Urido was quite a while getting this information.

"I am getting old. I like peace. I like not the bloodshed and angers of war. I do not like quarrels or unpleasantness. I am getting old, and did not know how old until Bremen took my place.

"I should have made my son king. He is young. He is strong. He has a good head. He is brave. He spoke of just this that we now see—I did not listen.

"Because I did not like unpleasantness, and Bremen was our guest, I would not put him out. Now my people suffer. They shall not suffer long. I have a plan. I would have done something to-day, but my daughter, Pylanpin, told me that Pug-ly-gug-lo is here.

"She also told me Urido promises help from Biggo. It is hard to believe that Biggo will help. But I believe Urido. He has but one tongue, and it is straight.

"I told my daughter that I would wait until she had gone to see Pug-ly-gug-lo and come back to me."

This was told me through Urido by the king.

"What is this plan that he speaks of, Urido?" I asked.

"He won't tell. He says it is the last resort, and that he has given his word to Pylanpin that he won't do it till he hears from her—unless the people really need it before." Urido gazed grimly ahead as he said it.

"What?" I exclaimed. "Well, the stubborn old cuss! Here we are marching to some little prearranged hell that this fiend Bremen has prepared for us, and he won't carry out a plan that he knows will put a stop to Bremen— Damn!" I ejaculated explosively.

But I had sense enough to keep it in whispers.

"He has spoken!" Urido said, without again speaking to the old king.

"But can't he see that we are in need of anything he can do to save us—right now?" I asked.

Again Urido answered without referring to Gig-Gig.

"It is his people he is to save—not us," was his consoling reply.

And I felt the truth in Urido's statement. I looked at him in surprise, for it seemed that I was learning a great deal about my man Urido that I had not known before. He was developing into quite an authoritative sort of a chap in the environment of Tabu.

I had known him all my life, but this was the first time that I had seen him take quite such a thoughtful view of life and things around him.

"Ask him when he intends to carry out his plan." I spoke rather sharply to Urido, for I was impatient at the king's obstinacy.

Urido told the king what I had said, and they had another long talk, which seemed serious. Finally Urido spoke to me.

"He says that the time is not yet. He says that Pug-ly-gug-lo shall have a chance to get rid of the intruder, and only as a last resort shall he, King Gig-Gig, take a hand and work his plan."

And that was all the satisfaction that I could get. The worst of it was that Urido seemed to side with the old man. I hoped that something would turn up that would make our prospects look more propitious than they did right then.

I had never felt quite so much in bad. And possibly I was the more put out because it was directly by my actions that

Urido and I were absolutely in the power of Bremen.

I was about to say more in an effort to get the old man's plan explained so that we might at least judge of the plausibility of it, when I had to keep quiet, for Bremen dropped back and walked beside me.

"Fellow," he said, speaking to me, "what is your nationality? You are certainly no Tabian, and you speak English so well that I am in doubt if you are Filipino," he said.

I thought a moment, and finally decided that it was useless to try and keep my nationality entirely in the dark, for I thought his suspicions might lead him into more deviltry than true knowledge. I didn't know Bremen even then.

"I am an American citizen," I told him.

"Ah! I had suspected as much," he said, as if affirming an inner thought. "It is the American so-called democratic idea that is the curse of the people of the world. I know whereof I speak, for I am an American citizen, too," he said with an unpleasant laugh.

"Who made you leave?" I couldn't withstand the temptation to ask.

He looked sharply at me from the corner of his eye, and a vindictive scowl came over his face. I had landed upon a sore spot, but I seemingly looked straight ahead, as if I didn't realize that I had asked an insulting question. And I tried not to let my satisfaction show on my face.

"I left at my own desire," he said with such alacrity and with so much bitterness in his voice that I knew his desire had been influenced by some outside forces that he was not master of. "I had enough of American *independence* that hinders real development.

"Freedom! Bah! There is less real freedom in America than in any other country in the world. There is no country where all natural impulses are so squelched," and he muttered to himself over some fancied grievance.

"Possibly your *good* intentions were misunderstood?" I asked, to lead him on.

"Good intentions!" and he fairly yelled it at me. "What do you call good intentions? To bend to the wishes of everybody else and suppress every natural desire of your own? The same as Americans want one to do? Tommy-rot!"

He was getting well warmed up, and I kept quiet that he might incriminate himself as far as he liked.

"We hear of greed, lust, selfishness—there are none such — they're all words coined by that damnable softening of the human race brought about by the curse, Christianity. They're all natural, strong impulses of the inner man which must be allowed expression.

"All impulses are good, no matter what they may be, and they must find expression—let them out, act them, don't suppress them. This world is bedridden with maudlin sentiment. Men are getting feminine.

"But there is a race of red-blooded men coming, like me, who will recognize the phenomena of inner impulse, and, like the powerful men of old, they will allow such self-expression free rein."

Bremen was the first radical of this type that I had ever met, for my little world of Guam held only good Americans or bad Chimoros — and bad Chimoros don't last long. I was interested to find out just how vile the man's thoughts might be.

"Yes?" I said in a tone that I judged would be provocative.

"This golden rule stuff sickens me—it gets a person nothing. Do unto others as you would be done by—piffle! Let the hard-fisted, cruel-natured *real* man declare himself. Let him grab all that he wants, be it his neighbor's wife or money; then let him take a little more for good measure.

"That man shall rule, for by his very strength he is superior. He is a supreme beast. All men are beasts, anyway, and as in the animal world only the cruelest shall rise, while all of the rest shall be slaves, merely fit to wait upon and serve the strong," he said.

And by this time he was talking all over —his hands were playing an active part, his feet were doing their share as he continually turned to face me, then walked ahead, and all of his muscles were in play in some way. He was so excited and carried away with himself that I asked:

"How about self-control — isn't it one good point to develop?"

"Self-control! Self-control—so-called—is the hand-throttling individuality, and is fostered by that sentimental curse on humanity—Christianity!" he exploded in my ear.

Then he shuffled up ahead again, and was so beside himself with inner impulses that the self-expression of his feet made them cease to track at all.

Glancing at Urido, I noticed his hands acting up again. They were closing and opening and swinging to the front where they would come together as if he were clutching something and squeezing it hard; then they would go through a wringing motion, as if he held a wet cloth between them. I looked at his face, and saw there a look that spelled righteous anger.

"How do you like our friend?" I asked, indicating Bremen.

"That! That—" But the poor fellow's vocabulary was at a loss for sufficiently expressive words. His hands did his talking for him.

King Gig-Gig was walking along with a long, easy stride, his head held high, as if nothing in the immediate vicinity bothered him in the least. He was on very familiar ground—he knew where we were heading.

"Urido," I said, "ask King Gig-Gig where we are going."

"To Ugluee," Urido answered, without speaking to the king at all.

"How do you know?" I asked.

"I know," was his assured answer.

There was not much satisfaction for me in that answer, but I knew that when he spoke in that final manner it was useless to ask further. He was not inclined to talk of the "how" of his knowledge.

The path that we followed was well defined as it wended its way through virgin jungle. Many bare feet must have trod that trail to make its surface so compact and glossy. Even the bordering rank growth of fern and shrub stopped short at the edge of this much-traveled way. And where undisturbed these same plants would tangle into an almost impassable barrier for a man without a machete.

We had come to the height of the climb and were traveling between two ridges in the mountain pass. The air was very humid. The ground was warm. Giant elephant ears grew in little clearings that we passed, and the broad leaves, spreading from their big stalks, high over head, made a bower for the fern which grew profusely next the ground.

It would have been a luxurious desecration to have rolled in the delicately etched fronds of these plants. In another place grew bananas, cocos, plumosa palms, elephant ears, and cane in wild disorder, as only found in tropical nature undisturbed; and it made a spot of real beauty.

Suddenly to our right a regular amphitheater opened. A little stream trickled from lava block to lava block in a rugged descent from the cliff heights. Beside the moss-covered banks, under the broad-leafed shading plants which grew in the crevices of rock and bordered by exquisite ferns, was another well-defined path which wound up the steep slope.

"Where does that go?" I asked Urido.

He pointed to a spot well up the cliff-side.

"Where Ugluee speaks to his people. It is there that the Tabians offer sacrifice," he said.

And upon looking up to where he pointed, I saw a cave opening in the cliff. Steam issued from it in lazy clouds, and over the lip of a lava rock ledge a little stream dropped in a miniature waterfall. This was Ugluee's mouth.

"When Ugluee is angry he gets choked up in his throat and speaks loudly from over there," King Gig-Gig said, pointing in the direction that we were going.

"Does he get angry very often?" I asked, realizing that his loud speaking meant a volcanic eruption.

"Only once since I have been king," Gig-Gig said. "Then my people suffered, and Tabu shook until we thought the land would be swallowed by the sea, and it has not been the same since," he continued.

Urido looked his surprise at this bit of information. He asked a question which he interpreted for me with the answer.

"What did it do?"

"You will see," King Gig-Gig said.

Shortly after this I noticed that as we walked nearer the volcano the surrounding jungle thinned. The sun shone down on us more frequently. The air was oppressive with humidity and warmth.

The ground was strangely parched for a place with so much moisture in the air, and I noticed an uncomfortable warmth to the touch of my bare feet. Finally the underbrush straggled out to nothing and outcroppings of lava showed a scantiness of soil.

Then only a few wind-torn trees remained between us and the crater itself, and they were so feeble that I wondered how they lived. The soil-denuded lava rock gave us a hot, hard surface to walk upon. The sun beat down unmercifully.

We were climbing again, and the summit of the pass was just a few yards ahead of us, when from somewhere in the general direction of the crater my ears caught the sound of hissing like thousands of safety-valves all popping at once.

The noise grew louder as we advanced. Overhead a white cloud hung low.

"I wish I'd brought along a pair of sandals," I remarked to Urido.

He only smiled grimly and set his jaw as with a firm determination to do something desperate. And as he looked at Bremen, I thought he was scheming against that fiendish devil.

I heartily indorsed whatever his plan might be. I would try and do my part when the time came. Again I showed my ignorance of Bremen's craftiness.

When I looked up at the white cloud overhead, it seemed to me that it came from just over the rise in front of us. Yet I could hardly believe such to be the case. It was a hazy sort of a cloud, more like steam, and for a while it partially obscured the sun.

One lonely, wind-blown old tree, scrawny, and with arms reaching far out toward us, stood beckoning like an old witch at the top of the pass. It grew from a crevice beside the path, and cast some shade.

In that shade was a great heavy boar, asleep. I could see his side rise and fall as he breathed, and his ear flopped up and down. He was undoubtedly of domestic origin, but gone wild.

Bremen saw the animal, and being in a mood to interfere with the comfort of anything, he drew his pistol and fired at the hog. This boar was a big, ungainly animal, but it was with surprising alacrity that he was up and away.

Bremen had missed him by a foot. Chagrined at his poor marksmanship, he hastened up the slope to the top in order that he might get another shot. We who followed went faster also, in order to see what success he might have. I was rooting for the pig.

We reached the summit on the heels of Bremen. And such a sight as lay before our eyes I hope never to have to look upon again under such circumstances.

It seemed as if we had suddenly been elevated to the rim of a tremendous skillet of boiling porridge, and that just as we looked a great bubble of steam broke through the center of the viscid mass, raising a stiff, jagged cone which momentarily I expected to see sink back again into the pot, but it stayed.

The center crater, or cone, was of cold lava, and would not sink, nor would the soft-looking mass around it move perceptibly even if the curve of flow did make it seem to be going in one direction, as if some big paddle were stirring it. The stuff was not boiling, even if a myriad of little steam jets did break through the surface, for all the world like the pot of mush I likened it to.

It was from all of those big and little steam jets that the foglike cloud, constantly hanging overhead, arose. And it was hard to tell very much about the center crater, for all of it was never clear of the rising vapors at one time.

However, I could see that it was not as high as the main outer crater wall, and that its top was quite ragged. At times the whole scene would be obscured by the condensing vapors which came from the innumerable little jets distributed over the whole floor of the valley; then a favorable wind would blow enough away for us to see parts of the far side of the crater.

The far side wall was of the same character as where we stood. The sides sloped rather steeply from the hardening lake of mud which filled the bottom of the great basin up to an irregular crest.

To our right, in the line with the curve of flow in the mud, was a deep rent in the side wall, through which I could catch a glimpse of the ocean. It must have been there that the hot stream of flowing mud fund outlet when first thrown up by the central volcanic cone. Such I later found to be the case.

What attracted my attention, after the first amazed glance around, was the boar which Bremen had disturbed as it slept on the far side of the pass. The animal was yet running, and it was away down by the edge of the mud lake.

Bremen sighted it and, raising his pistol, again fired at the frightened beast. It would have skirted the mud and stayed on the hard lava of the side wall, but Bremen's shots fell fast right in front and to the left, driving it to the right.

Terrified, the boar turned abruptly and, seemingly blindly, fled out onto the crusted lake. I was greatly surprised, for the animal was heavy, his hoofs small, and the mud did not look firm. But he kept going farther from the hard rock.

A small jet of steam spurted up in front of him. A bullet flicked the mud behind, a steam jet developed from the wounded surface. The boar went on more cautiously. Suddenly I saw his forefoot sink in the slime almost to the shoulder.

A puff of steam blew up around him. I thought the animal done for. The steam cloud blew aside, and I saw him give a quick back lunge and free himself. Bremen laughed.

Although the distance was now a hundred yards, Bremen kept firing at the poor creature. The shots spurred it on. Circling the soft spot, the boar carefully picked his way. He was half the way across to the center cone.

Bremen's pistol was not effective at the range. He wanted to have another shot at the hog; and apparently remembering the rifle Reiker carried, he turned about to call to him from the place where the fat man covered our rear with the gun, but Bremen looked at Urido, King Gig-Gig, and me, and changed his mind. With a sigh of regret, he gave the boar one last look, then turned his attention to us.

I watched the boar. He was almost across. Frequently he would turn suddenly to one side and skirt some spot that instinct told him would not hold his weight.

I saw him climb up onto the side of the central crater; then the steam fog shut out all but the near part of the mud lake. But in the crust of that portion yet visible I could faintly trace the path made by the boar's sharp hoofs.

Bremen looked at me and smiled gloatingly. He had seen me watching the boar.

"If you can make it across to the cone, you may go free!" he said.

A cruel grin of satisfaction creased his mouth and eyes, narrowing them to slits, for the same thought must have come to him that came to me: even if I should reach the cone, what good would it do me? I would be in the center of this hell hole.

I shuddered with horror. I remembered the near casualty to the boar when its forefoot sank into the hot, steaming ooze.

I looked at Urido. He stood staring open-mouthed at the sight of the new crater. I knew that it was the first time he had seen it—at least, in its present condition. He had not heard Bremen.

I glanced at King Gig-Gig. He was looking steadily at Bremen, with such a gleam of hate in his eyes that I knew he had sensed the white man's meaning, even though Bremen had spoken in English. But it was not a look of fear that the old man had.

He stood dignifiedly erect; his whole energy was directed in the hate that he glared at his enemy. Again I looked at Bremen, and I spoke. He chuckled in appreciation of his own catlike cruelty.

"If freedom lies there," I said, thinking of the seeming certain death in that mire of steaming mud, "and life such as you outline has to be lived here — there would be the better!" I said, and I looked in his eye, for I wanted him to get my meaning clear, and I was curious to see the effect of this speech upon him.

I did not feel the least bit heroic—the words came spontaneously. I was angered all the way through and back again—yet I was fearful. A nausea was inside of me.

His chuckles ceased. He again lost his calm demeanor. His fury choked him.

This seeming lack of fear at his cruel suggestion galled him more than anything that I could have done. I knew the worst might be expected, for he was now capable of anything. He did his worst.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SUPREME BEAST.

IT was with dread that I turned away from Bremen's disgusting display of uncontrollable anger. I cast a glance at Reiker to see what to expect from that source. He was eying us like a hawk.

He stood back about twenty paces, well out of our reach, with his rifle at the ready. Around him, at his back and on either side, were black spearmen standing rigidly at attention. They blocked the pass.

Behind these guards were row on row of Tabians on their knees, bobbing up and down like weighted, balanced toys that, once set going, would keep swaying until stopped. They were bowing in reverence to their god, Ugluee. No chance of escape was apparent in this direction.

On either side of the pass the side walls rose sheer for a hundred feet. There was no way out.

Bremen saw me look around and sneered, for he guessed why I looked.

A sorry group indeed we prisoners were, huddled together in a little squad between Bremen and Reiker. The five mutinous pearl-divers were doing obeisance like their fellows, and were right at the heels of King Gig-Gig, Urido, and myself.

Every time they bobbed they nearly touched our feet with the tops of their heads. To one side was the ex-captain of the guards, who, handicapped by his bound wrists, was yet doing his bit at bumping his forehead on the lava rock.

And well all these fellows might ask their god for mercy, for no one present seemed to be giving them any.

King Gig-Gig attracted my attention. He was speaking. He stood looking out over Ugluee's mud-choked valley, and with a quizzical expression on his face addressed himself to his deity.

"Ugluee, it is not for me to question, I, an old man, who will not be with my people long, but I do not understand. When I was young and a strong man you became angered, O great Ugluee.

"My people were poor. You spoke in anger. My people were afraid. My people's huts were knocked down. You covered their fields with ashes so the yams and rice would not grow for three seasons. You killed the coconuts and the trees that gave us food.

"The sea became hot and dirty, so that all the fish went away. Many of my people died. And we offered big sacrifice to appease you.

"And now my people suffer again." A look of anguish crossed the old man's strong face. "What have I done, O Ugluee, the powerful, what have I done?" and tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Urido," I said, "we're up against the real thing this time."

Urido nodded in silent affirmation.

"Keep a sharp watch on Reiker, and I'll do the same by Bremen—maybe a chance will come to make a break," I said.

"I'll watch, friend Alonzo, but I think we will not get the chance. The fat man is too sly to get near us," he said with conviction.

I felt the same. Thoughts of Patience, my wife, and her morbid predictions for this trip, came to me. I didn't expect to ever see her again, and I much wanted to see her again.

Bremen motioned for the whole procession to march down the slope toward the mud lake below. We were caused to advance within about twenty paces of the brink.

The lava was hot to our bare feet. The air was heavy with steam. It was uncomfortably like entering a close boiler-room.

We were kept in our respective positions, except for the people of the village, who were caused to remain at the crest of the pass. Not a chance offered to get at either

of the white men, for Bremen was very wary, and stood well away from us and kept his pistol in his hand. The blacks above us stood watching as curiosity overcame religious superstition for the while.

"Americans!" Bremen called to Urido and me in English. "Gig-Gig, come over here and attend while I entertain you," and he smirked at us as he waved his pistol in a menacing manner.

Curiously we went to the place he designated. Not a hundred feet from us was where the boar had made his wild dash out onto the treacherous mud.

We stood waiting for we knew not what. I shifted from one foot to the other in an effort to ease the pain to my bare feet, for the lava rock was so hot that it burned my flesh.

Then the five pearl-divers were caused to be brought near. The crowd of blacks at the pass edged closer down the slope, pushed forward by those in the rear, eager to see also. The guards were all attention, and stood ready with their spears to prevent any break for liberty.

"Pearl-divers," Bremen harangued the five men before him, "you have seen fit to pit your puny wills against mine and Ugluee's. I'll learn you better. I'll punish you that those who serve me may profit by your example and mend their ways.

"Ugluee demands sacrifice for this insult to my superior will. Ugluee serves me well. You will go to Ugluee and there receive your final sentence."

Bremen paused to let this startling judgment sink into the poor fellow's thoughts. "There lies your way—go!" shrieked the unmerciful fiend as he pointed to Ugluee's steaming mud lake.

A groan of horror chorused from the five men. It was echoed by the populace on the height of the pass, for they had seen Bremen's motion, and they understood even if they could not hear the words above the noise of the steam vents.

The five sentenced men turned pleading eyes toward their rightful king. Gig-Gig looked sorrowfully, helplessly at them. He hung his head in grief.

With a sudden determination expressed in the tightly compressed lips and set jaw, one of the men turned, and before Bremen understood his motive the fellow rushed to his king's side, dropped to the ground, and kissed Gig-Gig's feet.

Then he rose, faced about, and marched without falter down to the steaming hot mud. The others, seeing the act of reverence by their fellow, followed his example and bravely turned from their king to their fate.

"Of all my subjects but these are loyal—and they die!" moaned King Gig-Gig. "What have I done, O Ugluee?"

Down inside the breasts of these five humble pearl-divers beat the hearts of martyrs. True to the last to their king, to their country and ideals, they unhesitatingly showed their willingness to die for them.

Out onto the uncertain crust of Ugluee's encircling mud lake they stepped. Slowly, with heads high and hands at their sides in seeming military correctness, they walked out from the bank—out—out.

For a hundred feet they walked unharmed—five heroic figures. The people on the hill were quiet, breathlessly watching. We below, who were to go to the same slow anticipation of a horrible end, watched.

I wanted to close my eyes. I did so and shuddered. But a morbid fascination made me open them again. Maybe the men would not sink in the mud.

The boar was a heavy animal—twice as heavy as any of these men—he got across. I would watch.

A gusty swirl of steam vapor hid the men from view for a moment. I fancied that I saw a momentary thickening of the little fog wall as if more vapor had been added to it explosively. Then the cloud wafted away like a curtain before a dramatic setting.

Only four men walked toward the crinkled cone of Ugluee.

The bound, black ex-captain of the guards, watching, nerves strained to tenseness, groaned. Bremen heard and laughed with cruel delight. Like a cat playing with its prey, he eyed us, gloated, but seemed to be looking the other way.

I sickened with the horror of watching the poor fellows on the lake. So I tried to watch Bremen—but his ugliness and in-

human glee at this fiendish game was worse than the other. I turned my eyes back to the men out on the mud.

Only three were there. Somewhere between the place where these three walked and where I had last seen them one of the fellows had gone to that place where they were really "beyond good and evil." The three were about half-way across the mud to Ugluee's crater cone.

A short distance on the near side of the three stoical pearl-divers I thought I saw a new steaming depression in the crust. Several bubbles of steam seemed to break the surface in this spot—but the foggy atmosphere made sight uncertain.

At times the men far out on the death-trap were as hazy fantoms fancied in a bad dream. The vapors around them would make them seem gigantic; then as the air cleared they would appear but pygmies.

But a quarter of the distance remained for the blacks to walk, and I was thinking how like a nightmare the whole scene was, when I saw one of them suddenly stumble, fall forward; then, as if something had a pulling hold on his feet, he slid, feet first, from sight below the steaming surface.

This was getting to be too vivid. I turned my eyes to the lava walls at our right, and steadily tried to keep them there. I looked out through the rent in the south wall to the blue sea beyond, and it looked cool.

For at least two minutes I succeeded in keeping my eyes on the refreshing sight of the ocean, then I had to look back. Bremen's jarring laugh caused me to do so. He was squinting his piglike eyes at me and jeering at my weakness. He angered me.

Our chances to escape were nil. I had seen black men go to their death without a whimper. Bremen expected me to give way under the strain, but I vowed that I would not give way.

I would go—if for no other reason than to show this brute that a real white man had no yellow in his spine. I intended to go without flinching.

But I didn't want to go. I looked for some way out.

Again my eyes sought the volcanic cone in the middle of the lake. The mists of steam cleared and gave me a good sight of the lava pile. I thought I saw something move against the dull gray of the burned stone.

I rubbed my eyes and looked again. I did see something move. Something alive was in the very heart of Ugluee. I remembered the boar. He was over there.

He had crossed the mud lake safely. He was twice as heavy as an ordinary man—once and a half as heavy as Urido. An inspiration came to me. I searched the mud crust eagerly for some trace of the pig's trail.

Faintly I saw a double row of little indentations running out from the near bank. I followed it with my eyes. The fog settled, and I lost track of the trail in the hot mists.

Looking back to where the black men had been, I saw only one was left, and just then he threw his hands up and sank from sight.

Bremen, watching, laughed loud and long. The black people on the hill above bowed themselves to the ground in prayer to Ugluee.

Five of their fellows had gone as a sacrifice to appease the wrath of an inhuman brute. The people were impressed.

The captain of the guards was called next. He sat on the lava in front of me. He shook as with an ague. Bremen shouted at him in Tabu, ordering him to get started.

King Gig-Gig looked coldly at him. "Traitor!" he muttered.

"Get up!" Bremen roared at the shivering fellow. But the man could not get up. He had lost control of his muscles. He was suffering a nervous collapse. He could not walk out on the mud.

"Get up!" again Bremen roared, pointing his pistol at the fellow. The man did not move from his place—he merely shook the harder.

Bremen fired. His aim was true. The man slumped to the lava, a limp thing. He stopped shaking—he was beyond good and evil.

The crowd of blacks on the hill groaned in disapproval at Bremen's act, but were silenced by a menacing sweep of his pistol.

King Gig-Gig was gazing indifferently at the still form of the late captain of the guards. If Gig-Gig's enemies shot each other — what need he sorrow? Bremen spoke.

"Gig-Gig," he said, and the old man's face underwent a quick change as he understood that he was being addressed. He stiffened, a gleam of profound hate came in his eyes, his mouth was a straight line of accusation that radiated contempt of the usurper.

"Gig-Gig, you have seen what happens to those who cross me!" Bremen said slowly.

I asked Urido to tell me every word of the Tabu conversation, for from his manner I felt that Bremen was playing his strongest card in a bluffing game. King Gig-Gig maintained a reserved, dignified silence.

"Gig-Gig," Bremen continued, "I am the power here. I'll learn them that goes against me. You have seen my anger aroused by these men who would not do my bidding—they have paid the penalty of death.

"My will to power is greater than yours —I am the more cruel—I am the stronger —your own people have chosen me!" he concluded.

King Gig-Gig winced slightly at the last statement—ever so slightly. His recovery was remarkable, for the cut must have gone deep into his heart. He loved his people, and they had turned against him. He pointed accusingly at the dead captain of the guards and said:

"Kings do not kill thus—they have executioners. If the slaying be unjust, punish the executioner. Thus the people are kept content and the king's hands free."

It was a rebuke. Bremen understood. It was his turn to wince, for he recognized experienced advice. His trump card was not big enough.

"Black fellow," he said, reverting to his insulting manner, as was his wont when angered or at a loss for words, "you know what I want—the royal pearls of the Tabu. Will you tell me where they are—or will you walk the path your mutinous pearl-divers have walked?"

The strength of this threat was lost in the manner in which Bremen delivered it. He was too anxious.

"The royal pearls of the Tabu are not for you, white man!" King Gig-Gig calmly said. He had sensed the weakness of his enemy.

"Gig-Gig will never walk out onto the lake—as long as Bremen doesn't know where the pearls are," I whispered to Urido.

He nodded in agreement. Urido was no simpleton, even if he had been crazed at one time and recovered.

"You must see more? Then my entertainment shall go on for your particular benefit!" Bremen said, with irritation at the old man's stubbornness showing in every action.

"American," the supreme beast yelled at me, "you and your man come forward!"

There was nothing else to do but obey quietly. I intended that our going out should reflect no discredit on us at least. I knew the stuff Urido was made of, and I hoped to be of equal fiber under the test. But I hastily whispered to Urido:

"Follow me. Do exactly as I do, and for all that you hold dear, move fast when I do!"

He grunted "Umph!" and I knew that I could depend on him.

We stood in front of Bremen.

"American," and it seemed to me that a taunt rung in the tone and a challenge, "you have seen these black men walk out to their death. Can a white man do as well?" he said with a sneer.

I did not answer.

"American—I don't think so!" He said it slowly and as a direct taunt. "You and your man walk out onto that lake of mud and learn this black king how a white man dies!" And he laughed a snarling laugh, like a big cat beast tearing its prey while it was yet alive.

Into that laugh he threw all of the malice, cruelty, and vindictiveness that his narrowed nature possessed. Indeed, he went into it whole-souled.

Then I did something which startled Bremen. I laughed back at him. I felt hopeful, and I could laugh, for I thought

I saw a chance to get free of this man's grasp. I turned to Urido. He was laughing as heartily as I—following the directions I had given him literally—and said:

"Come on, Urido! We're on our way!"

Then I dashed off down the slope to the mud lake. I headed for the first imprints of the boar's hoofs in the treacherous crust.

And I carried in my mind a little satisfying picture—the amazed look of surprise on Bremen's face as he went. But we were on our way through hell.

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.

Mr. MacCallion, Liberator

by H. Keith Trask

WHEN the topping lift of a forward cargo-boom on the steamship Presidente snapped suddenly as the boom was winging a heavy case inboard to the hatch, everybody jumped clear except the captain and the fourth engineer. The captain was passing the hatch on his way ashore, and the fourth was making a minor repair to a winch. He jumped for the "old man" to shove him out of the way, and both went down under the boom.

Subsequently they went to the Long Island College Hospital in the same ambulance; the skipper with a compound fracture of the right leg and a light concussion, and the fourth so badly stove up amidships that he died soon after being admitted.

This all happened in the Erie Basin, in Brooklyn, the day before the Presidente was due to sail for Santa Cruz, and left her short a skipper and a fourth engineer. Marine Superintendent Sam Bowen solved the difficulty by placing First Officer Carl Graham in command until the skipper should be about again, and hiring Robert MacCallion as fourth engineer.

Mr. MacCallion went aboard the ship that same afternoon. He found the chief in the mess-room, in conference with the second anent the vagaries of the forced-draft fan. They had just started to raise steam for sea, and the fan was behaving badly.

The new fourth was a tall, thin individual with a bronze on his face that is not often acquired by engineers in the merchant service, and an expression of gloomy pessimism. Without speech he handed the chief a letter.

Mr. Allan read the letter, then stuck out a welcoming hand.

"Glad to have you with us, Mr. MacCallion," he said heartily. "By your name you should be a Glasgow man."

"South Brooklyn," Mr. MacCallion corrected sadly.

"Meet Mr. Kenny, the second," the chief continued. "He'll show you your room, and you can turn right to."

MacCallion nodded. "Get my dunnage," he stated with a remarkable economy of speech, then followed the second out on deck and beckoned to a boy with a pushcart, who was waiting on the wharf by the gangway.

While Kenny looked on, the fourth assisted the boy to carry his belongings aboard the ship. On his second trip he bore up the gangplank a flat, brass-bound mahogany box of considerable dimensions, fitted with a stout lock at either end. Kenny eyed the box with interest.

"That's a pretty classy tool-chest you have there," he commented.

"It would be if it had tools in it," Mr. MacCallion admitted.

He followed Kenny to the room he was to occupy with the other two assistants, and stowed away his scanty belongings with speed and precision. The box he placed carefully under his berth, which was the lower and less airy one, beneath that of the third. Then he donned his war clothes and accompanied Kenny to the engine-room without having said a word.

Some two hours later he emerged from the uptake, where he had been wrestling with the refractory damper deflector-plate that had caused most of the fan's pettishness. As he opened the fan engine throttle and the blades began to hum, he removed his gas-mask and addressed Kenny:

"Wish I had three thousand dollars and I'd quit this business."

"Get married and buy a farm, I suppose," Kenny suggested.

Mr. MacCallion merely gave the throttle another non-committal twist. Then he held his smoky hand-torch to the lubricator and adjusted a feed with care and precision, blew out the torch, and started for the tunnel that led between the boilers into the fire-room. At the bulkhead door he turned and nodded at the second.

"Ain't it hell?" he queried, then vanished.

"He spoke without being spoken to," Mr. Kenny whispered to himself, staring with amazement.

At supper in the mess-room, chief, second, and third tried in turn and in vain to induce Mr. MacCallion to converse. They failed signally to elicit a flicker of interest from the fourth on any topic under the sun, from the sinking on sight of unarmed merchantmen to the high cost of living.

Mr. MacCallion silently consumed beefsteak and onions, and stared gravely at each speaker. He had a most disconcerting way of looking a man in the eye, his own absolutely blank.

"What do you know about that guy?" Kenny demanded after MacCallion had departed, having contributed no more to the supper-time chat than a request for the butter, which was out of reach.

"He can't be over twenty-four at the outside," the second continued, "but he acts like he'd lived his life. Said if he had three thousand dollars he'd quit the sea. I bet some skirt has told him she won't name the day until he has a stake."

"It 'd be a rash skirt that 'd hitch with him," Molloy, the third, put in. "He's got space to rent in his top story. When I went into the room to wash for supper, he had that mahogany box out and was lookin into it. As quick as he heard me comin', he shut it and shoved it back.

"A little later I dropped my pipe and it rolled under the berth. I got down to look for it and started to move the box, but he flagged me mighty quick.

"'Don't touch that!' he says sharply.

"'What's in it—dynamite?' says I.

"'It 'll be bad for you if you handle it rough!' says he. Then he gets down and finds the pipe himself. 'If you want to be happy, leave that box be,' says he. He's sure some nut!"

The next morning the Presidente sailed for Santa Cruz with First Officer Graham in command; General Manager Norton, of the Consolidated Fruit Company, the owners, as the most distinguished passenger, and Fourth Engineer Robert MacCallion making the four-to-eight watch twice a day.

Carl Graham viewed his elevation to the temporary command of the Presidente with elation. He was a young man who worshiped the gospel of efficiency and himself as his only gods, and he considered that the snapping of that topping lift gave him a chance to show what he could really do.

He had been passed over once for the command of the Presidente, although he had been in possession of a full master's certificate for three years, and he was aware that he was not altogether in favor at headquarters. Now he would be able to show the Consolidated Fruit Company what a valuable man they had overlooked.

Norton's errand to Santa Cruz was more or less an open secret, and was known to temporary Captain Graham. The Consolidated Fruit Company is all of the republic of Santa Cruz except the few thousand patriots, who believe it is unhealthy to work, and belong to the anti-government party.

The Consolidated is a hard-headed gringo concern that earns its dividends regularly, and will not part with money unless for value received. The above-mentioned patriots have no use for it.

Owing to their aversion for debasing labor they are not on the pay-roll, and being against the government, they are not in line for those favors which Norton knew how to distribute to the right people with almost Castilian grace. If dissenters dissent long enough, they will impress the masses.

Don Luiz Almeida Shirra, late minister of war, had been the chief dissenter for about a year. As a result, the patriots were becoming very restive, and the resident manager had reported to Norton that it was time for more favors.

The conjunction of events which had evolved this situation at a time when he was in command of the ship appeared to Graham to be one of those opportunities that are always coming to an efficient young man. Stirring events might well take place in the near future that would enable him to attach the title of captain permanently to his name.

Never popular with deck or engine-room staff, Graham became even more obnoxious as master than he had been as first officer. The second officer had been elevated to the position of first along with Graham; but the captain still kept a mighty critical eye on all the doings aboard that are, by all the customs of the sea, the province of the first officer alone.

He towed his unfortunate subordinate all over the ship twice a day and made strictures upon his administration—which the mate had to accept and keep his mouth shut. Captain Graham was, in fact, feeling his oats, if such an expression may be pardoned in reference to a master mariner. That is a bad thing for any young man with ambitions.

Nothing in particular happened on the voyage, except that the curiosity of the engine-room mess was wrought to fever heat by the mystery of Mr. MacCallion's mahogany chest. Both Kenny and Molloy frequently entered the room, to find him looking into it, but he always shut it so quickly that they could not glimpse its contents.

On occasions when one of his mates was occupying the room, Mr. MacCallion had been known to take the box and retire to the privacy of the engine-room skylights on the boat deck, there to gloat over its secret. Molloy, in particular, was tantalized.

"I'm goin' to see what he's got in there, if it takes me a year," he vowed once in the mess-room.

The Presidente made Santa Cruz on the morning of the sixth day, her usual time for the run, and unloaded her cargo and began to take in bananas immediately. After his duties in the engine-room were finished, on her last day in port, Mr. MacCallion procured shore leave and disappeared into the sandy scrub along the beach, his pockets bulging mysteriously.

He returned shortly before sailing-time, with his habitual gloom intensified. At supper the chief profanely commented upon the desertion of two firemen and an oiler. Three of the deck crew had also departed.

All the vacancies were filled with Santa Crucians, of whom the crew was customarily composed in part, for reasons of economy and policy.

On the afternoon of the third day of the north-bound trip Mr. MacCallion, relieved Mr. Molloy from watch at four o'clock, as usual. Mr. Molloy immediately sought the seclusion of the stateroom. He had previously borrowed all the keys he could lay hands on in the ship, and he knew that at that hour the second would be playing

pinocle with the chief steward in the latter's office.

He did not shut the lattice door that guarded the privacy of the room, but prudently left it wide open. He drew the mahogany box from under the berth, then listened intently.

There was no sound save the steady beat of the engines and the wash of the sea overside. He selected a key and fitted it experimentally to the right-hand lock.

There are no extenuating circumstances to urge for Mr. Molloy's conduct. He knew that himself, as witness his guilty start at a vagrant footstep that turned out to be on the shelter deck overhead.

Some men are born curious, and Dan Molloy was one of them. Key after key refused to move the lock, and he became more and more absorbed in his nefarious design.

At the moment when Captain Graham, on the warpath, with the resentful mate expressing his overcharged feelings in pantomime behind the skipper's back, emerged from an alley and started aft along the port side of the main deck, Molloy found a key which seemed about to do the trick. He manipulated it gently, so intent that he failed to notice the approach of the inspecting party, or that lighter tread that drew near from the engine-room door.

The lock almost yielded. Molloy gently coaxed the key.

Crash! He was hurled through the doorway and against the bulwarks. He raised himself, to see Mr. MacCallion standing over him, using belligerent language.

Molloy staggered to his feet and put up his hands, while the fourth braced himself for another assault.

"Here, what's all this; what do you mean by fighting on my ship?" Captain Graham demanded in his most impressive and masterful voice.

He was quite within his rights as master of the ship, but it is not ethical for the deck to interfere with the engine-room. The rightful skipper would have vanished through the nearest doorway and left all comment to the chief, who emerged hastily from his room. At sight of MacCallion he frowned.

"What are you doing on deck in your watch, Mr. MacCallion?" he demanded.

"I came up to catch that guy breakin' into my box," the culprit answered with sullen defiance. "I heard him borrowin' Mr. Kenny's keys, and I knew what he was after—he's too nosey!"

Captain Graham was staring malevolently at the fourth.

"Discipline that man, Mr. Allan," he commanded. "I won't have any man away from his post during his watch on my ship!"

He looked still more intently at the object of his displeasure.

"Why, it's Bugs MacCallion," he added with a nasty laugh. "I never heard that you had turned violent, Bugs. You were harmless enough on the school-ship."

It was a gratuitous insult to a highly competent fourth engineer with a gift for coaxing draft fans—and MacCallion had had much provocation. It annoyed Mr. Allan—he was annoyed clear through, any way, that the captain should have such a chance to criticise him.

"I'll settle this, if you please, Captain Graham," he suggested quietly.

The captain addressed MacCallion:

"If I hear any more from you I'll put you in irons. I know you, and I won't have insubordination aboard my ship."

He turned on his heel and strode aft, to make trouble over the taffrail log.

"His ship," the chief grunted, watching him go. Then he addressed the fourth: "What the devil is in this chest that it made you forget your duty, Mr. MacCallion?"

"That's nobody's business," MacCallion retorted, looking the chief in the eye.

"You're wrong," the chief assured him, entering the room. "It's my business, because it has made trouble in my department. Show me what you have there!"

There could be no evasion of the direct command. MacCallion, scowling, produced a key which he wore on a string around his neck, lifted the box gently upon the berth, and threw back the lid.

"Won't none of you be really interested; it's just rubberneckin', like it's been on every other ship!" he growled.

Molloy looked over the chief's shoulder. As the contents of the box was disclosed, both men swore and the chief drew back sharply.

"Damn nasty things!" he ejaculated with an involuntary shudder. "They make me creep!"

Cleverly mounted and very lifelike, a miscellany of bugs confronted them; centipedes and scorpions, spiders, a Gila monster in all its revolting, poisonous pink puffiness, tray on tray of bugs was revealed.

In a corner, partitioned off from the rest of the box, was a compartment filled with the instruments of the chase; a very fine mesh-net, wide-mouthed bottles and vials of parti-colored fluids. The holy light of joy was in MacCallion's face as he regarded his treasures.

"I got a specimen of pretty near every kind of venomous insect from any place I've ever been," he announced proudly. "The chief thing missin' is a good big tarantula, and I'd hoped to get him while we was at Santa Cruz, but I missed it this trip."

"Batty as hell!" Molloy proclaimed with conviction.

"You can have your bugs for all me," the chief declared with a grimace. "Now get back to your duty—I'll pass it over this time."

Mr. MacCallion replaced the box under the berth, then straightened up, shaking his head mournfully.

"I can't ever find anybody to take any interest in 'em," he lamented as he started for the engine-room.

His standing with the company of the Presidente was assured from that moment. He was a bug, even as the captain had called him; harmless, to be sure, unless his hobby was interfered with, but a genuine bug.

The deck concurred with the engine-room in that. You cannot induce the crew of a banana-boat to have any love for poisonous insects. Molloy and Kenny both objected violently to sharing their room with those bugs, but the chief overruled them.

He pointed out that the bugs were dead, and that he couldn't very well force MacCallion to heave them overside. If they had been alive, it would have been different.

Surely, preserving dead bugs and mounting them with loving and painstaking skill is a sufficiently harmless pastime for a fourth engineer. I have known men who wanted to read Browning aloud to their messmates.

The chaffing and abuse hurt Mr. MacCallion, who was by nature a friendly soul, whose nature had been warped by the coldness of the world to his hobby. Under the storm that broke about his ears his taciturnity increased, if that were possible.

The one person aboard who appeared to sympathize with him was José, the native Santa Crucian oiler who had been shipped in place of the deserter.

José, however, had an ax to grind. He shared the four-to-eight watch with Mr. MacCallion, and he had confided to his immediate superior that he wanted to achieve an engineer's certificate.

As a result Mr. MacCallion let him do many of the routine things in the engine-room which ordinarily a Santa Crucian oiler would have been heartily cursed for attempting; such duties as tending the dynamo switchboard and the dynamo itself, the refrigerating machinery and the condenser pumps became unofficially José's job, and he did them remarkably well. He was careful, however, to avoid attracting the attention of the chief or Mr. Kenny to these activities.

It was José who acted as safety valve to Mr. MacCallion's overburdened soul when he reached the engine-room. José listened to the story with many sympathetic comments.

"I theenk the old man ees no good," he observed at the close of the recital. "He has a swell head."

"You bet he has!" Mr. MacCallion agreed fervently. "He always had, even on the old school-ship. I licked him then; but I guess it's above my reach to get back at him now," he added as he went to the hot well to take the temperature of the feed-water.

While he logged it, José devoted himself to feeling the three great cranks as they swung upward in turn from the pit. When

MacCallion returned to his station by the starting gear the oiler sidled up to him.

"You're not happy in thees sheep—no?" he suggested.

"I'm not," MacCallion assured him. "I'm used to bein' joshed about my bugs, but they never called me a nut in any other packet I was in. If I had my three thousand dollars I'd quit!

"Better get up there and swab them piston-rods," he reminded José, who seemed to be in a brown study.

Just before they were relieved at eight that night José again sidled up to MacCallion with the ingratiatingly confidential air that he had assumed toward the fourth.

"Maybe soon I can show you how to get thees three thousand dollars and more," he confided.

Mr. MacCallion merely grunted. He was very skeptical.

"And show thees swell-head skipper and all the res' that you are no nut, but the wise bird," José proceeded.

Again Mr. MacCallion merely grunted, and José sighed, with his forehead puckered in a frown. This gringo was very hard to understand; but José had hopes for the future.

When next the Presidente passed out by Sandy Hook and left the Ambrose Lightship astern, Captain Graham was still in command. Mr. MacCallion and his bugs were also on board as a permanent institution, if they cared to stay.

The chief had been unable to find any valid objection to him, save that one provoked desertion of his post, and he undeniably had a gift with balky machinery.

Captain Graham was much elated by the turn things were taking. Norton had remained in Santa Cruz, and by his instructions, conveyed north by the captain, many cases had been loaded aboard the Presidente just before she sailed, and placed handily in her upper forehold.

They were rectangular, flattish cases, with lids carefully screwed in place. With them were also many small, square boxes equipped with rope handles. They were the result of Norton's conclusion that favors distributed with Castilian grace might not avail this time.

There were also passengers and an air of mystery in the first cabin of the Presidente. The passengers were patriots, native to Santa Cruz, and the air of mystery was native to them.

They had a penchant for mysterious conferences in out-of-the-way corners and the Spanish language. Interest centered about a swarthy little man with a martial bearing and shrewd eyes.

The trip passed uneventfully until the afternoon of the fifth day, the ship being due at Santa Cruz on the morning of the sixth.

Just before eight bells from the bridge proclaimed four o'clock, Mr. MacCallion started for the engine-room floor to relieve Mr. Molloy. He skipped nimbly down the ladders to the grating that runs around the engine's level with the plunging links of the valve-gear, and walked along it to feel the bearings, his body swaying to the motion of the ship, and his hand reaching unharmed where the unprofessional hand would instantly have been ground to pulp.

He was just over Mr. Molloy at the starting gear when the third emitted a wild yell and started for the ladder, clawing madly at the back of his neck. He sprinted upward past MacCallion, and the fourth followed in chase.

He overtook the other on the upper grating, alongside the cylinder heads. Molloy was white and shaking.

"What's up?" MacCallion queried.

"U-ugh-gh!" Molloy shivered, his teeth clicking like the castanets in O'Doyle's place on Santa Cruz wharf. "Tarantula—he dropped on me from overhead somewhere!"

"Tarantula! Wait here!" MacCallion commanded. Then he vanished.

Molloy waited. Had the engine-room telegraph swung from "full ahead," where it had stood since leaving Brooklyn, to "full astern," I doubt that he would have returned to his station to reverse the engines.

MacCallion returned with his bug-net in an incredibly short time. While Molloy watched, wide-eyed, from the upper grating, he descended to the floor-plates and made a search for the quarry.

José, who was used to tarantulas, joined him. They located the spider and got it alive into a wide-mouthed bottle without being stung.

"Say, Molloy, he's a beaut!" MacCallion called, loquacious for once. "It was lucky he lighted on you instead of on the floor-plates, or he'd 'a' been all smashed up. Come and have a look!"

But Mr. Molloy, staring at the enthusiast on the floor, shook his head, and once again delivered his verdict.

"Batty as hell!" he muttered; then, eight bells having gone, withdrew without the formality of having turned the watch over to his successor.

After he had paid the routine visit to the fire-room and written up his log, Mr. MacCallion assured himself that José was throwing in the cabin lighting circuits, then set his treasure on the bed-plate, close to the edge of the crank-pit where he could gloat over it.

He bent over to examine more closely and made a discovery—the tarantula was about to shed his skin. Never in all his bug-hunting experience had Mr. MacCallion beheld this phenomenon, and he watched with bated breath while the crack that had appeared in the insect's back widened and lengthened.

José joined him, and MacCallion held the bottle to the light while the tarantula drew one leg after another out of the old skin, very much like a rheumatic man removing his coat.

José suddenly made a warning sound through his teeth.

"The chief and the captain come, *señor*," he whispered.

Mr. MacCallion hastily concealed the bottle on the reversing engine cylinder. Captain Graham descended the ladder, carefully avoiding contact with the shining brass handrail lest he smudge the immaculate white of his drill uniform.

Behind him came the chief, wearing a somewhat bewildered and incredulous expression. The skipper glanced sharply at José, who immediately found business with the circulating pump.

Graham consulted the radio message that he held in his hand.

"That is one of the men Norton describes," he told the chief, speaking very loudly, as is the way of those unaccustomed to conversation amid the roar of working engines. "We'll have a look at the firemen, Mr. Allan."

At that moment José passed behind the captain on his way across the engine-room. He appeared to see something wrong with the draft-fan as the captain spoke, halted to examine it, then vanished unobtrusively into the fire-room.

The chief looked doubtful.

"If Norton's guess is right, they'd have a lovely chance to hand us one with a clinker hook," he demurred.

"Norton was only guessing," the skipper returned. "If the firemen answer the description also, I'll clap 'em in irons for luck until we make port; but there 'll be no uprising on my ship!" He laughed scornfully. "Does Norton think I can't handle these fellows?"

Mr. MacCallion heard, but scarcely heeded. His whole attention was centered on the bottle, which was precariously balanced on the reversing engine cylinder. The vibration threatened to shake it off at any moment, did shake it off; he caught it just in time.

The hasty movement caught Captain Graham's eye. He looked at the bottle intently, strode forward, and snatched it from the engineer's hand.

With an oath of disgust he hurled it against the upcoming high-pressure crank. The glass shattered with explosive force, and Mr. MacCallion's prize became a smeary blotch on the massive steel arm.

"Damn you—I'll kill you for that!" MacCallion yelled.

All remembrance of discipline, of the divinity that hedged Graham's position if not his personality, left the infuriated fourth with his rush.

"*Mr. MacCallion!*" the chief roared in a voice of thunder.

MacCallion brought himself up all standing. Graham had nimbly side-stepped, and now stood glaring at the maddened naturalist.

"I'll iron you for that when you come off watch!" the captain promised. Then

he motioned toward the tunnel. "We'll go to the fire-room, Mr. Allan."

Mr. MacCallion knelt on the bed-plate, his head in imminent danger of meeting the same fate as the tarantula, and searched the crank-pit with anxious eyes. In the sloping bottom of the pit, clear of the water that sloshed about, but out of his reach while the engine turned, lay the tarantula skin. It was unharmed, but threatened with ruination by the greasy bilge-water with every roll of the ship.

José had emerged from the fire-room just before the skipper and the chief entered. Now he moved close behind the fourth, and stood watching with a triumphant smile curling his lips.

Presently he tapped MacCallion on the arm, and the engineer looked up, half dazed, but wholly boiling with wrath.

"I theenk now you will be weeth us, not?" the oiler laughed. "You will have honor and much money; also you will square the dirty trick!" he added with a nod, then ran for the ladder.

Very slowly Mr. MacCallion's brain took in José's words. He pondered them half-heartedly, at a loss to give them the proper significance.

Comprehension came with a sudden rush—the chief's doubts, Graham's scorn—and he walked right into a trap in that fire-room. Mutiny was what José meant!

Instinctively true to his duty, he snatched up a spanner; took two steps toward the tunnel. The weapon dropped from his hand.

"Graham says he ain't afraid of Santa Crucian's—let him handle them," he muttered, his face contorted in a fierce scowl. He knelt once more on the edge of the bed-plate. "Damn him, he killed my tarantula!" he said out loud, as if seeking to justify his action to himself.

Sounds of strife, sharp oaths, the thud of feet on the steel floor-plates of the fire-room, a sharp cry like a man hurt rang through the tunnel. MacCallion, kneeling on the bed-plate, raised his head to listen. His lips were drawn back from his teeth.

"I hope he got his!" he snarled.

The boom of the telegraph startled him. He glanced at the pointer; it had swung to "stand by." Almost immediately it indicated "stop."

Engine-room habit asserted itself. MacCallion closed the throttle, then strode to the draft-fan and slowed it down. He heard exultant Spanish oaths in the fire-room, but the telegraph was clamoring for "half astern."

With the whine of the reverse engine throwing the links, a procession emerged from the fire-room.

First came the firemen, bearing the senseless body of Mr. Allan. His worst fears anent the clinker hook had been realized, as the gash in his head proved. In the rear the trimmers wrestled with the captain, bound hand and foot, but in full possession of his senses and his vocabulary.

The bridge sent down "stop," then "all fast" in quick succession. While the procession filed up the ladder, Mr. MacCallion stopped the fan and the condenser pump, then dove head and shoulders into the crank-pit and rescued the tarantula skin, quite untouched by the bilge-water.

He turned it over and over in his hands. In itself it was an important addition to his collection. The voice of José summoned him from the upper grating. Carrying the skin with him, he went on deck.

By going into the fire-room, Captain Graham had played right into the hand of Don Luiz Almeida Shirras and his fellow patriots, and they had managed the affair very well. Captain Graham had not seen fit to confide the wireless warning he had received from Norton to any one except the chief, and the watch officer had been taken entirely unaware.

The passengers and that part of the crew that was in the plot were armed, while the rest of the crew was not. It had been too easy.

The elated don explained this to Mr. MacCallion while the loyal part of the crew was put overside in the starboard boats. The don further explained his reasons for this high-handed seizure of the Consolidated Fruit Company's property.

"So you see, Señor MacCallion," he concluded in his charming English, "instead of having to buy rifles, for which we are too poor, we take those many cases which the

Señor Norton has so graciously provided aboard ship. There are machine guns, too," he added appreciatively, licking his lips, "and much ammunition."

"What's all this got to do with me?" MacCallion inquired.

"We come to that," Shirras assured him with a wave of his hand. "It has been reported to me that you did not like your berth aboard this ship—also that you greatly desire three thousand dollars."

He looked meaningly at the fourth engineer.

"Well—" MacCallion prompted, his face expressionless.

"I can offer you much," the don told him. "There will be ten thousand dollars and the position of chief engineer of this ship, which shall be the first vessel of the Liberal navy.

"Will you accept? The boats await your decision."

Until Shirras made his proposition the whole business had been cloudy, unreal, to Mr. MacCallion; an affair of personal revenge upon Captain Graham for the death of the tarantula. But now—he stepped to the side and looked diffidently at his late shipmates in the boats, very restive under the guns of the patriots.

Mr. Kenny sighted him and epitomized for Mr. MacCallion the opinion of the ship's company.

"You damned black-and-tan renegade!" he yelled.

Mr. MacCallion stepped hastily back. He could do nothing in the boats to repair the damage; and he would not be popular. He might do something aboard the ship, if he retained freedom of action.

"I don't think I will go in the boats," he decided.

"Good!" the don exclaimed. "Oblige me by getting the ship under way immediately. My compatriots await only our arrival at Santa Cruz for the *coup d'état* that will free my suffering country from the iron heel of this gringo outfit!"

Mr. MacCallion was still a trifle dazed. As he turned to comply with the request, he raised a hand and rubbed the back across his forehead.

"*Madre de Dois*—what have you there?" the don cried sharply, starting back.

He cowered against the rail, his swarthy face ashen white and working, his eyes staring, glassy, hypnotized—a picture of mortal terror.

The fourth lowered his hand and glanced at it.

"That is only a tarantula skin," he said wonderingly.

"I beg of you, put it out of sight," Shirras quavered. "That is better!" He breathed more freely as MacCallum hid the skin behind his back.

"I have an aversion for those brutes. My mother was bitten before I was born. In all else I am as brave as a lion!"

José already had the condenser pump and draft fan going when Mr. MacCallion reached the engine-room. The little oiler was highly elated.

"I shall be your second, is it not?" he inquired anxiously.

The new chief engineer nodded. His mind was on other things. When the telegraph commanded "slow ahead," he let José handle the gear. It transported José to paradise.

MacCallion perceived that so long as José was entrusted with the engines he would have not the faintest interest in any happenings on deck. Also that he could be trusted to see that his fellow countrymen in the fire-room attended to their duty. Mr. MacCallion returned on deck.

He found the bar in the first-cabin smoking-room crowded with patriots, celebrating the first victory of the revolution. So far as he could see, the whole Liberal army was there, with the exception of the engine-room force and Don Luiz Almeida Shirras.

He viewed the scene with approval. They would be very drunk presently and take no further active part in the revolution for some time.

Don Luiz sat in the captain's cabin with a veritable arsenal on the desk before him. Mr. MacCallion frowned. This was not so good.

"I have a trustworthy man at the wheel," Shirras informed him. "Myself, I stay here, lest that cursed booze inspire

one of my compatriots to attempt to become the liberator in my stead."

He touched the pile of arms significantly. "I have collected all their shooting irons. Perhaps you will get some sleep now, and relieve José as we near port," he added.

But it was not to sleep that Mr. MacCallion retired to his room. He had to figure how to divorce the don from that arsenal. Luck had played into his hand with the crowd in the smoke-room, but Shirras and the man at the wheel were different.

They were armed and Mr. MacCallion was not. Nor did search reveal the guns that the chief and Mr. Kenny had owned. Evidently the liberator had added them to his collection.

There was plenty of time, and he always thought better with his hands occupied, so he drew out the mahogany box and commenced to stuff and mount the tarantula skin. It was not the real thing, but, properly mounted, as he was mounting it now, it looked very lifelike.

After a time Mr. MacCallion's hands were stilled, and he sat looking through the open door at the quiet, tropic sea, grinning seraphically.

Later he rooted a spool of black thread out of his housewife and then stepped softly to the engine-room door, peering down. José was right on the job.

Mr. MacCallion considered. Twelve hours was a long stretch for those firemen; they might take a notion to defy José. A couple of wedges and a cold chisel from the chief's chest enabled Mr. MacCallion to make sure that nobody would open that door except from the outside.

As he passed the smoking-room he saw that he need not worry about the army of liberation. They were in no condition to liberate anything for some hours. He entered the captain's room from the port side and addressed the don, vigilant over the firearms.

"Everything's lovely below. The army's dead drunk, and José on the job. Why don't you let me stand watch for you, and you get a little sleep?"

Shirras shook his head decidedly.

"You will pardon me, *señor,* but I will entrust my watch to no one, nor will I sleep until I am master of my country!"

"All right," MacCallion agreed. He passed out by the starboard door, and had the don been less intent on his own thoughts, he might have noticed the thread that trailed from MacCallion's hand. However, he was gazing raptly at the floor. He saw himself being hailed as liberator, addressing his people from the balcony of the palace.

A swift movement across his field of vision startled him. He darted his head forward, with a clutch of dread at his heart; then with a wild yell leaped on top of the desk and sent the piled arms clattering to the floor.

An awful sickness overwhelmed him as he stared at the horror. The awful thing moved and he emitted a second yell of pure animal terror, shrinking as far back as possible on the desk-top.

Mr. MacCallion appeared, providentially, in the doorway.

"What's up?" he queried.

Shirras could not speak. He pointed with a shaking finger.

"All right, I'll fix you," said MacCallion, reaching for a big automatic.

"They jump high—" the don warned weakly.

Mr. MacCallion laughed as his hand closed around the butt of the forty-five. He jabbed the muzzle brutally into the other's ribs.

"Put up your mitts," he ordered. "I'm goin' to be liberator now!"

The don continued to stare, glassy-eyed, unmindful of the gun.

"I dare not move," he breathed.

"Yes, you do!" Mr. MacCallion corrected, emphasizing his command with another jab. "That tarantula's as dead as your revolution. Put 'em up!"

The sun had risen more than an hour when the Presidente swung her nose toward Santa Cruz harbor. For some minutes Mr. MacCallion had divided his attention between steering, Shirras, and the helmsman, ironed to the bridge stanchions, and the pages of the "International Code Signal Book."

He felt that General Manager Norton

would be anxious about his ship, and that reassuring news would be welcome. He also felt that some tribute was due the subdued elation within his breast.

After long consideration he sent a parti-colored combination of signal-flags to the spring stay. He regarded them proudly as they fluttered in the morning breeze.

"I wish Graham could see that," he confided to the gloomy don.

It was, in truth, a masterpiece. It read:

Tell my owners I am very short-handed, but can make port unassisted.

Ten days later Mr. MacCallion returned from the Brooklyn office of the Consolidated Fruit Company, where he had been presented with a check for ten thousand dollars by the admiring general manager. While he was gathering his belongings together, preparatory to taking leave of the Presidente, Mr. Kenny entered the room.

"I suppose you'll marry the girl now, Mac," Kenny remarked.

"I ain't got any girl," Mr. MacCallion averred.

"I thought you said you'd quit if you had three thousand dollars," the second persisted.

"I didn't want the money to marry any girl," Mr. MacCallion informed him with scorn. "I wanted to go to college and study entomology—and that's where I'm goin'!"

A LUTE SONG

BY FRANK DEMPSTER SHERMAN

I KNOW not whence it came
To haunt the twilight hour—
A ghost of song without a name,
There in the garden bower—
A melody that seemed to be
The fragrance of a flower.

Softly, my lute! The strings dispute;
They say, "Sweetheart—a flower!"

I know not where it went,
Low quavering afar—
A breath of music like the scent
Of rose-leaves in a jar—
A melody that seemed to be
The whisper of a star.

Lightly, my lute! The strings dispute;
They say, "Sweetheart—a star!"

I know the song was sweet—
So tender that it drew
A captive down to Beauty's feet,
To be her lover true;
A melody that seemed to be
The very voice of you.

No more, my lute, the strings dispute;
They say, "Sweetheart—'tis you!"

And Never the Twain Shall Meet

by Katharine Metcalf Roof

CHAPTER I.

LALIA DECIDES.

THE green lawn under the old elms was dotted with the flowerlike gowns of the college girls, but upon this occasion the campus was not an Adamless Eden; for it was commencement week, and each group showed the dark note that indicated the welcome presence of masculine guests.

Apart from the groups a young girl sat on an old iron seat with an absorbed admirer.

Upon this girl, duskily dark and beautiful in a strange, alien fashion, many pairs of eyes, mostly masculine, were bent.

"Why, don't you know who she is?" the president of the junior class replied to an eagerly inquiring youth. "That is Princess Lalia of Istrahan, a real Oriental princess. She is in my class. She graduates next year. Isn't she beautiful? She has been in America since she was thirteen, so she is almost like one of us. Most of the girls don't feel anything different about her, but to me there is always an undercurrent of something strange and Asiatic."

At that moment the Princess Lalia, as if conscious that she was the subject of conversation, turned her dark eyes upon them; long eyes, they were, with sleepy lids, and so inscrutably dark as to seem almost opaque.

"She is certainly a charmer," said the youth; "but I think I should be afraid to fall in love with her, rather."

"Lalia, look at me," said Edward Howland; "I have something important to say to you to-day."

The princess answered in a slow, sweet voice without turning her head: "Better not say it, Edward."

Howland stared at her profile a moment. "You are so sure that you know what I am going to say?"

"You are going to tell me that you love me," said Lalia, bringing her mysterious eyes around to his with the last word.

"More than that—I am going to ask you to be my wife."

She shook her head. "Impossible, Edward."

"But why? Because you are a princess and I an American journalist?"

"Not only that. Have you forgotten your Kipling? 'East is East, and West is West; and never the twain shall meet'—"

He interrupted her quickly. "That is nonsense. We have passed beyond all that. Here in America, where all the races of the earth are mingling and mixing, we are developing a world consciousness. And who knows after this war is over that there will be any more queens—even in Asia?"

She smiled a smile that seemed to hold all the ancient wisdom of that ancient continent.

"They mingle, but they do not mix," she said at last. "People so fundamentally

different as Asiatics and the Northern races can never really understand each other. You think of me here in your country, in these clothes, your sister's friend, as an American like Susie. But I am not like Susie; down underneath, in a place which you can never enter, lies my soul of the East. Do not hope to possess it. It is not for you. No, for in the end the East must go back to the East."

Howland did not answer at once. He seemed to be thinking deeply.

"And do you really believe that you can go back to the restricted life of an Eastern woman?" he asked at last.

Lalia smiled.

"Did you think that I was going to become a citizen of America and leave my country to rule itself?" she asked in answer.

Howland made a disclaiming gesture. "Isn't it running itself perfectly well without you now?"

"Well, you see, it is like this," Lalia explained. "My father has only just been obliged to give up the government of Istrahan because of his ill health. My uncle reigns now as a sort of regent. Ordinarily he would be the next king in order of succession; for, of course, in the East a woman is seldom permitted to be a ruler. But my uncle is, so to speak, base-born on the maternal side. His mother was the daughter of a merchant, but she was so beautiful that my uncle chose to make her his first wife. But their son cannot succeed to the throne. And if my father should die—since I have already attained my majority—he could no longer be regent. I would have to go back."

"And will your husband be permitted plural wives—or is the queen in this case permitted extra husbands?" Howland asked with a smile.

He realized after he had spoken that he had addressed a queen, for the flippant American joke was obviously not pleasing to Lalia. She answered it seriously, if coldly.

"A woman would not ever be permitted more than one husband. But neither could the queen's consort have other wives. He would, of course, have concubines. But not all men in Istrahan have more than one wife.

"Woman is not held in contempt there, as she is in Persia and most of the other Mohammedan countries. Our men often go to great lengths for love of women. If my country had been like Persia, it would not have been possible for me to be in America having an American education.

"But my father was very advanced. He became much attached to the English ambassador and also to an American who was introduced at the court. He felt that the West had come so close to the East that certain changes must come—and so he sent me into a far country."

"To play havoc with the hearts of American men," said Howland. "Well—you cannot discourage me, my princess. I shall only ask you again when I come back—if I come back."

She turned quickly. "You think the Russian situation so serious, even in Asia?"

"At any moment the whole of Asia may be involved," he said. "That is why the paper is sending me there instead of to Russia proper."

Lalia sat silent after his words, silent with that strange stillness of the East that can wait, not years but centuries, for fulfilment—the waiting, cosmic silence that envelops the sphinx and the pyramids and broods over the palace of Tamerlane. Her eyes rested upon the wide stretches of green under the New England elms; but she saw a very different picture, or rather series of pictures, that rose, unbidden but vivid, before the eyes of her mind: the dusky interior of an Oriental palace, where brown, half-naked slaves stood fanning her; the face of her slave-girl who had died to save her life; the noonday siesta beside the pool under the tamarind-trees; the white palace, with its gold dome and many-colored tiles in the sun: the vivid colors of the passers-by in the street; the boy Nadal, her young cousin, who was so strong and lithe, so proud, who would not look at her; the peasant children riding home to their huts on the backs of the sheep under the crescent moon—

And this fair, distant country that she loved, this domain of hers, might come also

under the blight and doom that threatened to engulf all Europe.

"You really think that even the little countries in the far interior may be drawn in?" she asked.

Howland smiled sadly. "And are not the little countries the *hors-d'œuvres* of the beast? Hasn't he already devoured with one snap of his jaws all that have come his way?"

The expression on the girl's face did not change perceptibly; only her eyes seemed to look upon some high and distant spot. She rose as she spoke.

"Then I shall go back there at once, Edward."

"Not before you have finished your course and taken your degree?" he exclaimed.

Lalia smiled the smile of a princess.

Involuntarily the man bowed his head.

"Are they not my people?" she said. "If my country is in danger, my place is there, not here."

CHAPTER II.

NADAL SPEAKS.

"WILL her royal highness rest within the palace, or without under the tamarind-trees by the pool?" asked Rudash, the slave. For while Lalia was upon the sea her father had died, and the princess had become a queen.

"Without by the pool," answered Lalia.

Her American life had bade the dim Oriental interiors seem gloomy to Lalia, yet it was strange how already she had slipped back into many of the old ways. For a few days, a week at most, the customs of her country had seemed strange to her; but now they began to seem almost natural again.

Under the moving shadows of the tamarind-trees she lay beside the pool in the marble basin and watched the rose-leaves drifting on its green surface. In a world of green light she lay, the reflections in the water giving back the close green of the trees overhead.

Lalia had not yet taken on the habit of the afternoon siesta, but she liked to rest beside the pool in the afternoon stillness. Commanding her slaves to leave her alone, she lay motionless, her eyes closed. The air, heavy with the scent of jasmine and roses, made her drowsy. The morning had been fatiguing.

It was undeniable that the young queen was bored by the society of the Oriental women. They urged fulsome compliments upon her, according to the etiquette of the court, but they had nothing to say. Lalia was glad that she was a queen and might at least enjoy such companionship as her grand vizier and chamberlain could offer her.

A strange woman had been among her guests that day, very tall and with fiery eyes that rested upon the young queen over the mask that covered the lower part of her face. The woman had scarcely spoken and had refused to remove her veil.

There was a mystery about her. Lalia wondered drowsily if she could by any chance have been a spy, Russian or German. But spies and warfare seemed so far away from this serene Asiatic world. Lalia's mind slipped to other thoughts.

Nadal, her cousin, governor of a province of Istrahan, had not yet paid his visit of state; but his messenger had arrived with the news that his train was on its way. To-morrow or the next day, perhaps, he would arrive.

She wondered what Nadal would be like. He had been a handsome boy. Before she had gone away Lalia's father had considered betrothing his daughter to her cousin, but unlike most Oriental sovereigns he had not arranged his daughter's marriage in her childhood. "The world moves. I will wait," he had answered the urgent counseling of his vizier.

Perhaps Lalia slept for an instant, when that consciousness of a human presence that can arouse one from sleep pricked her lids open. She looked up to see a tall, brown youth pinning a paper, upon which some verses were written, to an almond-tree. As he turned, she closed her eyes again. She felt him approach nearer until he stood over her, then bent until she could feel his breath upon her cheek. Although Lalia had intended to continue her feigned

sleep, as against her will her eyes opened, and she looked into the man's face.

"Nadal," she whispered—"Nadal, is it you?"

The man rose and made as if to flee, but as the queen rose to a sitting posture she spoke to him again more imperatively. "Nadal."

He then turned and came slowly back to her.

"I have taken the risk; I am ready to pay the penalty," he said to her in her own tongue.

"What penalty?" Lalia repeated. "And for what?"

The man of her own race looked at her strangely. "Who has looked upon the face of the queen unveiled must pay the penalty with death, is not so?"

Lalia smiled.

"Is it still so here in my kingdom?" she said. "Then must the queen remake the laws. Thou art my old friend, my childhood's playmate, Nadal. Nay, instead of death, the penalty shall be to sit here and amuse me."

The youth, lithe, strong, beautiful, bent his proud head and seated himself beside the princess on the edge of the pool, but he did not smile.

"The penalty, radiant one, may demand more courage for its fulfilment than death," he said gravely.

"You do not flatter me," answered Lalia, looking at him with laughing eyes; but the Asiatic grew pale.

"You have forgotten, O rose of the world, that we men of the East are not accustomed to look upon the beauty of woman unveiled, least of all such dangerous beauty as thine. We are not used to sitting thus near the rose we may not pluck. Beware lest you drive your victim to madness, rather than death," he said.

The girl trained in the West in her formative years laughed involuntarily.

At the sound the man started as if from a blow. The muscles of his face strained under his brown skin.

"You laugh, my queen!" he said.

Lalia saw that it was indeed no laughing matter, and her face became grave again.

"Forgive me, Nadal. You see, I have been away so long; I was only a child when I left. There are things that I have forgotten."

Nadal lowered his eyes. "I see," he said.

"Then will you not forgive me and stay and talk with me after all these years? There is so much to say, so much that I would ask."

But Nadal remained silent. After a moment then he raised his eyes again to her face.

"Of what would you talk, Queen Lalia? What is there to say? Between men and women there is but one language, the speech of love. If I may not love you, I dare not stay in your presence. My veins do not hold the frozen blood of the West, but the fire of that sun from which you seek protection. Even so would my marble princess from the West flee from my love."

A slow flush rose to Lalia's cheek.

"Truly you lose no time in your talk of love," she said.

Nadal stood as if turned to bronze.

"If the royal one desires the cold love of the West she should have remained there where men can endure to wait," he said in a low voice.

"In the West," Lalia continued, "men do not love or speak of love when they see a woman for the first time."

"It is not for the first time," Nadal answered, raising his eyes. "Know that my caravan arrived last night. This morning I risked my life to see the beauty of my queen unveiled."

Lalia stared. "I do not understand. You could have seen the beauty of your queen unveiled when you made your call of state; for by degrees I intend to abolish this senseless veiling of women. To my court and tributary rulers I shall appear always without my veil. But I would know when you saw me, Nadal, while I did not see you. Have you then peeped at me from the roof-tops? But that would be conduct unbecoming a prince."

"I was the veiled woman who called upon you this morning," said Nadal.

Lalia, controlling another impulse to laugh, asked instead:

"But why like that, by a subterfuge?

Why not call as my cousin Nadal, governor of the Eastern province of Istrahan?"

"Because, remembering your warm mouth and cold eyes even from childhood, I feared to love you, Lalia, more than I would wish to love a woman. So I went to look upon you unveiled, hoping to find you grown ugly in that Western world. Instead, I find that which sets my blood on fire, so that I must die if I cannot win thy love."

Lalia rose from her reclining position, stretched her arms above her head, and smiled.

"Have done with this fiery talk of love, my prince. The hour is warm. Thou talkest much folly."

With a low salute Nadal turned and walked quickly away from her down the path.

Lalia relaxed into her reclining position again, but her eyes did not close. So this was what men were like in the East. Companionship, the exchange of ideas, was nothing. Between men and women there was but one thing, the fundamental thing. But life was not so simple as that.

Her eyelids fell slowly over her eyes. But he was beautiful, Nadal, strong and young, a splendid lover. Unconsciously her thoughts slipped into a dream of love and surrender. She roused herself with a start, a deep blush staining her cheek. It was not such a man as this, non-intellectual, intriguing, sensuous, she would love—a man who looked down upon women, according them but one place and use in the world. She who had developed in the free, brave atmosphere of the Western republic must love a man who was a companion, a man who could understand.

Then her eyes fell upon Nadal's verses pinned upon the tree, and, rising, she took it down and read what he had written:

TO LALIA.

As the nightingale is drunk with the night, so am I filled with thy beauty.
I brave death to look upon thee.
Thou art like a rose heavy with perfume.
Thou art the sun that burns by day, and the cool, deep night that is made for love.
I lie at thy feet and wait; I wait, but come quickly, my beloved, lest I die.

The sound of women's voices, the flutter of a crimson scarf among the trees, warned the young queen of the approach of her attendants.

Quickly she hid the verses in her bosom.

CHAPTER III.

A QUEEN IN ISTRAHAN.

NADAL as the governor of the Eastern province of Istrahan must, according to etiquette, pay a ceremonial visit to Lalia, bringing with him gifts and entertainment. Accordingly, the day after his stolen visit to Lalia's garden, he arrived with all the gorgeous pomp of the East, a camel-load of gifts in his train.

Among his offerings of jewels, rare perfumes, and vessels of exquisite old workmanship in silver, gold, and brass, there was one, a jeweled dagger with a handle curiously wrought of steel, gold and turquoise; the leather sheaf was also embroidered with silk encrusted with gems.

"For thy need or mine, queen of my soul," said Nadal in presenting it. "I ask that you wear it always."

Lalia accepted it lightly.

"Not for my need or thine, but for my pleasure, I wear thy gift, my cousin," she said, and slipped it in her belt.

"And now, if it is her pleasure, the queen will condescend to watch the miserable and unworthy entertainment I have to offer her," said Nadal, using the characteristic forms of the East which must describe all the speaker's possessions as contemptible, while extolling those of the person addressed.

So for the rest of the long day Lalia and Nadal sat side by side upon the dais at the end of the great room of the palace, while jugglers performed and veiled dancing-girls danced the frankly amorous dances of the East.

Throughout, Nadal sat silent beside the young queen, staring at the performers without seeing them. Only a faint line between his brows betrayed the fact that he found no pleasure in the entertainment he had provided.

But Lalia looked often in his direction.

Through her consciousness of the primitive beat of the dance music, the smell of incense mingled with the odor of flowers, the shifting pageant of colors, she was aware of the appeal of his manhood. She struggled against it in vain.

As the hours passed she became more and more conscious of his presence at her side.

All this slow, sensuous, barbaric beauty of the East became but a background for the dark young prince. At intervals during the performance slaves passed glasses of sherbet and trays of sweetmeats: but Nadal, refusing everything, stared straight ahead; but for his hard-drawn breath he might have been an image cast in bronze.

"Nadal"—he turned at last at the sound of the queen's voice—"do you then refuse all my hospitality?"

The prince became aware of a slave at his elbow offering him pomegranate juice in a golden goblet. With a murmured excuse he accepted the cup and drained it at a draft.

She met his eyes, heavy with the suppressed storm of nature.

"You are tired of all this, Nadal?" she asked.

He looked away from her as he answered in the low, controlled voice of the East: "Is it the queen's wish that the dancers cease?"

"It is my wish," said Lalia. It angered her because she trembled at the sound of his voice.

Nadal arose and gave the command.

The dancers stopped and the musicians withdrew.

"And your retainers," said Lalia, her voice almost a whisper, "all of them—send them away. They suffocate me; I am not used to crowds like this."

Nadal hesitated an instant.

"All? The princess would be alone with me?" he asked in a voice that shook despite his effort at control.

The demon of coquetry seized upon Lalia.

"Alone with thee," she breathed softly, close to his cheek. "Why not?"

Nadal paled.

"Thou art in Istrahan, not in America," he answered. "I warn thee, O queen of love—"

In the same voice Lalia replied: "I do not fear thee."

The slow color rose and dyed the prince's cheek. For the first time he turned and looked upon her. From the garden echoes of music drifted in like an exotic perfume, the beat of the drums, the rhythmic pulse of the strings making a sort of accompaniment to his words.

"No?" he said. "Then I fear the queen does not understand. But upon her own head be the consequences. It is destiny."

"Upon my own head," replied Lalia proudly and steadily.

In the depths of the man's being something quivered like fear. Yet it was in the same calm voice that he gave the order for the entire court, his and hers, to withdraw and leave them.

When they were quite alone he stood before her with folded arms. "The queen knows that to be alone with me like this signifies our betrothal."

Lalia replied lazily: "I recall that that was the custom of our world. But do you not understand yet, O prince, that I was sent to the West in order that I might bring its civilization to my country? Remember that I no longer abide by the ancient laws and customs that governed our race."

Nadal stood looking at her steadily.

If she felt the sultry storm of the East rising, she disregarded it for whatever reason. "As your superior ruler, I command you to come nearer to me, Nadal. It is well that you should learn to associate with women as do the men of the West, not like the barbarian of the East who asks naught of a woman but the gift of her sex."

Slowly, with a glitter in his eyes that should have warned her, Nadal approached nearer at her command.

Lalia threw back her veil. "Learn to look a woman in the face, Nadal. Learn to forget sometimes that she is a woman."

Nadal obeyed. He looked his queen in the face, and before that blazing look her eyes fell and her breath rose tumultuously. She heard his voice thick, deep, no longer controlled.

"I learn, and I teach," he breathed.

Then the bolt fell. She was in his arms, his kisses were on her lips.

And Nadal taught the Western-bred princess how the East could love.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WAY OF THE EAST.

ALONE upon her couch, face downward, Lalia tried to think. It was not conjoined to such a man that she could do the service she had dreamed of doing for her country. To be for a time drugged with this love of the senses, then satiety, boredom, enforced association with a man who could never understand the real true love of men and women, a man who could not offer her companionship upon any basis. She could not, with her unveiled eyes of the West, take such a man as Nadal for her husband. She could not—and in the same moment she trembled with the memory of his kisses.

For all of the following day Lalia refused Nadal's urgent requests to see her; sent no answer to his messages. The next morning her mind, trained in the rational control of the West, seemed to have conquered. She summoned the prince to her presence. When he entered he found her alone. She spoke simply and directly, not using the thee and thou of intimacy.

"You have understood, I am afraid, from my weakness of yesterday, that I have consented to be your wife, Nadal; but it did not mean that. I cannot marry you. It would not make either of us happy."

Nadal stood an instant as if turned to stone, then he raised his eyes and answered in the same form:

"Is this your final answer, my queen?"

She bowed her head.

There was a brief silence, a breathless moment of waiting; then, "For the last time," he whispered; and she felt his arms enfolding her.

With an effort she flung him off and clapped her hands to summon her attendants.

"Remove the prince," she commanded when they entered. "He has forgotten the etiquette due the queen, his sovereign."

But her servants did not move.

"You forget," said Nadal, "although I am your slave that I am also a prince. Also, I am a man and you are only a woman in Istrahan, Queen Lalia. Shall we not then deal with this alone, you and I?"

After a moment the conquered queen bowed her head and ordered her attendants to leave again.

When they were alone Nadal, without moving from his place beside her, drew the dagger he had given her a few hours before from his belt.

"The need comes soon. Strike now and avenge yourself, O queen." He pointed to his throat with a smile. "Strike here and see how the blood will spurt forth. It is certain death."

He forced the dagger into Lalia's hand. She stood, her breast rising tumultuously, her fascinated eyes upon his.

Suddenly she threw the dagger from her.

"You wild thing! Barbarian, do you really expect me to stand here and murder you?" she said, and laughed.

And Nadal laughed also, a laugh that maddened her.

"The West hath turned the blood in your veins to water," he said. "You no longer know how to hate or love." Then he bent and, picking up the dagger again, forced it into her hand, standing so close to her that his arm pressed her shoulder, and his eyes flashed flame into hers. "Strike, or I shall take thee in my arms. It is love or death. I am still of the East. It is my way of love."

Reluctantly, as if compelled, she met his eyes. Again he laughed exultantly. His hand covering hers upon the dagger-hilt, he slowly raised the knife and turned its point against her left breast.

"See, it is sharp," he whispered. "It will do its work well." He pressed the sharp point against her flesh.

She did not flinch, but her breath came harder, and the red color rose under her brown skin, the while her opaque eyes of the East rested on his.

"At least you are not a coward," said Prince Nadal.

A faint smile touched her lips, a slow fire began to kindle in her eyes.

"No; I do not fear death nor thee, wild man. Leave thy dagger at my breast or plunge it in until it finds my heart if it be thy barbarian pleasure."

His face darkened.

"Nay, then thou shalt learn to fear me," he panted, bending his fierce gaze upon her.

But her eyes did not falter. Boldly they flung back into his the challenge he gave. So they stood a breathless instant; then the man's breath broke forth in an agonized exclamation.

"Enough! Thou has conquered!" he cried, and withdrew the dagger from her breast. Still holding her hand clasped over the hilt with his own, he turned the point against his own heart.

"Then if thou wilt not, I must," he said: and she felt his hand begin to force the dagger toward his heart.

With a wild cry she flung off his hand, drew her own away, then flung the weapon far from her. A red drop of blood gushed from his wound, and for a moment she stood, shaken, breathless, then with a smothered cry she gave herself to his embrace.

When at last the under impulse of withdrawal asserted itself and she drew back from his arms, it was only to meet in the man's eyes the look that conquered her.

He smiled and touched the crimson stain on her white embroidered vest. "So you are mine, marked with my heart's blood," he said, "mine until death."

CHAPTER V.

HOWLAND ON THE HEELS OF THE HUN.

THERE were nightly riots now in the streets of Istrahan. The little country, which had been disturbed for some time with rumors of the encroachment of the great war, became daily more uneasy and aware of danger. Only the queen, consumed with the sudden passion which seemed to have overwhelmed her reason, failed to realize the approach of danger.

"Some Russians have entered the town," the grand vizier told her one day. "They are anarchists and they stir up the people. What shall be done to quiet them?"

"What is their number?" asked Lalia, languidly studying herself in a jeweled mirror, the gift of Nadal.

"Fifty or sixty now, perhaps, but it is said that there are more on the way."

Lalia laid down the mirror, wondering if Nadal would find her beautiful in her new head-dress.

"If there are no more than that, we do not need to alarm ourselves," she said. "My soldiers have modern firearms, and they are not cowardly like the Persians."

Then she turned her attention to the bridal gown her slaves brought in for her final inspection; for to-morrow was the day of her wedding.

When the prince's chamberlain brought the tidings to him he answered in like fashion. "Vex me not with news of war. What is to be, must be." And his counselor turned away in despair. He was an old man and had served Nadal's father.

"Thus may a man's kingdom be lost by a woman," he said.

The next day the marriage ceremonies began. For two days they lasted, according to the custom of the country. Not until the evening of the second day were the royal couple left alone. For the week that followed the universe was bounded by the flaming circle of their love to the queen and her consort.

Then one morning as she sat alone a small bit of white pasteboard was brought to her, a man's card. The sight of it brought back to her memory the American friends she had left in the beautiful college town.

Like a flash of clear daylight Lalia saw again for a brief instant the contrast between her life in the East and the one she had known in far-away America.

"Tell him to come in at once. I will see him," she said, still full of her memories. She looked up to see the female slave who had brought the message still standing. It was Astra, an old woman who had served Lalia's mother, a privileged being.

"But surely her royal highness will not receive the stranger with a naked face," she said.

Lalia smiled and told Astra to put on her veil.

The next instant Howland entered, to find himself received by an Oriental princess reclining, veiled.

"I see—the East has returned to the East," he said when he had recovered himself. "And to think that this is the girl I danced the one-step with the last time I saw her!"

Lalia smiled.

"Yes, the East has returned to the East," she said. "Have my people told you that I am now the wife of Prince Nadal, my cousin, ruler of the Eastern province of Istrahan?"

For a moment the American sat silent, while the color ebbed from his face.

"No, I did not know," he said. "I do not speak your language, and I have only just arrived." After a moment he looked at the girl he loved and smiled bravely. "Then I who came to warn remain to congratulate," he said.

Something in his tone arrested the queen's attention. "Of what would you warn?" she asked.

"Is it possible that you do not know that your city is infested with a band of Russian anarchists who may attack the palace at any minute."

In her surprise Lalia threw back the veil to which she had not yet become accustomed. But after a moment her momentary anxiety relaxed. "Oh, those Russian anarchists," she said. "I cannot take them seriously—a band of marauders. My soldiers will make short work of them if they attack us."

"Don't be too sure." Howland's face was grave. "A band of marauders—even a small one—armed and trained by Germany is not so easily disposed of."

Lalia looked slightly disturbed at his insistence. "What do you think we should do?"

Before Howland could answer Prince Nadal entered. As Lalia turned to greet him she saw that he was beside himself with passion.

She realized the cause the next moment. For his wife to be seen unveiled by a strange man was an unpardonable offense, a thing punishable by death.

In the very instant of her realization she saw Nadal leap upon Howland with a drawn dagger, and in less than a second after that four men suddenly appearing from behind the curtains at the entrance, seized the prince and held him prisoner.

Roused at last Lalia rose, standing upon her dais and questioned Howland like a queen.

"I command you to release the prince. Who are these men? You are my friend—Edward, I do not understand."

Nadal, hearing them speak together in a language he could not understand, literally shook with passion, but his captors held him fast.

Howland approaching nearer to Lalia answered in a low voice. "They are some of the anarchists who would get possession of your palace and eventually your kingdom," he said.

Lalia's eyes narrowed to the sinister slit of an Asiatic idol.

"And they are also your friends?" she said.

Howland did not answer at once, then raising his eyes to the queen's he said quietly: "You must trust me or I cannot help you, Lalia."

"What would you have me do?"

"Send every one away—even your husband. I must speak with you alone. One of my men can understand a little English. He has spent several years in America."

Lalia hesitated while Howland watched her, aware of her mental struggle. In the silence the hard breathing of the prince was audible. Lalia knew that he only waited his release to have the American's blood. Then she looked into the clear eyes of the man from another continent and made her choice.

"I will trust you, Edward," she said. "Release the prince and give your orders to your men." Then she turned to the liberated Nadal: "Our country is in danger, Nadal," she said. "It is necessary that I have some words with this gentleman alone. He is an old friend from America. His sister was my friend. I know you cannot understand, but you must trust me, my husband."

"You ask me to leave you alone with this man?" the prince asked in a low voice, then added with a smile, "For your coun-

try's sake." The word, the smile, were an insult, but in the gravity of the moment Lalia scarcely thought of that. Of course Nadal could never understand.

"Astra may remain," she said, "Will that satisfy thee?"

There was a brief silence before Nadal answered, with his eyes on the ground. "It will satisfy me—since it must," he said, and withdrew, closely followed by his late captors.

When they were alone, Howland seated himself beside the queen and spoke quickly.

"I came here by way of Persia," he said. "I was with the English army there. When I heard that your country was not far away I set out to find you, thinking you might have returned as you said you would. On the way I fell into the hands of these bandits, friends of the anarchists already here. The only way I escaped with my life was by pretending to be one of them. With my knowledge of their sort in America I managed to fool the man who understands a little English. I did not know which way we were traveling, except for the general direction, until this morning, when I found I was in Istrahan.

"I found that they had made plans to stampede the palace to-night. I persuaded them not to do this by telling them that I knew you and could entrap you by coming here. I drew a terrible picture of the tortures that would be inflicted upon them if they fell into the hands of your barbarian soldiers, so they easily consented to my plan.

"They have sent me to offer you terms. You must send back these men with a message from me—something to gain time. I will make some excuse about being detained here for a day or two in order to accomplish my ends.

"We must try to hold them until we get help. I brought a carrier-pigeon with me which I sent back to the English camp when I found out the state of affairs. So if we can hold off these men until some English soldiers come I don't think they can do much harm. But of course you must prepare for a siege in case they do attack us. We don't know how many men may join them from the Russian colonies near here. We ought to be able to put up a fair fight any way if all your people can be trusted. The outer walls are strong."

Then it was that Lalia showed the result of her American training. With Howland's help she spent the day planning and giving directions. And Nadal sat apart and thought with his eyes upon the ground. While Howland was preparing her message to Lifkowsky, the anarchist leader, she went to Nadal and drew his arms about her.

"Give me your word that the American shall come to no harm at your hands, Nadal," she said, "for we owe our lives to him."

Nadal, pale and sullen, continued to look upon the ground. "I do not know that," he said.

Lalia's heart sank. How was she to make this Oriental understand? "You know it, because—I tell you, Nadal. Do you want us to meet death at the hands of these Russians before you will be convinced?"

Nadal flashed a terrible look upon her. "I know that you have known this man in that hateful land of the West. I know that you speak with him alone, unveiled, in a tongue I do not understand. There is not room in the world for him and me. One of us must die."

"Nadal, Nadal, how shall I make you understand!" cried Lalia in despair. "You know that I love you with all my heart. Have I not proved it? Can a woman love a man as I love you and find room in her heart for another?"

Nadal stared at her with stormy eyes. "I do not know. I do not know what or how you may have learned to love over there. Their ways are not my ways."

For a moment Lalia sank down overcome, then the strength that she had developed in her life of free womanhood came to her rescue. She looked up with a new expression on her face, and in some way the man understood that she had conquered again, even as she had overcome him with his dagger at her breast.

"As you will, Nadal. If you would ever have me for your wife again you will safeguard this man's life. The day that he meets his death through you will be the last that you will ever hold me in your arms."

Nadal bowed low. "I understand," he said, but Lalia knew that the thing he understood was as far from the truth as pole from pole. The mind of the Oriental is not like ours. Lalia's words did not affect Nadal's purpose one whit; it but altered the nature of his plans.

That night as they sat at dinner Lalia was seized with a strange caprice.

"Give me your plate, Edward," she said suddenly, as the American was about to eat. "I see you have the chicken's wing, and it is the only part that Ju-Ju will eat: you do not mind?"

Edward laughed as the queen took his plate for her dog. She held it an instant before she handed it to the waiting slave.

"Or shall I take it instead myself?" she said, and made as if to set the plate down before her, glancing as she did so into her husband's eyes—so brief an instant that her glance seemed scarcely to rest upon him. Then she handed the plate to the slave. "No, after all, Ju-Ju shall have it. Poor little Ju-Ju, he loves the wing of chicken."

The slave set the plate upon the floor before the small white dog Nadal had given to the queen. "And you shall have mine as reward," she said to Howland, and commanded the attendant to give her plate to her guest.

That night when Howland had gone to his apartment, Lalia went into the dining-hall alone. Ju-Ju, the dog that Nadal had given her, lay dead upon the floor. She looked up to see her husband beside her. He met her look with a shrug.

She turned away to hide her tears. "Oh, Nadal!" she said. "And is that your answer?" Then he would have taken her in his arms, but she drew from him passionately and pointed to the dead animal. "Not after that," she said.

He looked back at her with unrepentant dangerous eyes. "You mean that you will send me from you to-night?" he asked. She nodded.

"Oh, very well." He turned away. "If you do not keep me with you you know how I shall occupy myself."

Too well she knew! The East had outwitted her. If she would save Howland's life she must keep Nadal by her side.

He was at the door when she called him faintly.

"Nadal—come back."

That night she lay and shuddered in his arms, shuddered because the man who held her thus was a treacherous murderer, and because, in spite of that, in those arms she could still forget all but love. Something outside of her will, yet part of herself, felt shame that she could love such a man.

CHAPTER VI.

WITHOUT HONOR.

AT dawn the anarchists attacked the palace in spite of Howland's diplomacy, but the American had planned well, and the men who climbed the high wall of the palace found a wide belt of flame on the other side, and while they hesitated they were shot down like birds by Lalia's soldiers. At the end of two hours' fighting the queen's little army had taken twenty prisoners who had fallen wounded in the fire from which Howland had dragged them.

As he saved the last man, he looked up to see the queen standing beside him. "Our prisoners," he said. "Call your men to take them, Lalia. Where shall you put them?"

A cruel smile lighted Lalia's dark face.

"Where do we put them?" she asked. "They shall be sewn up in sacks and dropped into the river. That is how we treat our enemies in Istrahan."

Howland turned away from her with a quick revulsion. "Lalia, no—you would not do anything so cruel as that!" he said.

She met his eyes and the cruel light in hers died under them. She knew him in that instant for the higher type, and the thought came to her that it was such a man as Howland that she should have loved.

She should have—but she did not.

Even in that moment of clear vision she could close her eyes and thrill at the memory of the love-making of that other man who was treacherous and without honor by the standards she had come to know, because—because in some mysterious way the same thing was in her blood, because East was East, and West was West.

As they stood together Nadal came out of

the palace and going up to one of the recumbent and apparently unconscious men, kicked him contemptuously with his foot. Afterward Lalia could not have told how it happened, but the man, who had apparently been only feigning unconsciousness, turned with a sudden twist upon Nadal and had a knife at his throat, and in the same moment Howland struck the knife from the Russian's hand and pinned his arms behind him in a strong clasp. The fellow was bound and taken away with the other prisoners, but before he went he called out something in Russian, a language Lalia understood as well as her own.

"Let him live then, the treacherous beast, the more fools you— He will only betray you again. It was he who told us that the American's message was a ruse. But for him you would have been safe to-day."

Howland passed into the palace with the men—he did not understand what the man had said—and Lalia and her husband were left alone.

She raised her sad eyes to Nadal's, which dwelt upon her strangely, traitor that he was, how should she appeal to him?

"Now that the American has saved your life for the second time, Nadal, surely you can give me your word that he is safe under our roof?"

But again Nadal's answer was a shrug. "Who knows why he chooses to save my life? Thou art a woman, we are two men that love thee. What can there ever be between men who love the same woman but death? Only a madman would protect his rival's life."

He left her, yet as he walked away he drew her heart after him. Barbarian that he was she could not free herself from his spell. From that thraldom, it seemed, she could not escape.

Since Lalia had discovered his intent to poison the American it remained for Nadal to find some other means for ridding himself of his rival. A scheme of kidnaping now commended itself to him as most feasible, but it must be a carefully matured plan that could not fail.

Howland must be carried far into the mountains before he was murdered so that no trace should remain. The deed must be performed by some one he could trust and not any of Lalia's retainers about the palace could be safely employed by him. They might betray him to the queen.

When the second day had passed and the enemy had attempted no second attack, Nadal laid his plans. The instinct of self-preservation urged him to wait, but his jealous passion, lashed to madness by the sight of Lalia and the American talking together in English, burned up the last shred of caution, and after dark, the evening of the second day, Nadal, wrapped in his servant's cloak, stole out of a small gate in the back of the palace wall.

A few yards beyond, at the bottom of the hill, was the hut of one Mushad, a Persian formerly employed in his palace. There was no one in sight. Nadal stole softly along in the shadow of the great wall.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TORMENTS OF LOVE.

INSIDE the palace Lalia waited for her husband, but the hour grew late, and still he did not come. By midnight she summoned all the retainers, slaves and servants of the palace, and learned that one of the women had seen him leave by the small gate, but had not seen him return.

Lalia lay awake until daylight, her heart torn with anguish and self-reproach. She told herself that she had not allowed sufficiently for Nadal's passionate Oriental nature. Of course he could not understand the kind of friendship that existed between her and this man of the West, and now she had driven her beloved out to his death.

An hour after sunrise a messenger came to the gates bearing a letter under a flag of truce. Lalia tore it open with shaking fingers. It contained but a few lines.

Prince Nadal is in our hands. If you will deliver up to us the American traitor who betrayed us we will permit the prince to return to you in safety. If you refuse he will be shot at sundown.

LIFKOWSKY.

All day in the very torments of hell Lalia paced the floor of her chamber, allowing no one to come near her. At one moment her

whole being cried out for her lover. The next her sense of justice, trained in the ethics of civilization, reminded her that her lover had treacherously tried to kill the man who had saved them, that he had even betrayed her and her people to their enemy in his insane jealousy, and that it was therefore just that Howland should live, and that Nadal, her lover, should die.

All day she alternately lay upon her couch and paced the floor, racked by the warring forces of her nature. Then an hour before sundown she sent her ultimatum to the anarchist. She would not give up the American. Nadal must die. "But tell him," she wrote, "that I shall be with him in death."

As the hour of sundown approached, Lalia still refusing to permit any one near her, sat at her window, with a revolver in her hand, waiting for the sun to drop below the blue edge of the mountains. When the last fiery edge had vanished she would lift the pistol to her head. At the same hour she and Nadal should pass out into the unknown together.

The scent of the roses drifted in to her. She remembered her lover's kisses, and her very soul grew faint within her with her longing; but it was too late now. The die was cast.

The sun had just touched the edge of the hilltop when the princess was roused by a commotion outside her door, and the next moment a slave ran in breathless, bearing another message from Nadal's captors. The note was brief. Lifkowsky offered the queen of Istrahan a chance to see her lover before he died. The man who carried the message would convey her in safety to her lover's prison and back to the palace. Nadal, for her sake, would be granted twelve hours more of life.

As Lalia, veiled and wrapped in her purple chadar, passed through the hall of the palace on her way out, Howland stopped her. "I beg of you not to go with this man. It is only a ruse to get possession of you. The man is mad about you. He has seen you from your neighbor's roof-top as you walked in your garden. He told me that when he had conquered your city he would take possession of you. Do not leave the palace even for a moment, Lalia, as you value your kingdom."

But Lalia shook her head. "What you say may be true, but I cannot lose any chance of seeing my beloved again," she said.

Howland, who did not know that Lalia had saved his life at her lover's expense, looked at her with grave eyes.

"It may be worse than death," he said.

Lalia with a smile laid her hand upon her breast. "It cannot, for I carry here always the means of death."

The man of the West who loved her so deeply in his different way made no further attempt to withhold her. "Do you then love him so much?" he said sadly.

"I love Nadal with my heart of the East," answered Lalia, "even while my mind, brought to birth in your world of the West, condemns him. I respect you, Edward, with that same mind. I trust you with my soul—but I do not love you."

"Go, then," he said, "the East to the East. It is destiny." But even as he spoke Howland began to lay his plans for her rescue. If only the English soldiers would get his message and come before it was too late!

Through the narrow streets of the town the anarchist led the young queen of Istrahan. The blue midnight sky of Asia behind the golden dome of the palace was thick with stars, but there was no moon. A nightingale sang in a lime-tree and a wild strain of music from somewhere was borne on the night wind. Through the fragrant night, down dark, crooked alleys, and into an open door the man led her; then down some steep steps into the cellar where the prince was confined.

A single lamp burned in a corner, and in its light an hour-glass, curiously wrought, held the slipping sands that measured Nadal's life.

With a low cry Lalia flung herself into her lover's arms, but the Oriental, wild with outraged jealousy and love, seized her about the throat and would have strangled her had not the prison attendant and the messenger together dragged him from her and held him back.

"Shall I take you away?" the queen's escort asked, but Lalia shook her head.

"Leave me with him while the sands of the hour-glass run," she said.

"But he may kill you," objected the Russian, "and Lifkowsky said that no harm must come to you."

Lalia drew off her jewels and offered them to the men.

"These for ten minutes alone with him."

The men, after a brief hesitation, accepted the bribe and left, closing the door behind them. Lalia turned to the prince, who stood trembling under the conflict of the primitive emotions that ravaged him.

"I come to save your life, Nadal, and like a wild beast you spring at my throat to kill me," she said.

"I was not always like this," he said in a broken voice. "But to love you and know that you love another has made me mad."

"Take me in your arms, Nadal—that is my answer."

But after a moment the woman recalled the slipping sands and drew back from her lover's embrace.

"Take my cloak, Nadal. I will take yours, then you can escape."

"And leave you to be shot within the hour? No, I will not live without you," was the prince's answer.

"Howland will save me," said Lalia. "Quick, it is your only chance."

When the jailer returned after the ten minutes had passed he found the lovers wrapped in each other's arms in a last embrace.

CHAPTER VIII.

"NO ANSWER."

BUT it was not to the safety of the palace that the anarchist messenger conducted his charge. Nadal knew that he was being led away from the palace into some house in the town, but he dared not protest. Even when he entered the upper room in which three Russian men were seated in close conversation, he did not at first realize what had befallen him.

"So this is our rebellious queen!" said a short, dark man who seemed to be the leader. Nadal noted his face, sharp yet sensual. "Leave me alone, men, I would become acquainted with her royal highness without an audience."

When the others had left, Lifkowsky came toward the supposed queen, and with a rough, possessive movement threw back the veil and the black, enveloping chadar.

"Now we shall see if you are as desirable as I remembered you, my lady," he said. But when he looked into the face of the prince a growl of rage broke from his lips.

"So this is your game!" he said. "And you thought to escape Lifkowsky with such child's play as this! But understand, brave prince in woman's skirts, the situation is not changed. *You* shall die, and I shall possess your queen—until I tire of her."

Nadal, weaponless though he was, sprang at the man's throat, but three men were upon him in an instant. They bound him with rough hands and stood awaiting orders from their leader.

"Bring the queen here without delay," he said, then to the prince: "So you shall see her again. Sooner than you had hoped!"

Lalia, bidden to leave her prison under escort, believed that she was going to her death; but even so she was happier than she had been a few hours before, when she had sat at the palace window in the red sunset waiting for the signal of death.

After a short walk in the street the men stopped and one of them bound a scarf about her eyes. "Now I am to die," the queen thought, and summoned all her courage. But after a moment the men again walked on, leading her not unkindly, until they came to a pause before a house she could not see.

After ascending a few steps the blindfolded princess knew that she stood in a lighted upper room, then her bandage was removed, and she saw at a glance that Howland's prophecy had come to pass.

Before her stood Nadal, a prisoner, and seated opposite her a Russian that she knew must be Lifkowsky.

Involuntarily she took a step toward Nadal, but she found herself restrained none too gently. "You may look, but you may

not touch," said the anarchist with a horrible smile. "I have put off the prince's execution for a few minutes so that he may see how a real man wins a woman."

As he spoke he seized Lalia in his arms. The prince, with a savage cry, leaped in the iron clasp of his captors. The next moment there was a sudden sound of rushing feet without and a crowd of men broke into the room. With an exclamation of joy Lalia recognized Holland in command of her own soldiers. "Lalia!" he cried. "Thank God I am not too late!" In an instant he was at her side. The Russian's arms loosened, and the queen freed herself.

"Don't be afraid, the English are coming. If *we* can't manage these dogs, they can. You are safe, you and your prince."

Nadal's voice rang out wildly above the confusion. "Your lover shall not save us! You sacrificed me to him once—it shall not happen again." The prince struggled to reach his knife.

Howland turned to the queen. "You sacrificed *me* to him? I don't understand."

Lalia's oblique eyelids fell. "It was his life or yours Edward—this beast—"

"And you chose mine?" Howland whispered. Then through the swift surge of happiness that blurred his vision he saw the Russian again lay his hands upon the queen.

"It seems our lovemaking must wait," Lifkowsky observed with a leer, and beckoned to a soldier. "Go with this man. He will take you to a safe place. Do not be lonely, beautiful one. I shall be with you soon."

A shot punctuated his sentence. The Russian dropped to the floor a dead man. In the alarm and confusion that followed Nadal slipped like an eel from the loosened clasp of the soldiers and reached Lalia's side. Howland, his revolver in hand and his eyes upon his enemies, spoke to the prince. "Get her to the palace—quick. Your men are below." An instant his eyes met the queen's. "When it is over I will come to you," he said.

As the queen and her lover slipped down the dark stairway the sounds behind them told them that the conflict had begun.

The dawn was creeping in through the narrow windows when Howland because suddenly aware of silence and a stinging pain in his shoulder. The anarchists had fled to a man—except for the scattered shapes upon the dim floor. He realized a touch upon his arm and turned to see the queen's messenger holding out a note addressed in Lalia's hand.

He tore it open with shaking fingers, hardly knowing what he hope and feared. He read:

Please do not come to us, dear Edward. Please understand. I was strong enough to choose the right once. Beyond that I am afraid my strength will not go. You have given me back the happiness that is my life; do not come again to endanger it, for he can never understand. Forget me, dear Edward, though I shall never forget you. Did I not tell you in the beginning that I was not of your world? The East has gone back to the East, as it must till the end of time. LALIA.

The note fluttered from Howland's limp hand. Time passed—a second, an eon, a measureless interval — then he became aware of the impassive dark face of the messenger waiting with the infinite empty patience of the East.

"No answer," he said, and mechanically put a piece of silver in the man's hand.

(The end.)

THE RED ROSE CRIED

BY HARRY KEMP

"OH, come to me, my love!" the Red Rose cried.
"I fear your thorns," the Nightingale replied.
"My thorns are only deadly for my foes,
To keep myself for you!" replied the Rose.

From Now On

by Frank L. Packard

Author of "The Sin That Was His," "The Miracle Man," "The Iron-Rider," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

DAVE HENDERSON, handy man for Booky Skarvan, a crooked bookmaker, had gone to Frisco to secure a hundred-thousand-dollar loan from Martin Tydeman.

Dave suddenly decides to secure the money, secretly, for himself. Having secreted the notes in a pigeon-cote at the rear of his lodgings, he returned to his room, to find Baldy Vickers and Runty Mott, crook pals of his boss, discussing his murder.

After a desperate dash for freedom, he was finally apprehended by Joe Barjan, of the Frisco plain-clothes squad, and sent to prison for five years.

Just before his release Barjan visited him, and tried to browbeat him into disclosing the hiding-place of the money.

Haunted by the fear of the police, he put his precious secret into the keeping of a fellow prisoner, Charles Millman, whose sentence expired before his own, with the understanding that he was to meet him in New York, where the money would be turned over to him.

Later he suspected Millman of double-crossing him, and once free he decided to do for Millman as well as Skarvan.

Just before his release he was called to see his friend, old Tony, the bomb-thrower, make his exit from the world of men. Dave had won the old man's regard by his kindness, and the dying man had whispered into Dave's ear the name of a Frisco compatriot who would always be a friend in need.

Henderson, on the day of his freedom, had laid all his plans for investigating the pigeon-cote, but in the mean time he had gone to collect some money from his friend, Square John Kelly, into whose saloon he made certain he had been followed by a fellow in a brown cap.

Together, in simulated drunkenness, they made their way to a saloon which led by a rear door into the back passageway of Capriano's house, the Italian friend to whose good graces he had been committed by dead Tony.

Speen, the owner of the brown cap, was a plain-clothes man, whose name and job were first called by a big bruiser, who struck the detective with brass knuckles as Baldy Vickers and his gang rushed in.

The police had trailed Dave, and the gangsters had trailed the police. Then the lights were extinguished as Dave felt the brass-knuckled hands at his throat, and the gang were upon him.

Quickly he threw them off, and in the darkness made his way out the rear, through the yard, and into the passage that led to the Italian's house.

Here his repeated knocks for admission were answered by the burst of an electric gleam over his head, disclosing his bleeding face and his torn clothes.

To the startled gasp of a girl behind the door he cried: "Quick! I'm from Tony Lomazzi," the pound of racing feet momentarily gaining upon his ear.

BOOK III — *Continued*

CHAPTER II.

SANCTUARY!

THE light in the porch went out. From within, as though with slow, dubious hesitation, a key turned in the lock. The door opened slightly, and from a dark interior the girl's voice reached Dave Henderson again.

"Tony Lomazzi sent you, you say!" she exclaimed in a puzzled way; and then, a sudden apprehension in her voice: "You are all covered with blood—what is the matter? What do you want?"

From the lane, the sound of pounding, racing feet seemed almost opposite the Italian's porch now. Dave Henderson, without ceremony, pushed at the door. It

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yielded, as the girl evidently retreated backward abruptly, and he stepped inside, closed the door softly behind him, and, feeling for the key, turned it swiftly in the lock. He could see nothing, but out of the darkness near him came a sharp intake of breath.

"I'm sorry!" said Dave Henderson quietly. "But it was a bit of a close call. I'm not quite sure whether they are running after me, or running from the police, but, either way, it would have been a little awkward if I had been seen."

She seemed to have regained her composure, for her voice, as she spoke again, was as quiet and as evenly modulated as his own.

"What do you want?" she asked once more. "Why did Tony Lomazzi send you here?"

He did not answer at once. From somewhere in the front of the house, muffled, but still quite audible, there came the voices of two men—one high-pitched, querulous, curiously short-breathed, the other with a sort of monotonous, sullen whine in it. He listened automatically for an instant, as his eyes searched around him. It was almost black inside here as he stood with his back to the door, but, growing more accustomed to the darkness now, he could make out a faint, blurred form, obviously that of the girl, a few feet away from him.

"I want to see Nicolo Capriano," he said.

It was her turn now to pause before she answered.

"Is it necessary?" she asked finally.

"To me—yes," said Dave Henderson.

"My father has already had far too much excitement to-night," she said in a low voice. "He is a very sick man. There is some one with him now. If you could give me the message it would be better. As for any help you need, for you appear to be hurt, I will gladly attend to that myself. You may be assured of that, if you come from Tony Lomazzi."

She was Nicolo Capriano's daughter, then! It struck him as a passing thought, though of no particular consequence, that she spoke excellent English for an Italian.

"I'm afraid that won't do," said Dave Henderson seriously. "It is practically a matter of life and death to me to see Nicolo Capriano, and—"

From the front of the house the querulous voice rose suddenly in a still higher pitch:

"Teresa! Teresa!"

"Yes, I am coming!" the girl cried out; and then, hurriedly, to Dave Henderson: "Wait here a moment. I will tell him. What is your name?"

Dave Henderson smiled a little queerly in the darkness.

"If he is alone when you tell him, it is Dave Henderson," he said dryly. "Otherwise, it is Smith—John Smith."

She was gone.

He listened as her footsteps died away in the darkness; and then he listened again at the door. There was still a great deal of commotion out there in the lane, but certainly there was nothing to indicate that he and Nicolo Capriano's back porch had in any way been suspected of having had anything in common; it was, rather, as though the entire saloon up there had emptied itself in haste into the lane, and was running pell-mell in an effort to be anywhere but in that vicinity when the police arrived.

Well, so much the better! For the moment, at least, he had evaded the trap set for him both by Booky Skarvan's pack and by the police—and the next move depended very largely upon Nicolo Capriano, or, perhaps even more, upon this daughter of his, since the old man, it seemed, was sick.

The girl's name was apparently Teresa—which mattered very little.

What mattered a great deal more was that she evidently had her wits about her—an inheritance possibly from the old man, whose reputation, in his day, as one of the coolest and shrewdest of those outside the pale of the law, was at least substantiated by the fact that he had been able to stand off the police for practically a lifetime.

Dave Henderson raised his hand, and felt gingerly over his right temple. The blood had stopped flowing, but there was a large and well-defined lump there. He did not remember at just what particular stage

of the fight that had happened. From his head, his hand felt over his clothing. He nodded a little ruefully to himself. He had come off far from scatheless—his coat had almost literally been torn from his back.

Voices reached him again from the front of the house; he heard the girl speaking quietly in Italian; he heard some response in the sullen whine that he had remarked before; and then the street door opened and closed. Silence followed for what seemed a long time, until finally he caught the sound of the girl's step, coming toward him again.

"My father will see you," she said. "But I want to warn you again that he is a very sick man—sicker than he imagines he is. It is his heart."

"Yes?" said Henderson.

"Come with me, then," she said tersely. "There is a door here—the passage turns to the right. Can you see?"

It was a queer place—with its darkness, and its twisted passage! Quite queer for so small and ordinary a dwelling—but, if rumor were true, it had been queerer still in the years gone by! A grim smile crossed Dave Henderson's lips, as he followed the shadowy form of his conductor. It argued well, at all events! The surroundings at least bore out Nicolo Capriano's record, which was a record much to be desired by a man in his, Dave Henderson's straits.

The light from an open door beyond the turn in the passage dispelled the darkness. The girl was standing there now, motioning him to enter—but suddenly, for a moment, he stood and stared at her. This was queer, too!

Everything about the place was queer!

Somehow he had pictured in the darkness an Italian girl, pretty enough perhaps in a purely physical way, with gold rings in her ears, perhaps such as the men wore, and slatternly, with feet shod in coarse, thick boots; the only kind of an Italian girl he had ever remembered having seen—a girl that hauled at the straps of a hand-organ, while the man plodded along the streets between the shafts.

Now he stared at the trim, lithe, daintily dressed little figure, stared at the oval face, and the dark, steady, self-reliant eyes, and the wealth of rich, black hair that crowned the broad, white forehead, and glinted like silken strands as the light fell upon it.

The color mounted in her cheeks.

And then, with a start, he pushed his hand across his eyes, and bit his lips, and flushed a deeper red than hers.

Her eyes, that had begun to harden as they met his gaze, softened in an instant, and she smiled. His confusion had been his apology, his acquittal of any intended offense.

She motioned again to him to enter, and, as he stepped forward across the threshold, she reached in and rested her hand on the doorknob.

"You can call when you need me, father," she said — and closed the door softly.

Dave Henderson's eyes swept the room with a swift, comprehensive glance—and then held steadily on a pair of jet-black eyes, so black that they seemed to possess no pupils, which were in turn fixed on him by a strange-looking figure, lying forward on a quaint, old-fashioned, four-poster bed across the room. He moved forward to the bedside, as the other beckoned to him.

So this was Nicolo Capriano! The man was propped upright in bed by means of pillows that were supported by an inverted chair behind them; both hands, very white, very blue under the nails of the long, slender fingers, lay outstretched before him on an immaculately white coverlet; the man's hair was silver, and a white beard and mustache but partially disguised the thin, emaciated condition of his face.

But it was the eyes that above all else commanded attention. They were unnaturally bright, gleaming out from under enormously white, bushy eyebrows; and they were curiously inscrutable eyes. They seemed to hold great depths beneath which might smolder a passion that would leap without warning into flame; or to hold, as they did now, a strange introspective stare, making them like shuttered windows that gave no glimpse of the mind within.

"I am Nicolo Capriano," said the man abruptly, and in perfect English. "My daughter tells me that you gave your name

as Dave Henderson. The name seems familiar. I have heard it somewhere. I remember, it seems to me, a little matter of one hundred thousand dollars some five years ago, for which a man by that name went to the penitentiary."

Dave Henderson's eyes wandered for a moment around the room again. He found himself wondering at the man's English—as he had at the girl's. Subconsciously he was aware that the furnishings, though plain and simple and lacking in anything ornate, were foreign and unusual, but that the outstanding feature of the room was a sort of refreshing and immaculate cleanliness—like the coverlet. He forced his mind back to what Nicolo Capriano had said.

Were all his cards to go face up on the table for Nicolo Capriano to see?

He had intended to make no more of a confidant of the other than was absolutely necessary; but, equally, he had not expected to find in Nicolo Capriano a physically helpless and bed-ridden man. It made a difference—a very great difference! If Millman, for instance, had been bedridden, it— He caught himself smiling a little mirthlessly.

"That's me—Dave Henderson," he said calmly.

The old Italian nodded his head.

"And the hundred thousand dollars has never been recovered," he observed shrewdly. "The police are interested in your movements, eh? It is for that reason you have come to me, is it not so? And Tony Lomazzi foresaw all this—and he sent you here?"

"Yes," said Dave Henderson — and again—the fact that this Italian and his daughter should speak English as though it were their own tongue.

Nicolo Capriano nodded his head again. And then, astutely:

"Something is disturbing you, my young friend," he said. "What is it?"

Dave Henderson straightened in his chair with a little start—and laughed shortly. Very little, evidently, escaped Nicolo Capriano!

"It's not much," he said. "Just that you and your daughter speak pretty good English for Italians."

Nicolo Capriano smiled softly.

"I should speak pretty good English," he said; "and Teresa should speak it even better. We both learned it as children. I, in a certain part of London, as a boy; and Teresa here in San Francisco, where she was born. Her mother was American, and, though I taught Teresa Italian, we always spoke English while her mother was alive, and afterward my daughter seemed to think we should continue to do so." He shrugged his shoulders. "But you came from Lomazzi," he prompted. "Tell me about Lomazzi. He is well?"

"He is dead," said Dave Henderson quietly.

The thin hands, outstretched before the other, closed with a quick twitching motion—then opened, and the fingers began to pluck abstractedly at the coverlet. There was no other sign of emotion, or movement from the figure on the bed, except that the keen, black eyes were veiled now by half-closed lids.

"He died—fifteen years ago—when he went up there—for life"—the man seemed to be communing with himself. "Yes, yes; he is dead—he has been dead for fifteen years." He looked up suddenly, and fixed his eyes with a sharp, curiously appraising gaze on Dave Henderson. "You speak of actual death, of course," he said, in a low tone. "Do you know anything of the circumstances?"

"It was two months ago," Henderson answered. "He was taken ill one night. His cell was next to mine. He was my friend. He asked for me, and the warden let me go to him. He died in a very few minutes. It was then, while I was in the cell, that he whispered to me that I would need help when I got out, and he told me to come to you, and to say that he sent me."

"And to the warden, and whoever else was in the cell, he said—nothing?"

"Nothing," said Dave Henderson.

Nicolo Capriano's eyes were hidden again—the long, slim fingers, with blue-tipped nails, plucked at the coverlet. It was a full minute before he spoke.

"I owe Tony Lomazzi a great debt," he said slowly; "and I would like to repay it in a little way by helping you, since he has

asked it—but it is not to-day, young man, as it was in those days so long ago. For fifteen years I have not lifted my hand against the police. And it is obviously for help from the police that you come to me. You have served your term, and the police would not molest you further except for a good reason. Is it not so? And the reason is not far to seek, I think. It is the money which was never recovered that they are after. You have it hidden somewhere. You know where it is, and you wish to outwit the police while you secure it. Am I not right?"

Dave Henderson glanced at the impassive face propped up on the pillows. Old Nicolo Capriano in no way belied his reputation for shrewdness — the man's brain, however physically ill he might be otherwise, had at least not lost its cunning.

"Yes," said Dave, with a short, sudden laugh, "you are right—but also you are wrong. It is the police that I want to get away from, and it is on account of that money, which, it is also true, I hid away before I went up; but it is not only the police, it is the gang of crooks who put me in wrong at the trial who are trying to grab it, too—only, as it stands now, I don't know where the money is myself. I trusted a fellow in the jug, who got out two months ahead of me—and he did me."

The white, bushy eyebrows went up.

"So!" ejaculated the old Italian. "Well, then, what is the use!"

"A whole lot!" returned Dave Henderson grimly. "To get the fellow if I can! And I can't do that with the police, and a gang of crooks besides, at my heels, can I?"

Nicolo Capriano shook his head meditatively.

"I have my daughter to think of," he said. "Listen, young man, it has not been easy to stand square with the police during these years as it is, and that without any initiative act on my part that would stir them up against me again.

"Old associations and old records are not so easily got rid of. I will give you an example.

"There was a man here to-night—when you came. His name is Ignace Ferroni. He was one of us in the old days—do you understand? When the trouble came for which Tony Lomazzi suffered, Ignace managed to get away. I had not seen him from that day to this. He came back here to-night for help—for a very strange kind of help. He was one of us, I have said, and he had not forgotten his old ways. He had a bomb, a small bomb in his pocket, whose mechanism had gone wrong. He had already planted it once to-night, and finding it did not explode, he picked it up again, and brought it to me, and asked me to fix it for him. It was an old feud he had with some one, he would not tell me who, that he had been nursing all this time. I think his passion for vengeance had perhaps turned his head a little.

"I refused to have anything to do with his bomb, of course, and he left here in a rage, and in his condition he is as likely to turn on me as he is to carry out his original intention. But, after that, what was I to do? He was one of us. I cannot expose him to the police—he would be sentenced to a long term. And yet, if his bomb explodes, to whom will the police come first? To me!"

Nicolo Capriano suddenly raised his hands, and they were clenched—and as suddenly caught his breath, and choked, and a spasm of pain crossed his face. The next instant he was smiling mirthlessly with twitching lips. "Yes, to me—to me, whom some fool amongst them once called the Dago Bomb King, which they will never forget! It is always to me they come! Any crime that seems to have the slightest Italian tinge — and they come to Nicolo Capriano!" He shrugged his shoulders.

"You see, young man, it is not easy for me to steer my way unmolested even when I am wholly innocent. But I, too, do not forget! I do not forget Tony Lomazzi! Tell me exactly what you want me to do. You think you can find the man and the money if you can throw the police and the others off your trail?"

"Yes!" said Dave Henderson, with ominous quiet. "That's my job in life now! If I could disappear for three or four days, I guess that's all the start I'd need."

There was a tolerant smile now on the old bomb king's lips.

"Three or four days would be a very easy matter," he answered. "But after that—what? It might do very well in respect to this gang of crooks; but it would be of very little avail where the police are concerned, for they would simply do what the crooks could not do—see that every plain-clothes man and officer on this continent was on the watch for you. Do you imagine that, believing you know where the money is, the police will forget all about you three or four days?"

"No," admitted Dave Henderson, with the same ominous quiet; "but all I ask is a fighting chance."

Nicolo Capriano stared in speculative silence for a moment.

"You have courage, my young friend!" he said softly. "I like that—also I do not like the police. But three or four days!" He shook his head. "You do not know the police as I know them! And this man you trusted, and who, as I understand, got away with the money, do you know where to find him?"

"I think he is in New York," Dave Henderson answered.

"Ah! New York!" Nicolo Capriano nodded. "But New York is a world in itself. He did not give you his address, and then rob you, I suppose!"

Henderson did not answer for a moment. What Capriano said was very true! But the rendezvous that Millman had given was, on the face of it, a fake anyhow. That had been his own opinion from the start; but during the two years Millman and he had been together in prison, there had been many little inadvertent remarks in conversation that had, beyond question of doubt, stamped Millman as a New Yorker. Perhaps Millman had remembered that when he had given the rendezvous in New York—to give color to its genuineness—because it was the only natural place he could propose if he was to carry out logically the stories he had told for two long years.

"You do not answer?" suggested Nicolo Capriano patiently.

It was on Dave Henderson's tongue to lay the whole story bare to the date, day and hour of that hotel rendezvous, but instead he shook his head. He was conscious of no distrust of the other. Why should he be distrustful! It was not that. It seemed more an innate caution, an absurd caution now, because the rendezvous meant nothing anyhow. He felt that he was suddenly illogical. He found himself answering in a savage, dogged sort of way.

"That's all right!" he said. "I haven't got his address—but New York is good enough. He spilled too much in prison for me not to know that's where he hangs out. I'll get him—if I can only shake the police."

Nicolo Capriano's blue-tipped fingers went straggling through the long white beard.

"The police!" He was whispering—seemingly to himself. "It is always the police—a lifetime of the cursed police—and I have my daughter to think of—but I do not forget Tony Lomazzi—Teresa would not have me forget." He spoke abruptly to Dave Henderson. "Tell me about to-night. My daughter says you came here like a hunted thing, and it is very evident that you have been in a fight. I suppose it was with the police, or with this gang you speak of; but, in that case, you have ruined any chance of help from me if you have led them here—if, for instance, they are waiting now for you to come out again."

"I do not think they are waiting!" said Dave Henderson, with a twisted smile. "And I think that the police end of to-night, and maybe some of the rest of it as well, is in the hospital by now! It's not much of a story—but unless that light in your back porch, which was on for about two seconds, could be seen up the lane, there's no one could know that I am here."

The old Italian smiled curiously.

"I do not put lights where they act as beacons," he said whimsically. "It does not show from the lane—it is for the benefit of those *inside* the house. Tell me your story."

"It's not much," said Dave Henderson again. "The police shadowed me from the minute I left the penitentiary to-day. To-night I handed them a little come-on, that's all, so as to make sure that I had sidetracked them before coming here. And then the gang, Baldy Vickers's gang—"

"Vickers—Baldy Vickers! Yes, yes, I know; they hang out at Jake Morrissey's place!" exclaimed the old bomb king suddenly. "Runty Mott, and—"

"It was Runty Mott that butted in tonight," said Dave Henderson, with a short laugh. "I had the fly-cop going, all right. I let him pick me up in a saloon over the bar. He thought I was pretty drunk even then. We started in to make a night of it—and the fly-cop was going to get a drunken man to spill all the history of his life, and incidentally get him to lead the way to where a certain little sum of money was!

"Understand? I kept heading in this direction, for I had looked the lay of the land over this afternoon. That saloon up the street was booked as my last stopping place. I was going to shake the fly-cop there, and—"

Dave Henderson paused.

Nicolo Capriano was leaning forward in his bed, and there was a new, feverish light in the coal-black eyes—like some long-smoldering flame leaping suddenly into a blaze.

"Go on!" he breathed impatiently. "Go on! Ah! I can see it all!"

"Runty Mott and his crowd must have been trailing me." Dave Henderson smiled grimly. "They thought both the fly-cop and myself were drunk. But to cover their own game and make their play at me they had to get the fly-cop out of the road first. One of the gang came into the saloon, faked a quarrel with the fly-cop, and knocked him out. I didn't know what was up until then, when I caught sight of Runty Mott and the rest of his crowd pushing in through the door."

Dave Henderson's smile grew a little grimmer. "And that's all! They started something—but they didn't finish it! They had it all framed up well enough—the lights switched off, and all that, so as to lay me out and kidnap me, and then stow me away somewhere and make me talk."

He jerked his hand toward his torn garments. "There was a bit of a fight," he said quietly. "I left them there pawing the air in the dark, and I was down here in your porch before any of them got out to the lane. I fancy there's some little row up there now on account of that fly-cop they put to sleep."

Nicolo Capriano's hand reached out, and began to pat excitedly at Dave Henderson's sleeve.

"It is like the old days!" he said feverishly. "It is like the young blood warming up an old man's veins again. Yes, yes, it is like the old days come back once more! Ah, my young friend, if I had had you on the night that Tony Lomazzi was trapped, instead of—but that is too late, eh? Yes—too late! But you are clever, and you use your head, and you have the courage. That is what I like!

"Yes, assuredly, I will help you, and not for Tony Lomazzi's sake, but for your own. You shall have your chance, your fighting chance, my young friend, and you will run down your man"—his voice was rising in excitement—"and the money—eh! Yes, yes! And Nicolo Capriano will help you!" He raised his voice still higher. "Teresa! Here, Teresa!" he shouted.

The door opened; the girl stood on the threshold.

"Father," she said reprovingly, "you are exciting yourself again."

The old bomb king's voice was instantly subdued.

"No, I am not! You see—my little one! You see, I am quite calm. And now listen to me. This is Tony Lomazzi's friend, and he is therefore our friend. Is it not so? Well then, listen! He is in need of help. The police must not get him. So, first, he must have some clothes instead of those torn ones. Get him some of mine. They will not fit very well—but they will do. Then you will telephone Emmanuel that I have a guest for him who does not like the police, a guest by the name of Smith—that is enough for him to know. And tell Emmanuel that he is to come with his car, and wait a block below the lane. And after that again you will go out, Teresa, and let us know if all is safe, and if there is still any police, or any one else, in the lane. Eh?"

"Yes," she said. She was looking at Dave Henderson now, and there was a friendly smile in the dark, steady eyes, though she still addressed her father. "And what news does he bring us of Tony?"

"You will know by and by, when there is time," her father answered with sudden bruskness. "Run, now!"

She was back in a few moments with an armful of clothes; then once more left the room, this time closing the door behind her.

Nicolo Capriano pointed to a second door at the side of the room.

"There is the bath-room, my young friend," he said crisply. "Go in there and wash the blood off your face, and change your clothes."

Dave Henderson hesitated.

"Do you think it is safe for her, for your daughter, to go out there?" he demurred. "There was more of a row than perhaps I led you to imagine, and the police—"

"Safe!" The old Italian grinned suddenly in derision. "Listen, my young friend, you need have no fear. My daughter is a Capriano—eh? Yes, and like her father, she is more than a match for all the police in San Francisco. Go now, and change! It will not take Emmanuel long to get here."

It took Dave Henderson perhaps fifteen minutes to wash and bathe his bruises, and change into the Italian's clothes. At the expiration of that time, he surveyed the result in a small mirror that hung on the wall. The clothes were ready-made, and far from new; they were ill-fitting, and they bulged badly in places His appearance was not flattering! He might have passed for an Italian navvy in hard luck and— He smiled queerly, as he turned from the mirror and transferred the money he had received from Square John Kelly, together with his few belongings, from the pockets of his discarded suit to those of the one he now had on. He stepped out into the bedroom.

Nicolo Capriano in turn surveyed the metamorphosis critically for a moment—and nodded his head in approval.

"Good!" ejaculated the old bomb king. "Excellent!" He rubbed his thin fingers together. "Yes, yes, it is like the old days again! Ha, ha! old Nicolo still plays a hand in the game, and old Nicolo's head is still on his shoulders. Three or four days! That would be easy even for a child! Emmanuel will take care of that.

"But we must do better than that—eh? And that is not so simple!

"To hide away from the police is one thing, and to outwit them completely is another! Is it not so?

"Just give the old man, whose brain has grown rusty because it has been so long idle, time to think, eh? It will do you no good if you always have to hide—eh? But, listen, you will hide while old Nicolo thinks—you understand? You can trust Emmanuel—but tell him nothing. He keeps a little restaurant, and he will give you a room up-stairs. You must not leave that room, you must not show yourself, until you hear from me. You quite understand?"

"You need not worry on that score!" said Dave Henderson grimly.

"Good!" cried the old Italian again. "Only my daughter and myself will know that you are there. You can leave it to old Nicolo to find a way. Yes, yes"—excitement was growing upon the man again; he rocked his body to and fro—"old Nicolo and the police—ha, ha! Old Nicolo, who is dying in his bed—eh? And—" His voice was hushed abruptly; he lowered himself back on his pillows. "Here is Teresa!" he whispered. "She will say I am exciting myself again. Bah! I am strong again with the old wine in my veins!" His hands lay suddenly quiet and composed on the coverlet before him, as the door opened, and the girl stood again on the threshold. "Well, my little one?" he purred.

"Emmanuel has come," she said. "There are some police up in Vinetto's saloon, but there is no one in the lane. It is quite safe."

Nicolo Capriano nodded.

"And Emmanuel understands?"

"Yes," she said.

"Go, then!" The old Italian was holding out his hand to Dave Henderson. "Go at once! My daughter will take you to Emmanuel."

Dave Henderson caught the other's hand.

"Yes, but look here," he said, a sudden huskiness in his voice, "I—"

"You want to thank me—eh?" said the old bomb king, shaking his head. "Well, my young friend, there will be time enough for that. You will see me again—eh?

Yes! When old Nicolo sends for you, you will come. Until then—you will remember! Do not move from your room! Now, go!"

Teresa spoke from the doorway.

"Yes, hurry, please!" she said quietly. "The lane was empty a few minutes ago, but—" She shrugged her shoulders significantly.

Dave Henderson, with a final nod to the propped-up figure in the bed, turned and followed Teresa along the passage, and out into the porch. Here she bade him wait while she went out again into the lane: but in a minute more she called out to him in a whisper to join her.

They passed out of the lane, and into the cross street. A little ahead of them, Henderson could see a small car, its hood up, standing by the curb.

She stopped suddenly.

"Emmanuel has seen me," she said. "That is all that is necessary to identify you." She held out her hand. "I—I hope you will get out of your danger safely."

"If I do," said Dave Henderson fervently, "I'll have you and your father to thank for it."

She shook her head.

"No," she said. "You will have to thank Tony Lomazzi."

He wanted to say something to detain her there for a moment or two longer, even under those most unauspicious of circumstances—but five years of prison had not made him glib of tongue, or quick of speech. She was very pretty—but it was not her prettiness alone that made her appeal. There was something of winsomeness about the lithe, graceful little figure, and something to admire in the quiet self-reliance, and the cool composure with which, for instance, she had just accepted the danger of possible, and decidedly unpleasant, interference by the police in the lane.

"But I can't thank Tony Lomazzi, since he is dead," he blurted out—and the next instant cursed himself for a raw-tongued, blundering fool. In the rays of the street lamp a little way off, he saw her face go deathly white. Her hand that was in his closed with a quick, involuntary clutch, and fell away—and there came a little moan of pain.

"Dead!" she said. "Tony—dead!" And then she seemed to draw her little form erect—and smiled—but the great dark eyes were wet and full of tears. "I—" Her voice broke. "Good night!" she said hurriedly—and turned abruptly away.

He watched her, gnawing viciously at his lip, cursing at himself again for a blundering fool, until she disappeared in the lane—and then he, too, turned, and walked to the waiting car.

A man in the driver's seat reached out and opened the door of the tonneau.

"Me Emmanuel," he said complacently, in broken English. "You no givea da damn for da police any more. I gotta da room where you hide—safe. See? Over da restaurant. You eat, you sleep, you givea da cops da laugh."

Dave Henderson stepped into the car. His mind was in a curious whirl. A thousand diverse things seemed struggling for supremacy—the police and Runty Mott—Millman—Barjan, the police lieutenant—Capriano, the queer, sick Capriano — the girl with the wondrous face, who cried because Tony Lomazzi was dead — a thousand things impinging in lightning flashes that made a vortex of his brain. They found expression in a sort of debonair facetiousness.

"Some boy, Emmanuel!" he said—and flung himself down on the seat. "Go to it!"

CHAPTER III.

NICOLO CAPRIANO PLAYS HIS CARDS.

NICOLO CAPRIANO'S eyes were closed; the propped-up form on the pillows was motionless—only the thin fingers plucking at the coverlet with curiously patient insistence bore evidence that the man was not asleep.

Suddenly he smiled; and his eyes opened, a dreamy, smoldering light in their depths. His hand reached out for the morning paper that lay on the bed beside him, and for the second time since Teresa had brought him the paper half an hour before, he pored for a long while over a leading "story" on the front page.

It had nothing to do with the disturbance in Vinetto's saloon of the night before; it dealt with a strange and mysterious bomb explosion in a down-town park during the small morning hours, which, besides awakening and terrifying the immediate neighborhood, had, according to the newspaper account, literally blown a man and, with the man the bench on which he had evidently been sitting under an arc light, to pieces.

The victim was mutilated beyond recognition—all that the police had been able to identify were fragments of a bomb, thus establishing the cause of the accident, or, more likely, as the paper hinted, murder.

"The fool!" Nicolo Capriano whispered. "It was Ignace Ferroni—the fool! And so he would not listen to old Nicolo—eh?" He cackled out suddenly, his laugh shrill and high echoing through the room. "Well, perhaps it is as well, eh, Ignace? Perhaps it is as well—perhaps you will be of some service, Ignace, now that you are dead, eh, Ignace—which is something that you never were when you were alive!"

He laid the paper down, and again his eyes closed, and again the blue-tipped fingers resumed their interminable plucking at the coverlet—but now he whispered constantly to himself.

"A hundred thousand dollars. It is a great deal of money. We worked for much less in the old days—for very much less. I am old and sick, am I? Ha, ha! But for just once more, eh?—just once more—to see if the old cunning is not still there. And if the cards are thrust into one's hands, does it not make the fingers itch to play them? Yes, yes, it makes young again the blood in the old veins. And Tony is dead.

"Yes, yes, the young fellow is clever, too—clever enough to find the money again if the police do not meddle with him. And the gang, Baldy Vickers's gang—bah!—they are already no longer to be considered—they have not long arms, they do not reach far—they do not reach to New York—eh?—where the police reach—and where old Nicolo Capriano reaches, too!

"Ignace—the fool! So he would not listen to me, eh?—and he sat out there under the park light trying to fix his old bomb, and blew himself up. The fool—but you have no reason to complain, eh, Nicolo? It will bring the police to the door, but for once they will be welcome, eh? They will not know it—but they will be welcome. We will see if Nicolo Capriano is not still their match!"

Outside somewhere in the hall he could hear Teresa moving about, busy with her morning work. He listened intently—not to his daughter's movements, but for a footstep on the pavement that, instead of passing by, would climb the short flight of steps to the front door.

"Well, why do they not come—eh?" he muttered impatiently. "Why do they not come?"

He relapsed into silence, but he no longer lay there placidly with his eyes closed. A strange excitement seemed to be growing upon him. It tinged the skin under his beard with a hectic flush, and the black eyes glistened and glinted abnormally as they kept darting objectiveless glances here and there around the room.

Perhaps half an hour passed, and then the sick man began to mutter again:

"Will they make me send for them—the fools!" He apostrophized the foot of the bed viciously. "No, no—it would not be as safe. If they do not come in another hour, there will be time enough then for that. You must wait, Nicolo. The police have always come before to Nicolo Capriano if they thought old Nicolo could help them—and with a bomb—ha, ha!—to whom else would they come—eh?—to whom—"

He was instantly alert. Some one was outside there now. He heard the doorbell ring, and presently he heard Teresa answer it. He caught a confused murmur of voices. The thin fingers were working with a curious, jubilant motion one over the other. The black eyes, half closed again, fixed expectantly on the door of the room opposite to the foot of the bed. It opened, and Teresa stepped into the room.

"It is Lieutenant Barjan, father," she said, in a low tone. "He wants to talk to you about that bomb explosion in the park."

"So!" A queer smile twitched at the old bomb king's lips. He beckoned to his daughter to approach the bed, and, as she

obeyed, he pulled her head down to his lips. "You know nothing, Teresa—nothing! Understand? Nothing, except to corroborate anything that I may say. You did not even know that there had been an explosion until he spoke of it. You know nothing about Ignace. You understand?"

"Yes," she said composedly.

"Good!" he whispered. "Well now, go and tell him that I do not want to see him. Tell him I said he was to go away. Tell him that I won't see him, that I won't be bothered with him and his cursed police spies! Tell him that"—he patted his daughter's head confidentially—"and leave the door open, Teresa, little one, so that I can hear."

"What do you mean to do, father?" she asked quickly.

"Ha, ha—you will see, my little one—you will see!" Capriano patted her head again. "We do not forget our debt to Tony Lomazzi. No! Well, you will see! Tell the cunning, clever Barjan to go away!"

He watched as she left the room; and then, his head cocked on one side to listen, the blue-tipped fingers reached stealthily out and, without a sound, slid the newspaper that was lying in front of him under the bed-covers.

"I am very sorry," he heard Teresa announce crisply; "but my father positively refuses to see you."

"Oh, he does—does he?" a voice returned in bland sarcasm. "Well, I'm very sorry myself then, but I guess he'll have to change his mind! Pardon me, Miss Capriano, if I—"

A quick, heavy step sounded in the hallway. Nicolo Capriano's alert and listening attitude was gone in a flash. He pushed himself up in the bed, and held himself there with one hand, and the other, outflung, knotted into a fist, he shook violently in the direction of the door, as the figure of the plain-clothesman appeared on the threshold.

Old Nicolo Capriano was apparently in the throes of a towering passion.

"Get out of here!" he screamed. "Did my daughter not tell you to get out? Go away! I want nothing to do with you! Curse you—and all the rest of the police with you! Can you not leave old Nicolo Capriano to die in peace—eh?"

"That's all right!" said Barjan coolly. He glanced over his shoulder. Teresa was standing just outside in the hall behind him. "Pardon me," he said again—and closed the door upon her. "Now, then"—he faced Nicolo Capriano once more—"there's no use kicking up all this dust. It won't get you anywhere, Nicolo. There's a little matter that I want to talk to you about, and that I'm going to talk to you about whether you like it or not—that's all there is to it. And we'll get right to the point. What do you know about that affair in the park last night?"

Nicolo Capriano sank back on his pillows with a furious snarl. He still shook his fist at the officer.

"What should I know about your miserable affairs?" he shouted. "I know nothing about any park! I know nothing at all! Why do you not leave me in peace—eh? For fifteen years this has gone on, always spying on Nicolo Capriano, and for fifteen years Nicolo Capriano has not lifted a finger against the law."

"That is true—as far as we know," said Barjan calmly. "But there's a little record that goes back beyond those fifteen years, Nicolo, that keeps us a little chummy with you—and you've been valuable at times, Nicolo."

"Bah!" Nicolo Capriano spat the exclamation viciously at the other.

"About last night," suggested Barjan patiently. "It's rather in your line. I thought perhaps you might be able to give us a little help that would put us on the right track."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" snapped Nicolo Capriano.

"I'm talking about the man that was blown to pieces by a bomb." Barjan was still patient.

Nicolo Capriano's eyes showed the first gleam of interest.

"I didn't know there was any man blown up." His tone appeared to mingle the rage and antagonism that he had first exhibited with a new and suddenly awakened curiosity. "I didn't know there was any man blown up," he repeated.

"That's too bad!" said Barjan with mock resignation—and settled himself deliberately in a chair at the bedside. "I guess, then, you're the only man in San Francisco who doesn't."

"You fool!" Nicolo Capriano rasped in rage again. "I've been bedridden for three years—and I wish to God you had been, too!" He choked and coughed a little. He eyed Barjan malevolently. "I tell you this is the first I've heard of it. I don't hang about the street corners picking up the news! Don't sit there with your silly, smirking police face, trying to see how smart you can be! What information do you expect to get out of me like that? When I know nothing, I can tell nothing, can I? Who was the man?"

"That's what we want to know," said Barjan pleasantly. "And, look here, Nicolo, I'm not here to rile you. All that was left were a few fragments of park bench, man, arc-light standard, and a piece or two of what was evidently a bomb."

"What time was this?" Nicolo Capriano's eyes were on the foot of the bed.

"Three o'clock this morning," Barjan answered.

The old bomb king's fingers began to pluck at the coverlet. A minute passed. His eyes, from the foot of the bed, fixed for an instant moodily on Barjan's face—and sought the foot of the bed again.

Barjan broke the silence.

"So you do know something about it, eh, Nicolo?" he prodded softly.

"I didn't know anything had happened until you said so," returned Nicolo Capriano curtly. "But seeing it has happened, maybe I—" He cut his words off short, and eyed the plain-clothes man again. "Is the man dead?" he demanded, with well-simulated, sudden suspicion. "You are not lying to me—eh? I trust none of you!"

"Dead!" ejaculated Barjan almost hysterically. "Good God—dead! Didn't I tell you he was blown into unrecognizable atoms?"

The sharp, black eyes lingered a little longer on Barjan's face. The result appeared finally to allay Nicolo Capriano's suspicions.

"Well, all right, then, I'll tell you," he said, but there was a grudging note still in the old bomb king's voice. "It can't do the man any harm if he's dead. I guess you'll know who it is. It's the fellow who pulled that hundred-thousand-dollar robbery about five years ago on old man Tydeman—the fellow that went by the name of Dave Henderson, I don't know whether that's his real name or not."

"What!" shouted Barjan. He had lost his composure. He was up from his chair, and staring wildly at the old man on the bed. "You're crazy!" he jerked out suddenly. "Either you're lying to me, or you're off your nut! You—"

Nicolo Capriano was in a towering rage in an instant.

"You get out of here!" he screamed. "You get to hell out of here! I didn't ask you to come, and I don't give a damn whether it was Dave Henderson or a polecat! It's nothing to do with me! It's your hunt—so go and hunt somewhere else! I'm lying, or I'm off my nut, am I? Well, you get to hell out of here! Go on!" He shook a frantic fist at Barjan, and, choking, coughing, pulled himself up in bed again, and pointed to the door. "Do you hear? Get out!"

Barjan shifted uneasily in alarm. Nicolo Capriano's coughing spell had developed into a paroxysm that was genuine enough.

"Look here," said Barjan, in a pacifying tone, "don't excite yourself like that. I take back what I said. You gave me a jolt for a minute, that's all. But you've got the wrong dope somehow, Nicolo.

"Whoever it was, it wasn't Dave Henderson.

"The man was too badly smashed up to be recognized, but there was at least some of his clothing left. Dave Henderson was followed all day yesterday by the police from the minute he left the penitentiary, and he didn't buy any clothes. Dave Henderson had on a black prison suit—and this man hadn't."

Nicolo Caprino shrugged his shoulders in angry contempt.

"I'm satisfied, if you are!" he snarled. "Go on—get out!"

Barjan frowned a little helplessly now.

"But I'm not satisfied," he admitted

earnestly. "Look here, Nicolo, for the love of Mike, keep your temper, and let's get to the bottom of this. For some reason you seem to think it was Dave Henderson. I know it wasn't; but I've got to know what started you off on that track. Those clothes—"

"You're a damn fool!" Nicolo Capriano, apparently slightly mollified, was jeering now. "Those clothes—ha, ha! It is like the police! And so old Nicolo is off his nut—eh? Well, I will show you!" He raised his voice and called his daughter. "Teresa, my little one," he said, as the door opened and she appeared, "bring me the clothes that young man had on last night."

"What's that you say!" exclaimed Barjan in sudden excitement.

"Wait!" said Nicolo Capriano ungraciously.

Teresa was back in a moment with an armful of clothing, which, at her father's direction, she deposited on the foot of the bed.

Nicolo Capriano waved her from the room. He leered at Barjan.

"Well, are those the clothes there that you and your police are using to blindfold your eyes with, or are they not—eh?"

Barjan had already pounced upon the clothing, and was pawing it over feverishly.

"Good God—yes!" he burst out sharply.

"And the clothes that the dead man had on—let me see"—Nicolo Capriano's voice was tauntingly triumphant, as, with eyes half closed, visualizing for himself the attire of one Ignace Ferroni, he slowly enumerated the various articles of dress worn by the actual victim of the explosion. He looked at Barjan maliciously, as he finished.

"Well," he demanded, "was there enough left of what the man had on to identify any of those things? If so"—Nicolo Capriano shrugged his shoulders by way of finality.

"Yes, yes!" Barjan's excitement was almost beyond his control. "Yes, that is what he wore, but—good God, Capriano—what does this mean? I don't understand!"

"About the clothes?" inquired Nicolo Capriano caustically. "But I should know what he had on since they were *my* clothes—eh? And you have only to look at the ones there on the bed to find out for yourself why I gave him some that, though I do not say they were new, for I have not bought any clothes in the three damnable and cursed years that I have lain here, were at least not all torn to pieces—eh?"

Barjan was pacing up and down the room now. When the other's back was turned, Nicolo Capriano permitted a sinister and mocking smile to hover on his lips; when Barjan faced the bed, Nicolo Capriano eyed the officer with a sour contempt into which he injected a sort of viciously triumphant self-vindication.

"Come across with the rest!" said Barjan abruptly. "How did Dave Henderson come here to you? And what about that bomb? Did you give it to him?"

Nicolo Capriano's convenient irascibility was instantly at his command again. He scowled at Barjan, and his scranny fist was flourished under Barjan's nose.

"No, I didn't!" he snarled. "And you know well enough that I didn't. You will try to make me out the guilty man now—eh—just because I was fool enough to help you out of your muddle!"

Barjan became diplomatic again.

"Nothing of the kind!" he said appeasingly. "You're too touchy, Nicolo! I know that you're on the square all right, and that you have been ever since your gang was broken up and Tony Lomazzi was caught. That's good enough, isn't it? Now, come on! Give me the dope about Dave Henderson."

Nicolo Capriano's fingers plucked sullenly at the coverlet. A minute passed.

"Bah!" he grunted finally. "A little honey—eh—when you want something from old Nicolo! Well, then, listen! Dave Henderson came here last night in those torn clothes, and with his face badly cut from a fight that he said he had been in. I don't know whether his story is true or not—you can find that out for yourself. I don't know anything about him, but this is what he told me. He said that his cell in the prison was next to Tony Lomazzi's; that he and Tony were friends; that Tony

died a little while ago, and that on the night Tony died he told this fellow Henderson to come to me if he needed any help."

"Yes!" Barjan's voice was eager. He dropped into the chair again, and leaned attentively over the bed toward Nicolo Capriano. "So he came to you through Tony Lomazzi—eh? Well, so far, I guess the story's straight. I happen to know that Henderson's cell was next to Lomazzi's. But where did he get the bomb? He certainly didn't have it when he left the prison, and he was shadowed—"

"So you said before!" interrupted Nicolo Capriano caustically. "Well, in that case, you ought to know whether the rest of the story is true, too, or not. He said he met a stranger in a saloon last night, and that they chummed up together, and started in to make a night of it. They went from one saloon to another. Their spree ended in a fight at Vinetto's place up the block here, where Henderson and his friend were attacked by some of Baldy Vickers's gang.

"Henderson said his friend was knocked out, and that he himself had a narrow squeak of it, and just managed to escape through the back door, and ran down the lane, and got in here. I asked him how he knew where I lived, and he said that during the afternoon he had located the house because he meant to come here last night anyway, only he was afraid the police might be watching him, and he had intended to wait until after dark."

Nicolo Capriano's eyelids drooped to hide a sudden cunning and mocking gleam that was creeping into them. "You ought to be able to trace this friend of Henderson's if the man was knocked out and unconscious at Vinetto's, as Henderson claimed—and if Henderson was telling the truth, the other would corroborate it."

"We've already got him," said Barjan, with a hint of savagery in his voice. The "friend," alias a plain-clothes man, had proved anything but an inspiration from the standpoint of the police! "Go on! The story is still straight. You say that Dave Henderson said he intended to come here anyway, quite apart from making his escape from Vinetto's. What for?"

Nicolo Capriano shrugged his shoulders.

"Money, I dare say," he said tersely. "The usual thing! At least, I suppose that's what he had originally intended to come for—but we didn't get as far as that. The fight at Vinetto's seemed to have left him with but one idea. When he got here he was in a devil's rage. The only thing that seemed to be in his mind was to get some clothes that wouldn't attract attention, instead of the torn ones he had on, and to get out again as soon as he could with the object of getting even with this gang of Baldy's.

"He said they were the ones that 'sent him up' on account of their evidence at his trial, and that they were after him again now because of the stolen money that they believed he had hidden somewhere. He was like a maniac. He said he'd seen them and everybody else in hell before they got that money, and he swore he'd get every last one of that gang—and get them in a bunch. I didn't know what he meant then. I tried to quiet him down, but I might as well have talked to a wild beast. I tried to get him to stay here and go to bed—instead, he laughed at me in a queer sort of way, and said he'd wipe every one of that crowd off the face of the earth before morning. I began to think he was really crazy. He put on the clothes I gave him, and went out again."

Barjan nodded.

"You don't know it," he said quietly; "but that's where the police lost track of him—when he ran in here."

"I didn't even know the police were after him," said Nicolo Capriano indifferently. "He came back here again about two o'clock this morning, and he had a small clockwork bomb with him. The fool!" Nicolo Capriano cackled suddenly. "He had found Baldy's gang all together down in Jake Morrissey's, and he had thrown the thing against the building. The fool! Of course it wouldn't go off! He thought it would by hitting it against something. The only way to make it any good was to open the casing and set the clockwork. When he found it didn't explode, he picked it up again, and brought it back here.

"He wanted me to fix it for him. I asked him where he got it. All I could get out of him was that Tony Lomazzi had told him where he had hidden some things. Ha, ha!" Nicolo Capriano cackled more shrilly still, and began to rock in bed with unseemly mirth. "One of Tony's old bombs! Tony left the young fool a legacy—a bomb, and maybe there was some money, too. I tried to find out about that, but all he said was to keep asking me to fix the bomb for him. I refused. I told him I was no longer in that business. That I went out of it when Tony Lomazzi did—fifteen years ago.

"He would listen to nothing. He cursed me. I did not think he could do any harm with the thing—and I guess he didn't! A young fool like that is best out of the way. He went away cursing me. I suppose he tried to fix it himself under that arc light on the park bench."

Nicolo Capriano shrugged his shoulders again. "I would not have cared to open the thing myself—it was made too long ago, eh? The clockwork might have played tricks even with me, who once was—"

"Yes," said Barjan. He stood up. "I guess that's good enough, and I guess that's the end of Dave Henderson—and one hundred thousand dollars." He frowned in a meditative sort of way. "I don't know whether I'm sorry or not," he said slowly. "We'd have got him sooner or later, of course, but—" He pointed abruptly to the prison clothes on the bed. "I'll take those," he announced briskly; "they'll need them at the inquest."

"There's some paper in the bottom drawer of that wardrobe over there," said Nicolo Capriano unconcernedly. "You can wrap them up."

Barjan, with a nod of thanks, secured the paper, made a bundle of the clothes, and tucked the bundle under his arm.

"We won't forget this, Nicolo," he said heartily, as he moved toward the door.

"Bah!" said Nicolo Capriano with a scowl. "I know how much that is worth!"

He listened attentively as Teresa showed the plain-clothes man out through the front door. As the door closed again, he called his daughter.

"Listen, my little one," he said, and his forefinger was laid against the side of his nose in a gesture of humorous confidence. "I will tell you something. Ignace Ferroni, who was fool enough to blow himself up, has become the young man whom our good friend Tony Lomazzi sent to us last night."

"Father!" Her eyes widened in sudden amazement, not unmixed with alarm.

"You understand, my little one?" He wagged his head, and cackled softly. "Not a word! You understand?"

"Yes," she said doubtfully.

"Good!" grunted the old bomb king. "I think Barjan has swallowed the hook. But I trust no one. I must be sure—you understand—*sure!* Go and telephone Emmanuel, and tell him to find Little Peter, and send the scoundrel to me at once."

"Yes, father," she said; "but—"

"It is for Tony Lomazzi," he said.

She went from the room. Nicolo Capriano lay back on the pillows and closed his eyes. He might have been asleep again, for the smile on his lips was as guileless as a child's.

It was an hour later when, after motioning Teresa, who had opened the door, away, he propped himself up on his elbow to greet a wizen, crafty-faced little rat of the underworld who stood at the bedside.

"It is like the old days to see you here, Little Peter," murmured Nicolo Capriano. "And I always paid well—eh? You have not forgotten that? Well, I will pay well again. Listen! I am sure that the man who was killed with the bomb in the park last night was a prison bird by the name of Dave Henderson; and I told the police so. But it is always possible that I have made a mistake. I do not think so—but it is always possible—eh? Well, I must know, Little Peter. The police will investigate further, and so will Baldy Vickers's gang—they had it in for the fellow.

"You are a clever little devil, Little Peter. Find out if the police have discovered anything that would indicate I am wrong, and do the same with Baldy Vickers's gang. You know them all, don't you?"

The wizen little rat grinned.

"Sure!" he said, out of the corner of his

mouth. "Youse can leave it to me, Nicolo. I'm wise."

Nicolo Capriano patted the other's arm approvingly, and smiled the man away.

"You have the whole day before you, Little Peter," he said. "I am in no hurry."

Once more Nicolo Capriano lay back on his pillows and closed his eyes, and once more the guileless smile hovered over his lips.

At intervals through the day he murmured and communed with himself, and sometimes his cackling laugh brought Teresa to the door; but for the most part he lay there through the hours with the placid, cunning patience that the school of long experience had brought him.

It was dusk when Little Peter stood at the bedside again.

"Youse called de turn, Nicolo," he said. "Dat was de guy, all right. I got next to some of de fly-cops, an' dey ain't got no doubt about it. Dey handed it out to de reporters." He flipped a newspaper that he was carrying onto the bed. "Youse can read it for yerself. An' de gang sizes it up de same way. I pulled de window stunt on 'em down at Morrissey's about an hour ago. Dey was all dere—Baldy, an' Runty Mott, an' all de rest—an' another guy, too.

"Say, I didn't know dat Booky Skarvan pulled in wid dat mob. Dey was fightin' like a lot of stray cats, an' dey was sore as pups, an' all blamin' de other one for losin' de money.

"De only guy in de lot dat kept his head was Booky. He sat dere chewin' a big, fat cigar, an' wigglin' it from one corner of his mouth to de other, an' he handed 'em some talk. He give 'em hell for mussin' everything up.

"Say, Nicolo, take it from me, youse want to keep yer eye peeled for him. He says to de crowd: 'It's a cinch dat Dave Henderson's dead, thanks to de damned mess youse have made of everything,' he says; 'an' it's a cinch dat Capriano's story in de paper is straight—it's too full of de real dope to be anything else. But if Dave Henderson told old Capriano dat much, he may have told him more—see? Old Capriano's a wily bird, an' wid a hundred thousand in sight de old dago wouldn't be asleep. Anyway, it's our last chance—dat Capriano got de hidin' place out of Dave Henderson.

"'But here's where de rest of youse keeps yer mitts off. If it's de last chance, I'll see dat it ain't gummed up. I'll take care of Capriano myself.'"

Little Peter circled his lips with his tongue, as Nicolo Capriano extracted a bank-note of generous denomination from under his pillow, and handed it to the other.

"Very good, Little Peter!" he said softly. "Yes, yes—very good! But you have already forgotten it all, eh? Is it not so, Little Peter?"

"Sure!" said Little Peter earnestly. "Sure—youse can bet yer life I have!"

"Good-by, then, Little Peter," said Nicolo Capriano softly again.

He stared for a long while at the door, as it closed behind the other—stared and smiled curiously, and plucked with his fingers at the coverlet.

"And so they would watch old bedridden Nicolo, would they—while Nicolo watches — er — somewhere else?" he muttered. "Ha, ha! So they will watch old Nicolo, will they! Well, well, let them watch, eh?" He looked around the room and raised himself up in bed. He began to rock to and fro. A red tinge crept into his cheeks, a gleam of fire lighted up the coal-black eyes. "Nicolo, Nicolo," he whispered to himself, "it is like the old days back again, Nicolo—and it is like the old wine to make the blood run quick in the veins again."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MANTLE OF ONE IGNACE FERRONI.

UP and down the small, ill-furnished room Dave Henderson paced back and forward. Not so very long ago, he had paced by the hour from the rear wall of his cell to the barred door that opened on an iron gallery without. He paced the distance now with the old nervous, pent-up energy that rebelled and mutinied and would not take passively to

restraint, even when that restraint was self-imposed.

It had just grown dark. The window-shade was tightly drawn. On the table, beside the remains of the supper that Emmanuel had brought him some little time before, a small lamp furnished a meager light, and threw the corners of the room into shadow.

He had seen no one save Emmanuel since last night, when he had left Nicolo Capriano's. He had not heard from Nicolo Capriano. It was the sense of personal impotency, the sense of personal inactivity that filled him with a sort of savage, tiger-ish impatience now.

There were many things to do outside in that world beyond the drawn window-shade —and he could only wait!

There was the pigeon-cote in Tooler's shed, for instance. All during the day the pigeon-cote had been almost an obsession with him. There was a chance—one chance in perhaps a million — that for some reason or other Millman had not been able to get there. It was a gambling chance —no more, no less—with the odds so heavily against Millman permitting anything to keep him from getting his hands on a fortune in ready cash that, from a material standpoint, there was hardly any use in his going there.

But that did not remove the ever present, and, as opposed to the material, the intangible sense of uncertainty that possessed him. He expected to find the money gone; he would be a fool a thousand times over to expect anything else. But he had to satisfy himself, and he would—if that keen old brain of Nicolo Capriano only succeeded in devising some means of throwing the police definitely off the trail.

But it was not so easy to throw the police definitely off the trail, as Nicolo Capriano himself had said. He was ready to agree in that with the crafty old Italian; and, even after these few hours cooped up in here, he was even more ready to agree with the other that the mere hiding of himself away from the police was utterly abortive as far as the accomplishment of any conclusive end was concerned.

It was far from easy; though, acting somewhat as a panacea to his impatience, the old Italian had inspired him with faith as being more than a match for the police, and yet—

He gnawed at his lips. He, too, had not been idle through the day; he, too, had tried to find some way, some loophole that would enable him, once he went out into the open again, to throw Barjan and all that Barjan stood for, conclusively and forever off his track.

And the more he had thought of it, the more insurmountable the difficulty and seeming impossibility of doing so had become. It had even shaken his faith a little in Nicolo Capriano's foxlike cunning proving equal to the occasion. He couldn't, for instance, live all his life in disguise. That did very well perhaps as a piece of fiction, but practically it offered very little attraction!

He frowned—and laughed a little harshly at himself. He was illogical again. He had asked only for three or four days, for a fighting chance, just time enough to get on Millman's trail, hadn't he?

And now he was greedy for a permanent and enduring safe-conduct from the police, and his brain mulled and toiled with that objective alone in view, and he stood here now employed in gnawing his lips because he could not see the way, or see how Nicolo Capriano could find it, either. He shrugged his shoulders. As well dismiss that! If he could but reach Millman, and after Millman, Booky Skarvan, just to pay the debts he owed, then—

His hand, that had curled into a clenched fist, with knuckles showing like white knobs under the tight-stretched skin, relaxed, as, following a low, quick knock at the door, Emmanuel stepped into the room.

"I gotta da message for you from Nicolo," Emmanuel announced; "an' I gotta da letter for you from Nicolo, too. You get a damn sick staying in here, eh? Well, Nicolo say you go to his place—see him to-night. We takea da car by an' by an' go."

"That's the talk, Emmanuel!" said Dave Henderson with terse heartiness. "You're all right, Emmanuel, and so is your room and your grub, but a little fresh

air is what I am looking for, and the sooner the better!"

He took the envelope that Emmanuel extended, crossed over to the lamp and turned his back on the other, as he ripped the envelope open. Nicolo Capriano's injunction had been to say nothing to Emmanuel, and— He was staring blankly at the front page of the evening newspaper, all that the envelope contained, and which he had now unfolded before him. And then he caught his breath sharply.

He was either crazy, or his eyes were playing him tricks.

A thrill that he suppressed by an almost superhuman effort of will, a thrill that tore and fought at the restraint he put upon it, because he was afraid that the mad, insane uplift that it premised was but some fantastic hallucination, swept over him. There was a lead-pencil circle drawn around the captions of one of the columns; and three written words, connected to the circle by another pencil-stroke, leaped up at him from the margin of the paper:

"*You are dead!*"

He felt the blood surging upward in his veins to beat like the blows of a trip-hammer at his temples. The words were not blurred and running together any more; the captions, instead, inside that circle, seemed to stand out in such huge, startling type that they dominated the entire page:

MAN BLOWN TO PIECES BY BOMB IDENTIFIED.

Mystery Is Explained.

Dave Henderson, Ex-Convict, Victim of His Own Murderous Intentions.

Henderson glanced over his shoulder. Behind him Emmanuel was clatteringly piling up the supper dishes on the tray. He turned again to the newspaper and read Nicolo Capriano's story, all of it now—and laughed. He remembered the old Italian's tale of the man Ignace Ferroni and his bomb.

Nicolo Capriano, for all his age and infirmity, was still without his peer in craft and cunning!

The ingenious use of enough of what was true had stamped the utterly false as beyond the shadow of a suspicion that it, too, was as genuine as the connecting links that held the fabric together.

He warmed to the old Italian, an almost hysterical admiration upon him for Nicolo Capriano's guile.

But transcending all other emotions was the sense of freedom. It surged upon him, possessing him; it brought exhilaration, and it brought a grim, unholy vista of things to come—a goal within possibility of reach now—Millman first, and then Booky Skarvan. He was free—free as the air. He was dead. Dave Henderson had passed out of the jurisdiction of the police. To the police he was now but a memory—he was dead.

"You are dead." A queer, tight smile thinned his lips, as his eyes fell again upon the penciled words at the margin of the paper.

"It's no wonder they never got anything on old Capriano!" he muttered, and began to tear the paper into shreds.

He was free! He was dead! He was impatient now to exercise that freedom. He could walk out on the streets with no more disguise than these cast-off clothes he had on, plus the brim of his hat to shade his face—for Dave Henderson was dead. Neither Booky Skarvan, nor Baldy Vickers would be searching for a dead man any more—nor would the police. He swung around and faced Emmanuel.

"I am to go to Nicolo Capriano's, eh?" he said. "Well, then, let's go; I'm ready."

"No makea da rush," smiled Emmanuel. "Capriano say you gotta da time, plenty time. Capriano say come over by an' by in da car."

Dave Henderson shook his head impatiently.

"No; we'll go now," he answered.

Emmanuel in turn shook his head.

"I gotta some peep down-stairs in da restaurant," he said. "I gotta stay maybe an hour yet."

Henderson considered this for a moment. He could walk out on the streets now quite freely. It was no longer necessary that he should be hidden in a car. But Nicolo

Capriano had told Emmanuel to use the car. Emmanuel would not understand, and he had no intention of enlightening the other, why a car was no longer necessary. Neither was Emmanuel himself necessary —there was Mrs. Tooler's pigeon-cote. If he went there before going to Nicolo Capriano! His brain was racing now. Yes, the car, *without Emmanuel*, would be a great convenience.

"All right!" he said crisply. "You stay here and look after your restaurant. There's no need for you to come. I'll take the car myself."

"You drivea da car?" asked Emmanuel dubiously.

Dave Henderson laughed quietly. The question awakened a certain and very pertinent memory. There were those who, if they chose to do so, could testify with some eloquence to his efficiency at the wheel of a car!

"Well, I have driven one," he said. "I guess I can handle that old bus of yours."

"But"—Emmanuel was still dubious—"Capriano say no takea da risk of being seen on—"

"I'm not looking for any risk myself," interposed Dave Henderson coolly. "It's dark now, and there's no chance of anybody recognizing me while I'm driving a car. Forget it, Emmanuel! Come on! I don't want to stick around here for another hour. Here!" From his pocket he produced a bank-note and pushed it across the table to the other.

Emmanuel grinned. His doubts had vanished.

"Sure!" said Emmanuel. He tiptoed to the door, looked out, listened, and jerked his head reassuringly in Dave Henderson's direction. "Getta da move on then! We go down by da back stairs. Come on!"

They gained the back yard, and the small shed that did duty for a garage, and in a moment more Dave Henderson, at the wheel of the car, was out on the street.

He drove slowly at first. He had paid no attention to the route taken by Emmanuel when they had left Nicolo Capriano's the night before, and as a consequence he had little or no idea in what part of the city Emmanuel's restaurant was located; but at the expiration of a few minutes he got his bearings, and the speed of the car quickened instantly.

CHAPTER V.

CON AMORE.

TEN minutes later, the car left at the curb half a block away, Henderson was crouched in the darkness at the door of old Tooler's shed that opened on the lane.

There was a grim set to his lips. There seemed a curious analogy in all this—this tool even with which he worked upon the door to force it open, this chisel that he had taken from the kit under the seat of Emmanuel's car, as once before from under the seat of another car he had taken a chisel —with one hundred thousand dollars as his object in view. He had got the money, then, and lost it, and had nearly lost his life as well, and now—

He steeled himself as the door opened silently under his hand; steeled himself against the hope, which somehow seemed to be growing upon him, that Millman might never have got here after all; steeled himself against disappointment where logic told him disappointment had no place at all, since he was but a fool to harbor any hope.

And yet—and yet there were a thousand things, a thousand unforeseen contingencies which might have turned the tables upon Millman! The money *might* still be here. And if it were! He was dead now—and free to use it! Free! His lips thinned into a straight line.

The door closed noiselessly behind him. The flash-light in his hand, also borrowed from Emmanuel's car, played around the shed. It was the same old place, perhaps a little more down-at-the-heels, perhaps a little dirtier, a little more cumbered up with odds and ends than it had been five years before, but there was no other change. And there was the door of the pigeon-cote above him, that he could just reach from the ground.

He moved toward it now with a swift, impulsive step, and snarled in sudden anger

at himself as he found his hand trembling with excitement, causing the flash-light to throw a jerky, wavering ray on the old pigeon-cote door. What was the use of that? He expected nothing, didn't he? The pigeon-cote would be empty; he knew that well enough. And yet he was playing the fool. He knew quite well it would be empty; he had prepared himself thoroughly to expect nothing else.

He reached up, opened the door, and felt inside. His hand encountered a moldy litter of chaff and straw. He reached further in, with quick eagerness, the full length of his arm. He remembered that he had pushed the package into the corner, and had covered it with straw.

For a minute, for two full minutes his fingers, by the sense of touch, sifted through the chaff, first slowly, methodically, then with a sort of frantic abandon; and then, in another moment, he had stooped to the floor, seized an old box, and, standing upon it, had thrust head and shoulders into the old pigeon-cote, while the flash-light's ray swept every crevice of the interior, and he pawed and turned up the chaff and straw where even it lay but a bare inch deep and only one bereft of his senses could expect it to conceal anything.

He withdrew himself from the opening, and closed the pigeon-cote door again, and stood down on the floor. He laughed at himself in a low, bitter, merciless way. He had expected nothing, of course; he had expected only to find what he had found—nothing. He had told himself that, hadn't he? Quite convinced himself of it, hadn't he? Well, then, what did it matter! His hands, clenched, went suddenly above his head.

"I paid five years for that," he whispered. "Do you hear, Millman—five years—five years! And I'll get you—Millman! I'll get you for this, Millman—are you listening?—whether you are in New York—or hell!"

He put the box upon which he had stood back in its place, went out of the shed, closed the door behind him, and made his way back to the car. He drove quickly now, himself driven by the feverish, intolerant passion that had him in its grip. He was satisfied now. There were not any more doubts. He knew! Well, he would go to Nicolo Capriano's, and then—his hands gripped fiercely on the steering-wheel. He was dead! Ha, ha! Dave Henderson was dead—but Millman was still alive!

It was not far to Capriano's. He left the car where Emmanuel had awaited him the night before, and gained the back porch of Nicolo Capriano's house.

Teresa's voice answered his knock.

"Who's there?" she asked.

He laughed low, half in facetiousness, half in grim humor. He was in a curious mood.

"The dead man!" he answered.

There was no light in the porch to-night. She opened the door, and, as he stepped inside, closed it behind him again. He could not see her in the darkness—and somehow, suddenly, quite unreasonably, he found the situation awkward, and his tongue, as it had been the night before, awkward, too.

"Say," he blurted out, "your father's got some clever head, all right!"

"Has he?" Her voice seemed strangely quiet and subdued, a hint of listlessness and weariness in it.

"But you know about it, don't you?" he exclaimed. "You know what he did, don't you?"

"Yes; I know," she answered. "But he has been waiting for you, and he is impatient, and we had better go at once."

It was Tony Lomazzi! He remembered her grief when he had told her last night that Tony was dead. That was what was the matter with her, he decided, as he followed her along the passageway. She must have thought a good deal of Tony Lomazzi—more even than her father did.

He wished again that he had not broken the news to her in the blunt, brutal way he had—only he had not known then, of course, that Tony had meant so much to her. He found himself wondering why now. She could not have had anything to do with Tony Lomazzi for fifteen years, and fifteen years ago she could have been little more than a child. True, she might perhaps have visited the prison, but—

"Well, my young friend—eh?" Nicolo Capriano's voice greeted him as he followed Teresa into the old Italian's room. "So Ignace Ferroni has done you a good turn—eh? And old Nicolo! Eh—what have you to say about old Nicolo? Did I not tell you that you could leave it to old Nicolo to find a way?"

Dave Henderson caught the other's outstretched hand and wrung it hard.

"I'll never forget this," he said. "You've pulled the slickest thing I ever heard of, and I—"

"*Bah!*" Nicolo Capriano was chuckling delightedly. "Never mind the thanks, my young friend. You owe me none. The old fingers had the itch in them to play the cards against the police once more. And the police—eh?—I do not like the police. Well, perhaps we are quits now! Ha, ha! Do you know Barjan? Barjan is a very clever little man, too—ha, ha!—Barjan and old Nicolo have known each other many years. And that is what Barjan said—just what you said—that he would not forget.

"Well, we are all pleased—eh? But we do not stop at that. Old Nicolo does not do things by halves. You will still need help, my young friend. You will go at once to New York—eh? That is what you intend to do?"

"Yes," said Dave Henderson.

Nicolo Capriano nodded.

"And you will find your man—and the money?"

"Yes!" Dave Henderson's lips thinned suddenly. "If he is in New York, as I believe he is, I will find him; if not—then I will find him, just the same."

Again Nicolo Capriano nodded.

"Ah, my young friend, I like you!" he murmured. "If I had had you—eh—fifteen years ago! We would have gone far—eh? And Tony went no farther than a prison cell. But we waste time—eh? Old Nicolo is not through yet—a Capriano does not do things by halves. You will need help and friends in New York. Nicolo Capriano will see to that. And money to get to New York—eh? You will need some ready money for that?"

Dave Henderson's eyes met Teresa's. She stood there, a slim, straight figure, just inside the door, the light glinting on her raven hair. She seemed somehow, with those wondrous eyes of hers, to be making an analysis of him, an analysis that went deeper than a mere appraisal of his features and his clothes—and a little frown came and puckered the white brow—and, quick in its wake, with a little start of confusion, there came a heightened tinge of color to her cheeks, and she lowered her eyes.

"Teresa, my little one," said Nicolo Capriano softly, "go and get some paper and an envelope and pen and ink."

Dave Henderson watched her as she left the room.

Nicolo Capriano's fingers, from plucking at the counterpane, tapped gently on Dave Henderson's sleeve.

"We were speaking of money—for your immediate needs," Nicolo Capriano suggested pleasantly.

Dave Henderson shook his head.

"I have enough to keep me going for a while," he answered.

The old bomb king's eyebrows were slightly elevated.

"So! But you are just out of prison—and you said yourself that the police had followed you closely."

Henderson laughed shortly.

"That wasn't very difficult," he said. "I had a friend who owed me some money before I went to the pen—some I had won on the racetrack. I gave the police the slip without very much trouble last night in order to get here, and it was a good deal more of a cinch to put it over them long enough to get that money."

"So!" said Nicolo Capriano again. "And this friend—what is his name?"

Dave Henderson hesitated. He had seen to it that Square John Kelly's skirts were clear, and he was reluctant now, even to this man here, to whom he owed a debt beyond repayment, to bring Square John into the matter at all; yet, on the other hand, in this particular instance, it could make very little difference.

If Square John was involved, Nicolo Capriano was involved a hundredfold deeper. And then, too, Nicolo Capriano might very well, and with very good reason,

be curious to know how he could, under the circumstances, have come into the possession of a sum of money adequate for his present needs.

"I'd rather keep his name out of it," he said frankly; "but I guess you've got a right to ask about anything you like, and, if you insist, I'll tell you."

Nicolo Capriano's eyes were half-closed—and they were fixed on the foot of the bed.

"I think I would like to know," he said after a moment.

"All right! It was Square John Kelly," said Dave Henderson quietly—and recounted briefly the details of his visit to the Pacific Coral Saloon the night before.

Nicolo Capriano had propped himself up in bed. He leaned over now as Henderson finished and patted Dave's shoulder in a sort of exultant excitement.

"Good! Excellent!" he exclaimed. "Ah, my young friend, I begin to love you! It brings back the years that are gone. But—*bah!*—I shall get well again—eh? And I am not yet too old—eh? Who can tell—eh?—who can tell? We would be invincible, you and I, and—" He checked himself as Teresa reentered the room. "Yes, yes," he said. "Well, then, as far as money is concerned, you are supplied; but friends—eh?—are sometimes more important than money. You have found that out already—eh?

"Listen, then, I will give you a letter to a friend in New York whom you can trust—and I promise you he will stop at nothing to carry out my orders. You understand? His name is Georges Vardi, but he is commonly known as Dago George; and he, too, was one of us in the old days. You will want somewhere to go. He keeps a little hotel, a very *quiet* little hotel, off the Bowery, not far from Chatham Square. Any one will tell you there where to find Dago George. You understand?"

"Yes," said Dave Henderson.

Nicolo Capriano motioned his daughter suddenly to a small table on the opposite side of the bed.

"Teresa will write the letter and put it in Italian," he said as she seated herself at the table. "I do not write as easily as I used to. They say old Nicolo is a sick man. Well, maybe that is so, but old Nicolo's brain is not sick, and old Nicolo's fingers can, at least, still sign his name—and that is enough. Ha, ha! it is good to be alive again! Well"—he waved his hand again toward his daughter—"are you ready, my little one?"

"Yes, father," she answered.

"To Dago George, then," he said. "First—my affectionate salutations."

Her pen scratched rapidly over the paper. She looked up.

"Yes, father?"

Nicolo Capriano's fingers plucked at the coverlet.

"You will say that the bearer of this letter—ah! Yes!" He turned with a whimsical smile to Dave Henderson. "You must have a name, eh, my young friend—since Dave Henderson is dead? We shall not tell Dago George everything. Fools alone tell all they know! What shall it be?"

Dave Henderson shrugged his shoulders.

"Anything," he said. "It doesn't matter. One is as good as another. Make it Barty Lynch."

"Yes, that will do. Good!" Nicolo Capriano gestured with his hand in his daughter's direction again. "You will say that the bearer of this letter is Barty Lynch, and that he is to be treated as though he were Nicolo Capriano himself. You understand, my little one? Anything that he asks is his—and I, Nicolo Capriano, will be responsible. Tell him, my little one, that it is Nicolo Capriano's order—and that Nicolo Capriano has yet to be disobeyed. And particularly you will say that if our young friend here requires any help by those who know how to do what they are told and ask no questions, the men are to be supplied. You understand, Teresa?"

She did not look up this time.

"Yes, father."

"Write it, then," he said. "And see that Dago George is left with no doubt in his mind that he is at the command of our young friend here."

Teresa's pen scratched rapidly again across the paper.

Nicolo Capriano was at his interminable occupation of plucking at the counterpane.

Henderson pushed his hand through his hair in a curiously abstracted sort of way. There seemed to be something strangely and suddenly unreal about all this—about this man, with his cunning brain, who lay here in this queer four-poster bed; about that trim little figure, who bent over the table there, and whose profile only now was in view, the profile of a sweet, womanly face that somehow now seemed to be very earnest, for he could see the reflection of a puckered brow in the little nest of wrinkles at the corner of her eye.

No, there wasn't anything unreal about her. She was very real.

He remembered her as she had stood last night on the threshold there, and when in the lighted doorway he had seen her for the first time. He would never forget that—nor the smile that had followed the glorious flood of color in her cheeks, and that had lighted up her eyes, and that had forgiven him for his unconscious rudeness.

That wasn't what was unreal. All that would remain living and vibrant, a picture that would endure, and that the years would not dim.

It was unreal that in the space of a few minutes more everything here would have vanished forever out of his existence—this room with its vaguely foreign air, this four-poster bed with its strange occupant, whose mental vitality seemed to thrive on his physical weakness, that slimmer figure there bending over the table, whose masses of silken hair seemed to curl and cluster in a sort of proudly intimate affection about the arched, shapely neck, whose shoulders were molded in soft yielding lines that somehow invited the lingering touch of a hand, if one but had the right.

His hand pushed its way again through his hair, and fumbled a little helplessly across his eyes. And, too, it was more than that which was unreal. A multitude of things seemed unreal—the years in the penitentiary, during which he had racked his brain for a means of eluding the police—racked it until it had become a physical agony to think, were now dispelled by this man here, and with such ease that, as an accomplished, concrete fact, his mind somehow refused to accept it as such.

He was dead! It was very strange, very curious!

He sank back a little in his chair. There came a vista of New York—not as a tangible thing of great streets and vast edifices but as a Mecca of his aspirations, now almost within his grasp, as an arena where he could stand unleashed, and where the iron of five years that had entered his soul should have a chance to vent itself.

Millman was there! There seemed to come an unholy joy creeping upon him. Millman was there—and he, Dave Henderson, was dead, and in Henderson's place would be a man in that arena who had friends now at his back, who could laugh at the police.

Millman! He felt the blood sweep upward to his temples; he heard his knuckles crack as his hand clenched in a fierce, sudden surge of fury. Millman! Yes, the way was clear to Millman—but there was another, too. Booky Skarvan!

His hand unclenched. He was quite cool, quite unconcerned again. Teresa had finished the letter, and Nicolo Capriano was reading it now. He could afford to wait, as far as Booky Skarvan was concerned—he could not afford to wait where Millman was concerned. And, besides, there was his own safety. Booky Skarvan was here in San Francisco, but the further he got from San Francisco for the present, and the sooner, the better it would be. In a little while, a few months, after he had paid his debt to Millman—he would pay his debt to Booky Skarvan. He was not likely to forget Booky Skarvan!

His eyes fell on Teresa. He might come back to San Francisco in a few months. With ordinary caution it ought to be quite safe then. Dave Henderson would have been dead quite long enough then to be utterly forgotten. They would not be talking on every street corner about him as they were to-night, and—

Nicolo Capriano was nodding his head approvingly over the letter.

"Yes, yes!" he said. "Excellent! With this, my young friend, you will be a far more important personage in New York

than you imagine. Old Nicolo's arm still reaches far."

He stared for a moment musingly at Dave Henderson through half-closed eyes. "You have money and this letter. I do not think there is anything else that old Nicolo can do for you—eh—except to give you a little advice. You will leave here shortly, and from that moment you must be very careful. Anywhere near San Francisco you might be recognized. Travel only by night at first—make of yourself a tramp and use the freight trains, and hide by day. After two or three days, which should have taken you a good many miles from here, you will be able to travel more comfortably.

"But still do not use the through express trains—the men on the dining and sleeping-cars have all started from here, too, you must remember. You understand? Go slowly. Be very careful. You are not really safe until you are east of Chicago. I do not think there is anything else, unless — eh — you are armed, my young friend?"

Dave Henderson shook his head.

"So!" ejaculated Nicolo Capriano, and pursed his lips. "And it would not be safe for you to buy a weapon to-night—eh?—and it might very well be that to-night you would need it badly. Well, it is easily remedied." He turned to his daughter. "Teresa, my little one, I think we might let our young friend have that revolver upstairs in the bottom of the old box—and still not remain defenseless ourselves—eh? Yes, yes! Run and get it, Teresa!"

She rose from her seat obediently and turned toward the door—but her father stopped her with a quick, impulsive gesture.

"Wait!" he said. "Give me the pen before you go, and I will sign this letter. Dago George must be sure that it came from Nicolo Capriano—eh?"

She dipped the pen in the ink and handed it to him.

Nicolo Capriano propped the letter on his knees as he motioned her away on her errand. His pen moved laboriously across the paper. He looked up then and beckoned Dave Henderson to lean over the bed.

"See, my young friend!" he smiled—and pointed to his cramped writing. "Old Nicolo's fingers are old and stiff, and it is a long while since Dago George has seen that signature—but, though I am certain he would know it again, I have made assurance doubly sure. See, I have signed: '*Con amore*, Nicolo Capriano.' You do not know Italian—eh? Well, it is a simple phrase, a very common phrase. It means —'with love.'

"But to Dago George it means something else. It was a secret signal in the old days. A letter signed in that way by any one of us meant—'trust to the death!' You understand, my young friend?" He smiled again and patted Dave Henderson's arm. "Give me the envelope there on the table."

He was inserting the letter in the envelope as Teresa entered the room again. He sealed the envelope, reached out to her for the revolver which she carried, broke the revolver, nodded as he satisfied himself that it was loaded—and handed both envelope and weapon to Dave Henderson. He spread out his hands then and lifted his shoulders in a whimsical gesture of finality.

"It is only left then to say good-by—eh—my young friend—who was the friend of Tony Lomazzi? You will have good luck and good fortune, and—"

Dave Henderson was on his feet. He had both of the old Italian's hands in his.

"I will never forget what you have done—and I will never forget Nicolo Capriano," he said in a low tone, his voice suddenly choked.

The old bomb king's eyelids fluttered down. It was like a blind man whose face was turned to Dave Henderson.

"I am sure of that, my young friend," he said softly. "I am sure that you will never forget Nicolo Capriano. I shall hear of you through Dago George."

He released his hands suddenly. His eyes opened—they were inscrutable, almost dead, without lustre. "Go!" he said. "I know what you would say. But we are not children to sob on one another's neck. Nicolo is not dead yet. Perhaps we will meet again—eh? We will not make a scene—Teresa will tell you that it might bring on an attack. Eh? Well, then, go! You

will need all the hours from now until daylight to get well away from the city." He smiled again and waved Dave Henderson from the bed.

In a curiously reluctant way, as though conscious that his farewell to the old Italian was entirely inadequate, that his gratitude had found no expression, and yet conscious, too, that any attempt to express his feelings would be genuinely unwelcome to the other, Dave moved toward the door. Teresa had already passed out of the room and was standing in the hall. On the threshold he paused and looked back.

"Good-by, Nicolo Capriano!" he called gaily.

The old Italian had sunk back on the pillows, his fingers busy with the counterpane.

"The wine of life, my young friend!" It was almost as though he were talking to himself. "Ha, ha!—the wine of life! The old days back again—the measured blades—the fight and the rasp of steel! Ha, ha! Old Nicolo is not yet dead! Good-by—good-by, my young friend! It is old Nicolo who is in your debt—not you in his. Good-by, my young friend—good-by!"

Teresa's footsteps were already receding along the passageway toward the rear door. With a final wave of his hand to the old Italian, Henderson turned and walked slowly along the hall. He heard the porch door ahead of him being opened. He reached it, and halted, looking around him. It was dark, as it always was here, and he could see nothing—not even a faint, blurred outline of Teresa's form. Surprised, he called her name softly. There was no answer—only the door wide open.

He stepped out into the porch. There was still no sign of her. It was very strange! He called her again—he only wanted to say good-by, to thank her, to tell her, as he had told her father, that he would not forget. And, yes, to tell her, too, if he could find the words, that some day he hoped that he might see her again. But there was no answer.

He was frowning now, piqued, and a little angry. He did not understand—only that she had opened the door for him, and in some way had deliberately chosen to evade him. He did not know why—he could find no reason for it. He moved on through the porch. Perhaps she had preceded him as far as the lane.

At the lane he halted again, and again looked around him—and stood there hesitant. And then there reached him the sound of the porch door being closed and locked.

He did not understand. It mystified him. It was not coquetry—there was no coquetry in those steady, self-reliant eyes, or in that strong, sweet face. And yet it had been deliberately done, and about it was something of finality—and his lips twisted in a hurt smile as he turned and walked from the lane.

"Beat it!" said Dave to himself. "You're dead!"

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.

À LA MOWED

BY J. LILIAN VANDEVERE

ONE day, meeting Cupid at rest from his work,
Reclining at ease by a river,
I said to him, "Boy, you have no time to shirk,
And what has become of your quiver?"
"The game that I seek has no trace of a heart,"
He answered with gurgles of laughter,
"So I use a sickle instead of a dart—
It's merry grass-widows I'm after!"

With Much Gusto

by Herman Howard Matteson

DON RAMON AVILLA—every peon patriot in Sonora is a don at least—one hand resting upon the cantle of his saddle, stood glowering at General José Cuchillo.

General Cuchillo, unaware of his underling's malevolent look, walked slowly, pompously about a clustered group consisting of one young white woman, two little white girls, and a dozen Mexican and breed women and girls.

With languid, imperious hand, General José beckoned to the young white woman to follow him, when she, who, within the hour had become the widow of the young white ranchero, drew a sobbing breath, licked up with avid tongue and lips the brown powder that she had held secreted in a clenched hand—fell to the earth.

General José, both annoyed and chagrined, uttered a short laugh and walked on.

Madre de Dios! Good enough. Don Ramon's black eyes glittered.

Within a twelvemonth, the cutthroat band had had no less than half a dozen generals, chieftains. Each, until the unhappy choice fell upon José Cuchillo, had justified the honor by acquiring a white woman.

Cuchillo had tried and tried, all but succeeded—failed. Which was a sign, communed Avilla, that the sun of José Cuchillo was toward the setting. It was high time that the band swore eternal fealty to a new chief, and that chief might as well as not be Don Ramon Avilla, with first choice of captives, first hand into the bag of loot.

Possession of a gringo white woman brought a man good luck. Besides the matter of luck, no small item to Avilla's skulking soul, his inclinations lay that way mightily, for he was beginning to find, with his elevation to the colonelcy, odious in the extreme the crude blandishments of the starveling camp followers who came fluttering about the bivouac like hungry crows in search of carrion.

Meditating thus, Don Ramon took a pace or two back and forth, lifted his head smartly, proudly. He was resolved. He would go upon a journey.

Before a ragged patch of tent—the army's commissary—Don Ramon proceeded to outfit, filling a leather bottle to the bubbling top with the ardent drink called *pulque*, packing full two lizard-skin pouches, one with strong tobacco of Oaxaca, the other with dried leaves of the marihuana, or courage plant.

As an afterthought, he slipped a couple of greasy frijoles and a double handful of leached corn into the saddle-bag. Then he mounted, drove the long spurs into the horse's torn flanks, bore away toward the north.

Evelyn Warner, a dab of chalk across one cheek, her blue eyes zealously alight, was striving earnestly to impress upon the mind and soul of Pedro Torres the fact that six times seven is forty-two, and never forty-six. Pedro couldn't see it, which seems rather remarkable, for Pedro was anything but stupid, even though, at the age of twenty, he was struggling with problems of the second grammar grade.

Nor was Pedro stubborn, or intractable. Why, since her first request he had never once rolled or lighted a cigarette within the school's domain; further, with lofty magnanimity, he had foreborne to pack within the temple of learning the seven-inch bowie-knife with which, formerly, he had gone embellished.

Pedro was as one traveling in a Socorro sand-storm, from whom all nearer things of earth are hidden, but who is permitted to look upon the crest of the lofty peak ahead. That was it. Upon that high pinnacle, Pedro saw the yellow-haired school-teacher, with whom he was deeply, abysmally in love.

Of this fact, Schoolmistress Evelyn was all unaware, though she might easily enough have guessed it had not her own tender fancies centered upon the biweekly arrival of the Eastern mail. Even when Pedro began to appear garbed in his braided, black velvet coat—worn previously at bull-fights and upon fiesta days only—she never suspected, nor, when, to the coat he added the wide-brimmed, cone-crowned hat with the thick silver cord representing one season's toil in the cotton-field, did she remotely dream or suspect.

Evelyn, before she had started from the East, had heard that the Mexicans were cruel, treacherous. She didn't believe it.

Every morning her little, black-eyed folk—her scholars, except for three white children, were Mexicans or breeds—would come with dirty hands filled with offerings of ripe guavas, dates, or cactus-apple. When the bell dismissed them from their seats they would gather about her like bronze mountain butterflies hovering over a bush of sweet pedisporum.

Her every kindness they flashed back at her out of sparkling, grateful eyes. Upon their soft tongues, her name, Señorita Evelyno, was as a phrase from a lullaby.

From these children, she, gentle born and bred, was learning true courtesy and politeness. A little fellow, no higher than her waist, would fly down the aisle to retrieve for her a pencil that she had dropped.

When the gringo teacher would have a drink from the porous, cooling jar, some witch of a child would first scrub out the drinking-cup with the corner of a bright, ragged serape.

And Pedro. To her lightest request, he would sweep her a bow, accompanied, at first, before he had much English, with a ceremonious "*con muchisimo gusto*," which, as time went on, he would declaim variously as "with muchisimo pleasure," or "con much gusto."

Evelyn began to fidget over Pedro, not because he stared at her so owlishly, but because he wasn't learning his lessons. Day after day he went down to inglorious defeat before the table of sevens and employed his geography solely as a covert from behind which he might peer at Evelyn.

"You must, must study, Pedro, study hard."

Pedro laid a brown hand over his heart.

"With much gusto, Señorita Evelyno.

But Pedro didn't study, save to meditate, without impiety, how very like her golden hair was to the hair upon the head of our Lady of the Angels in the mission chapel.

He didn't study, and he didn't, and had to stay after school, which was as severe as punishing an Indian with a bottle of *mescal*.

She stepped around a desk, to point out pertinent facts touching the multiplication of nine by seven, and found Pedro upon his knees, both her hands clasped in his own. Then, as a caballero of old Spain might have made his plea, Pedro poured out his heart.

He loved her. For her, he would spill his blood like December rain. He would be her true caballero, he would, he would.

Gently, wishing that Jimmy Haworth, of Galena, Illinois, might have borrowed some of Pedro's Latin fire for his wooing, she withdrew her hands. Why, Pedro was but a boy; she was old, very old.

Pedro was not a boy. Would he not, come blessed day of Santa Barbara, be

twenty? She old? Angels never grew old. Then his soft, black eyes became the hard, glittering eyes of a wronged rattler. Had she, then, a lover, a caballero?

None thereabouts, certainly.

Pedro arose to his feet, set a bit more jauntily the velvet coat about his shoulders, marched out with the stride of a grandee. Beside a clump of Turk's head cactus, where, during hours of instruction he was wont to secrete the long-bladed bowie, he sank to the earth from sight, tried the edge of the blade against his thumb, slid it into its sheath.

No lover thereabouts. But somewhere, a lover. No matter. There were hopes.

He'd win yet this angel of the golden hair; he'd learn the accursed table of sevens, eights, and nines; he'd slit the throat—

Clattering hoof-beats sounded from the cañon trail which led to the Mexican line a mile south. A gay serape fluttering from his shoulder, resplendent in the gaudy uniform of a bandit colonel, a rider dashed up alongside the tile step of the adobe schoolhouse, threw the reins over the horse's head, dismounted, entered.

There came sound of a smothered scream. The bandit reappeared, a squirming bundle wrapped about in the serape in his arms. He was in the saddle, the bundle before him. The cruel spurs stabbed the horse's flanks. He was away, speeding down the cañon trail.

Leaping from rock to rock like a goat, the naked blade in his hand, Pedro ran after, screaming threats, blistering oaths. Where a tiny monument marked the limits of the United States, Pedro stopped, stared at the cloud of dust that lay ahead on the edge of the desert.

The desert!

Back Pedro ran with all speed to his own adobe house, yanked a canvas water-bag from a rafter, filled it from the cooling jar, tore down the trail, across the line, into the waste of hot sands.

Hour after hour he pressed on, following the deep hoof marks of a horse, that any momentary flurry of hot wind might obliterate forever. The distance between the marks of the reaching forefeet and the spurning hind feet, began to lessen.

Good! Pedro had been watching for the sign, for, in the desert, a good man, with a burning purpose, will overhaul a horse.

On Pedro went, and on until the darkness hid the hoof marks from his sight. Then, on hands and knees, he felt out the direction of the tracks, ran a distance, located the tracks anew, then on.

For several miles, until the spent horse began to stumble, Don Ramon spurred the wretched beast unmercifully. Then, for fear the animal would drop down for good, the bandit dismounted for a brief breathing spell, and lifted the girl to the earth.

"*Señorita* got knife, poison?" he demanded, padding with his hands about her person.

Her face flamed at the indignity. Ah! If only she had had poison—or knife.

Don Ramon took a gulp from the leather bottle of pulque, rolled himself a cigarette, half of tobacco, half of the dried courage-plant, also called variously, "the liberator of sin," "loco," or "wild hemp."

The man's eyes began to glow like moistened match-heads in the dark, and, swelling to the mad exhilaration of the pulque and the loco, he took a few strutting steps back and forth.

Bowing with mock gallantry, he lifted the girl to the horse's back, mounted, urged the beast forward.

Again the horse began to stumble. Darkness was falling. Avilla reined in.

"We eat now food," he said, "rest *un poco,* go on."

From the saddle-bag he searched forth greasy frijoles, a handful of leached corn, spread his serape upon the sand for a cloth. Seating himself, he proffered the leather bottle to the girl.

She refused. The don took a generous drink, a bite of a frijole, and laid out the lizard-skin pouches preparatory to rolling another cigarette.

She knew something about this loco, or Mexican opium. Until she had peremptorily stopped the practise, some of the children even had chewed it as other children chew gum. She had heard of Mexicans, maddened by overindulgence in the weed, when no human victim was at hand, run-

ning amuck, slashing horses and cows with their knives—anything to shed blood, to kill.

The frenzy of a loco drunk, soon over, is followed by stupor, sleep. But in that period of madness what unspeakable deviltry might not be done. She'd risk it. She would have to.

Leaning slightly, she began to feel about her in the sand. At last she found it, a stone no larger than her thumb.

Watching for her opportunity, she flung the stone, struck the horse upon the neck. It plunged, ran forward a few steps, the Mexican after it, cursing vilely.

In an instant she had seized the pulque bottle, had emptied into it all the loco she could gather in her hand. Then she shook the bottle vigorously, placed it back upon the *serape.*

Avilla, seating himself once more, took a pull at the bottle, a bit of frijole, lighted his cigarette. In the flickering yellow light of the vesta match, his eyes looked like black points. Again he offered her the bottle, laughed at her refusal, took another drink.

Presently he leaped to his feet, began to pace back and forth nervously. As he came to a stop, standing over her, she arose, backed away a step.

Now, courage. Oh, for the sharp, long-bladed knife of Pedro, a hatpin, anything.

"*Señorita,* I—"

"Please," she stammered, searching desperately for some time-saving subterfuge, "please, I—really, if you will give me just a taste of the pulque, I feel very ill."

"*Perfectamente!* Stupid pig that I forget the *señorita.* Pardons a million."

In playful simulation of self-punishment for his neglect, he struck himself upon the chest, handed her the bottle. She tilted it to the lips, pretended to drink, handed it back. Don Ramon drank after her, and drank again.

"*Señorita!*"

He was leaning toward her, fumbling in the darkness to find her hand.

"Please," she protested. "I am feeling wretchedly ill and weak."

She drew her cold fingers from his hot grasp, shrank back.

"Cruel, *señorita!* One kiss—one!"

He came lurching toward her, flung both arms about her. Striking, thrusting him away, like a fury sinking her teeth into the back of the hand that grasped her arm, she fought free of him.

Again and again she broke away from him, to be seized anew. But she was young, vigorous, armed with a strength inspired by terror supreme.

She fell to her knees upon the serape. Her groping hand found the leather bottle. Into his face and eyes she dashed the fiery stuff.

Screaming with pain, his hands clapped over eyes that were as two burning coals, he ran blindly back and forth.

Evelyn was gone. Heedless of the barbed cactus that pierced her thin shoes, she ran, ran until it seemed her heart would burst from her bosom. At last, when she could no longer run, she fell, lay panting upon the sand.

Her ear close to the earth, she listened. Away in the distance, she could hear the bandit calling to her, cursing, then babbling senseless, whirling words.

At length his voice was still. She struggled to her feet, pressed on, ignorant of all direction, but on, away from what lay behind.

For miles she fought her way, her feet and ankles bleeding from the cactus through which she blundered. Then, as the sun arose like an inflamed eye to peer along that waste of sand, and spines, and horrid, creeping things, her heart sank.

When she should have been traveling north and east toward the line and safety, she had been going south and west, deeper still into the bandit country.

Summoning, from the uttermost parts of her being, her last vestige of strength and resolution, she set forth, making a détour to avoid the spot where the bandit had pitched his temporary camp. By this time of the morning the lethal effect of the loco would have worn off, leaving an aftermath of nervous irritability, more dangerous than its exhilaration.

Up, up, climbed the flaming, red eye, changing to yellow, to an incandescent-white. The world, under that terrific heat

that grew and grew still hotter, must become, it seemed, a waste of fire.

The desert rabbits, pocket mice, kangaroo rats, hovered in the precarious shelter of elephant wood, their sides heaving, their red mouths gaping piteously.

On her knees, with bleeding, spine-torn hands, she dug desperately to find roots of the desert, water-nut plant. She found a pitiful few, swallowed the drops of hot, acrid fluid.

Further on, but slowly, oh, so slowly. She was getting dizzy. Things were turning black.

Her last thought was a realization that if she lay out in that destroying sun, it would be the end.

Crawling into the shelter of an elephant-bush, she fell forward upon her face—unconscious.

Some one lifted her head gently, poured blessed drops of water into her parched mouth.

"*Gracias, Madre de Dios!*" exclaimed a fervent voice. "Opens now the blue eyes! More water! There!"

Pedro, his face the color of the dead, bleached branches above him, was leaning over her. There was a clean hole through the black velvet jacket, which was stiff with dried blood.

He was breathing rapidly, shallowly, with a terrifying rattling noise. He let her head sag back upon the sand, for he had not the strength to support it.

"Listen, *carita mia,*" he said, pointing weakly to the north, "keep the sun at your back—a league on—you are safe. All night," he panted, "I trail the hoof-tracks. This morning I came upon him—raving. *Madre de Dios,* how he rave. *Muchisimo* we fight. There, and there—and there, with much gusto, my knife finds his buzzard flesh.

"Me, twice, he stab, here, and here. Does he die? No. He falls to the earth. I take the *riata* from his saddle.

"With my bloody knife I cut it in pieces four. One foot of the *carne envenenada* I tie to root of tough yucca—the other foot to another—one wrist to a third—a wrist to a fourth—there he lies—crucified—like a thief, but without a cross. He lives an hour, a day maybe, more—perhaps. *Quien sabe?*"

He shoved the broad-brimmed hat from his sweating brow.

"Then I find her, *carita mia, Madre de Dios,* I find her. *Gracias,* Lady of Heaven, that for a space, I serve her—her *caballero*—with much gusto, I serve her. Go, now, *carita mia*—take the water-bag—a league—"

He lopped over onto the sand, but still smiled up at her bravely.

"It is soon ever," he whispered. "Go now. Santa Margaret bless the golden hair of her—Santa Ysobel bless and keep the two blue eyes—Santa—"

A spasm shook his breast. The lips opened dryly. He crossed himself. The hand fell limply across his chest.

The caballero soul of Pedro Torres had taken flight.

A WORD IS A WALL

BY MARY CAROLYN DAVIES

A WORD is a wall;
And we would go
Where no walls hedge us,
To and fro.

A word is a wall,
Put your cheek on my cheek.
Let the night fall;
And do not speak.

The Conquest of the Moon Pool

by A. Merritt

A Sequel to "The Moon Pool"

A "DIFFERENT" SERIAL

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

FOLLOWING the strange and inexplicable disappearance of Dr. David Throckmartin's wife, his associate, Dr. Stanton, and his wife's maid, Thora Helverson, in the uncanny depths of the Moon Pool, and the still more amazing disappearance of Throckmartin himself from the ship Southern Queen, in midocean (the details of which have already been given to the world in a statement made by Dr. Walter T. Goodwin, Ph.D., F. R. G. S., and published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, June 22, 1918), Dr. Goodwin, backed by the International Association of Science, set out to investigate thoroughly the appalling phenomena, and if possible effect a rescue of the victims.

While proceeding toward the Caroline Islands, on the outlying island of which, Nan-Matal, was the entrance to the vast cavern in which was the Moon Pool, in the little sailing vessel, Suwarna, Captain Da Costa, they encountered another small vessel, the Brunhilda, Captain Olaf Huldricksson. Olaf, a huge giant of a man, was alone on the ship, his hands lashed to his wheel and in the last stages of exhaustion. From him, when he had been cared for, they learned that a "sparkling devil" had come down the path of the moon and taken his wife and his little daughter, Freda. The crew, terrified, had deserted the ship, and he, binding his wrists to the wheel that he might keep awake, had followed the direction taken by the sparkling devil. On learning of Dr. Goodwin's mission, he willingly consented to join him, and the two, with Larry O'Keefe (a young half-American, half-Irish member of the Royal Air Force, whom the Suwarna had picked up from his wrecked hydroplane the day after the rescue of Olaf), landed on Nan-Matal.

The full of the moon was past, but by means of light condensers Dr. Goodwin managed to focus the moon rays in sufficient strength to cause the rock door to the Moon Pool to open. Scarcely had it done so when Olaf, shrieking, rushed through the portal; a rifle cracked, and the bullet, missing O'Keefe by a narrow margin, shattered a condenser. The next moment a figure catapulted out of the shadows, and in a second O'Keefe and the stranger were struggling on the threshold of the Moon Rock. They rolled past the opened slab, Dr. Goodwin following. It was over in a moment, however, and presently the Irishman rose, leaving the stranger unconscious on the rock floor.

Even as he did so, however, the great rock door, released by the breaking of the light condenser, swung to, and they were imprisoned in the lair of the Dweller of the Moon Pool.

The stranger proved to be Dr. von Hetzdorp, a German scientist, with whom they finally concluded a truce for the benefit of all. After passing around the Moon Pool they came to a blank wall, where a beautiful girl accompanied by a huge frog-woman appeared to them, and by signs showed them the secret springs that opened the wall before them. From then on adventures came thick and fast until at last they arrived in a vast country, miles below the surface, where existed a race of powerful dwarfs, ruled over by a beautiful woman, Yolara, priestess of the Shining One, and Lugur, "the Voice," a man of herculean strength. Yolara soon showed that she is attracted by O'Keefe (thereby arousing the fury of Lugur), but Larry, having fallen in love with the vision

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of the Moon Pool Chamber—whom he has learned is Lakla, handmaiden of the Silent Ones, and as good as Yolara is evil—did not respond.

The German and Lugur joined forces, and though their enmity to the Americans was carefully veiled, it was none the less sinister and threatening. That the powerful influence of Lakla and the Silent Ones is on their side, however, gives Larry and Dr. Goodwin hope.

It was soon evident that something big was due to break soon. The *ladala*—the common people—were restless and sullen; and after a sacrifice to the Shining One, at which Larry and Olaf openly defied the god, they were distinctly threatening. Then, too, Yolara's open love for Larry drove Lugar half mad with jealousy, which reached its zenith when, at the feast following the sacrifice, Yolara, having rendered Larry half drunk with some potent drug, declared her intention of taking him for her mate then and there. The ceremony was proceeding, to the horror of Dr. Goodwin, when there was a blare of trumpets, and into the hall filed a company of grotesque frog-men warriors, and following them came Lakla, handmaiden of the Silent One.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"THESE MEN THE SILENT ONES SUMMON!"

THROUGH the grotesque ranks of the frog-men she paced and halted close beside me. From firm little chin to dainty buskined feet she was swathed in the soft metallic robes; these of a dull, almost coppery hue. The left arm was hidden, the right free and gloved, the gloving disappearing high in the shoulder folds. Wound tight about the arm was one of the vines of the sculptured wall and of Lugur's circled signet-ring. Thick, a vivid green, its five tendrils ran between her fingers, stretching out five flowered heads that gleamed like blossoms cut from gigantic, glowing rubies.

So she stood for a moment, contemplating Yolara, from whose visage the mask had fled, leaving, it is true, a face still seared with rage and hate, but human. Drawn perhaps by my gaze, she dropped her eyes upon me; golden, translucent, with tiny flecks of amber in their aureate irises, the soul that looked through them was as far removed from that flaming out of the priestess's as zenith is above nadir.

I noted the low, broad brow, the proud little nose, the tender mouth, and the soft—sunlight—glow that seemed to transfuse the delicate skin. And suddenly in the eyes dawned a smile—sweet, friendly, a touch of roguishness, profoundly reassuring in its all humanness. I felt my heart expand as though freed from fetters, a recrudescence of confidence in the essential reality of things—as though in nightmare the struggling consciousness should glimpse some familiar face and know the terrors with which it strove were but dreams. And involuntarily I smiled back at her.

She raised her head and looked again at Yolara, contempt and a certain curiosity in her gaze; at O'Keefe—and through the softened eyes drifted swiftly a shadow of sorrow, and on its fleeting wings deepest interest, and hovering over that a naive approval as reassuringly human as had been her smile. She spoke, and her voice, deep-timbred, soft gold as was Yolara's all silver, was subtly the synthesis of all the golden glowing beauty of her.

"The Silent Ones have sent me, O Yolara," she said. "And this is their command to you—that ye deliver to me to bring before them three of the four strangers who have found their way here. This man they summon"—she pointed to O'Keefe—"and this"—her hand almost touched me—"and that yellow-haired one who seeks his mate and babe"—and how knew she of Olaf's quest, I wondered. "But for him there who plots with Lugur"—she pointed at Von Hetzdorp, and I saw Yolara start—"they have no need. Into his heart the Silent Ones have looked; and Lugur and you may keep him, Yolara!"

There was honeyed venom in the last words; and let me write here that truly angelic as Lakla might look and on occasion be, great as was her heart and high her spirit, she was very human indeed; feminine through and through, and therefore not disdainful, when they served her, either of woman's guile or woman's needle tongue.

Yolara was herself again; now only the edge of shrillness on her voice revealed her wrath as she answered the Handmaiden.

"And whence have the Silent Ones gained power to command, *choya?*"

This last, I knew, was a very vulgar word; I had heard Rador use it in a moment of anger to one of the serving maids,

and it meant, approximately, "kitchen girl," "scullion." Beneath the insult and the acid disdain, the blood rushed up under Lakla's ambered ivory skin. Her hand clenched, and I thought I saw writhe the vine that braceleted her arm.

"Yolara"—her voice was calm—"of no use is it to question me. I am but the messenger of the Silent Ones. And one thing only am I bidden to ask you—do you deliver to me the three strangers?"

Lugur was on his feet; eagerness, sardonic delight, sinister anticipation thrilling from him—and my same glance showed Von Hetzdorp, crouched, biting his fingernails, glaring at the Golden Girl.

"No!" Yolara fairly spat the word. "No! Now by Thanaroa and by the Shining One, no!" Her eyes blazed, her nostrils were wide, in her fair throat a little pulse beat angrily. "You, Lakla—take you *my* message to the Silent Ones. Say to them that I keep this man"—she pointed to Larry—"because he is mine. Say to them that I keep the yellow-haired one and him"—she pointed to me—"because it pleases me.

"Tell them that upon their mouths I place my foot, so!"—she stamped upon the dais viciously—"and that in their faces I spit!"—and her action was hideously snakelike. "And say last to them, you handmaiden, that if *you* they dare send to Yolara again, she will feed *you* to the Shining One! Now—go!"

The handmaiden's face was white.

"Not unforeseen by the three was this, Yolara," she replied. "And did you speak as you have spoken, then was I bidden to say this to you." Her voice deepened. "Three *tal* have ye to take counsel, Yolara. And at the end of that time three things must ye have determined—either to do or not to do: first, send the strangers to the Silent Ones; second, give up, ye and Lugur and all of ye, that dream ye have of conquest of the world without; and, third, foreswear the Shining One! And if ye do not one and all these things, then are ye done, your cup of life broken, your wine of life spilled. Yea, Yolara, for ye and the Shining One, Lugur and the Nine and all those here and their kind shall pass! This say the Silent Ones, 'Surely shall all of ye pass and be as though never had ye been!'"

Now a gasp of rage and fear arose from all those around me—but the priestess threw back her head and laughed loud and long. Into the silver sweet chiming of her laughter clashed that of Lugur—and after a little the nobles took it up, till the whole chamber echoed with their mirth. O'Keefe, lips tightening, moved toward the handmaiden, and almost imperceptibly, but peremptorily, she waved him back.

"Those *are* great words—great words indeed, *choya*," shrilled Yolara at last; and again Lakla winced beneath the word. "Lo, for *laya* upon *laya*, the Shining One has been freed from the three; and for *laya* upon *laya* they have sat helpless, rotting. Now I ask you again—whence comes their power to lay their will upon me, and whence comes their strength to wrestle with the Shining One and the beloved of the Shining One?"

And again she laughed—and again Lugur and all the fair-haired joined in her laughter.

Into the eyes of Lakla I saw creep a doubt, a wavering; as though deep within her the foundations of her own belief were none too firm.

She hesitated, turning upon O'Keefe eyes in which rested more than suggestion of appeal! And Yolara saw, too, for she flashed with triumph, stretched a finger toward the handmaiden.

"Look!" she cried. "Look! Why, even *she* does not believe!" Her voice grew silk of silver—merciless, cruel. "Now am I minded to send another answer to the Silent Ones. Yea! But not by *you*, Lakla; by these"—she pointed to the frog-men, and, swift as light, her hand darted into her bosom, bringing forth the little shining cone of death.

But before she could level it, dart the *Keth* upon her, the Golden Girl had released that hidden left arm and thrown over her face a fold of the metallic swathings. Swifter than Yolara, she raised the arm that held the vine—and now I knew this was no inert blossoming thing. It was alive! It writhed down her arm, and with its five rubescent flower heads thrust itself

out toward the priestess—vibrating, quivering, held in leash only by the light touch of the handmaiden at its very end.

From the swelling throat pouch of the monster behind her came a succession of the reverberant boomings I had heard when the little tendrils of moon flame began to shrink back to the crystal globes. The frog-men wheeled, raised their lances, leveled them at the throng. Around the reaching ruby flowers a red mist swiftly grew.

The silver cone dropped from Yolara's rigid fingers; her eyes grew stark with horror; all her unearthly loveliness fled from her; she stood pale-lipped, face shrunken, shorn of beauty by that one gesture of Lakla's as Samson was of his strength by the first clip of Delilah's shears. The handmaiden dropped the protecting veil—and now it was she who laughed.

"It would seem, then, Yolara, that there *is* a thing of the Silent Ones ye fear!" she said. "Well—the kiss of the *Yekta* I promise you in return for the embrace of your Shining One."

She looked at Larry, long, searchingly, and suddenly again with all that effect of sunlight bursting into dark places, her smile shone upon him. She nodded, half gaily; looked down upon me again, the little merry light dancing in her eyes; waved her hand to me.

She spoke to the giant frog-man. He wheeled behind her as she turned, facing the priestess, club upraised, fangs glistening. His troop moved not a jot, spears held high. And Lakla began to pass, slowly—almost, I thought, tauntingly—and as she reached the portal Larry leaped from the dais.

"*Alanna!*" he cried. "You'll not be leavin' me just when I've found you!"

In his excitement he spoke in his own tongue, the velvet brogue appealing. Lakla turned—and well it was that she did, for her Gargantuan follower boomed a war-note and swept the great mace over his horned head, whirling it downward as the Irishman rushed forward.

There was a sharp cry from the handmaiden, and he halted the club not a foot from O'Keefe's black hair.

The Irishman looked him up and down, stretched out his hand, and patted the scaled arm approvingly, as one would a dog.

"Good boy," he said; "good boy! But I wouldn't harm a hair of her sweet head for all the jewels in all the crowns the kings of Ireland ever wore. Let me by!"

The monster's enormous eyes, direct on Larry, were unblinking, but from the huge throat came a puzzled croak. He turned toward the Golden Girl—as though expecting some order.

The handmaiden contemplated O'Keefe, hesitant, unquestionably longingly, irresistibly, like a child making up her mind whether she dared or dared not take a delectable something offered her.

"I go with you," said O'Keefe, this time in her own speech. A glimmer of a smile passed through her eyes. "Come on, Doc!" He reached out a hand to me.

But now Yolara spoke. Life and beauty had flowed back into her face, and in her purple eyes all her hosts of devils were gathered.

"Do you forget what I promised you before Siya and Siyana? Or what I promised you should you turn from me! And do you think that you can leave me—*me*—as though I were a *choya*—like *her*." She pointed to Lakla. "Do you—"

"Now, listen, Yolara," Larry interrupted almost plaintively. "No promise has passed from me to you—and why would you hold me?" He passed unconsciously into English. "Be a good sport, Yolara," he urged. "You *have* got a very devil of a temper, you know, and so have I; and we'd be really awfully uncomfortable together. And why don't you get rid of that devilish pet of yours, and be good!"

She looked at him, puzzled. Von Hetzdorp leaned over, translated to Lugur. The red dwarf smiled maliciously, drew near the priestess; whispered to her what was without doubt as near as he could come in the Murian to Larry's own very colloquial phrases.

Yolara stiffened, her lips writhed.

"Hear me, Lakla!" she cried, her voice vibrant with determination unshakable. "Now would I not let you take this man from me were I to dwell ten thousand *laya*

in the agony of the *Yekta's* kiss. This I swear to you—by Thanaroa, by my heart, and by my strength—that should you try to take him, or should he try to go with you, then shall I slay both him and you with the *Keth*, though the *Yekta* you carry blast me; and may my strength wither, my heart rot in my breast, and Thanaroa forget me if I do not this thing!"

"Listen, Yolara—" began O'Keefe again.

"Be silent, you!" It was almost a shriek. And her hand again sought in her breast for the cone of rhythmic death.

Lugur touched her arm, whispered again. The glint of guile shone in her eyes; she laughed softly, relaxed.

"The Silent Ones, Lakla, bade you say that they—allowed—me three *tal* to decide," she said suavely. "Go now in peace, Lakla, and say that Yolara has heard, and that for the three *tal* they—allow—her she will take council."

The handmaiden hesitated, a vague apprehension, a hint of doubt in her face.

"The Silent Ones have said it," she answered at last. "Stay you here, strangers"—the long lashes drooped as her eyes met O'Keefe's and a hint of blush was in her cheeks—"stay you here, strangers, till then. But, Yolara, see you on that heart and strength you have sworn by that they come to no harm—else that which you have invoked will come upon you swiftly indeed—and that *I* promise you," she added.

Their eyes met, clashed, burned into each other—black flame from Abaddon and golden flame from Paradise.

"Remember!" said Lakla, and passed through the portal. The gigantic frog-man boomed a thunderous note of command, his grotesque guards turned and, slowly, eyes menacing, followed their mistress; and last of all passed out the monster with the mace.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LARRY'S DEFIANCE.

A CLAMOR arose from all the chamber; stilled in an instant by a motion of Yolara's hand. She stood silent, regarding O'Keefe with something other now than the blind wrath of her threat to him; something half regretful, half beseeching. But the Irishman's control was gone.

"Yolara"—his voice shook with rage, and he threw caution to the wind—"now hear *me*. I go where I will and when I will. Here shall we stay until the time *she* named is come. And then we follow her, whether you will or not. And if any should have thought to stop us—tell them of that flame that shattered the vase," he added grimly.

The wistfulness died out of her eyes, leaving them cold.

"Is it so?" she answered. "Now it is in my mind that much may happen ere then. Perchance you and those others may dance with the Shining One, or perchance one of those hidden men that I showed you may visit you, or it may be that I myself will slay ye—and not so swiftly, *Larree*."

"And is that so," he said, slipping back into English, "and is that so? A promise means as much to you as it does to Potsdam Bill—some little scrap-of-paper scrapper, aren't you?" And now, the breath of danger having blown upon him, back came his old, alert careless, whimsical self. "Before that sweet little pet of yours"—he spoke now in her own tongue—"that you name the Shining One, dances with *us*, Yolara, many shall wither under that swift flame I showed you; and as for *you*—think whether *you* may not feel it, too, before you have a chance to slay; and as for those hidden ones of yours, Yolara, know you that I have *anui*"—he used the Murian for spirit, the Polynesian *ani*—"who will warn me long, long before they can don those robes that hide them."

A sparkle came into his eyes. "Lo, Yolara, even before you can command them, shall you hear the voice of my spirit—and it is this—" He threw back his head, and from his throat pulsed the wo-laden, sobbing cry, raising steadily into the heart-shaking, shuddering wail that I had heard on the deck of the Suwarna; louder and ever louder it wailed, died away into the soul-broken sobbing, and faltered out into silence!

Upon those listening, sensitive as they were to sound, the effect of the high-pitched

keening was appalling; it was gruesome enough to me. There was startled movement, a panic rush from the tables to the portal; even Lugur's face was gray; the priestess's eyes stark wide; in Von Hetzdorp's I saw ungrudging admiration.

"And when you hear that, Yolara," thus O'Keefe, "know that my spirit is near, and think well before you send your hidden ones, or come yourself."

No answer made the priestess to him.

She turned to the white-faced nobles.

"What Lakla has said, the council must consider, and at once," said she. "Now, friends of mine, and friends of Lugur, must all feud, all rancor, between us end." She glanced swiftly at Lugur. "The *Iadala* are stirring, and the Silent Ones threaten. Yet fear not—for are we not strong under the Shining One? And now—leave us."

She waited until the last of the fair-haired had withdrawn. Her hand dropped to the table, and she gave, evidently, a signal, for in marched a dozen or more of the green dwarfs.

"Take these two to their place," she commanded, pointing to us. "But wait—" She turned to the whispering globe, touched its control; its light broke, swam with the film of rushing colors.

"Rador," she spoke upon it, "the two strangers come to you. Guard them and the third named Olaf as you would your life. And—listen well, Rador—if you do not, and if they should escape you, then before you die shall you beg me for what shall seem to you *laya* upon *laya* to throw you to the Shining One!"

The green dwarfs clustered about us. Without another look at the priestess O'Keefe marched beside me, between them, from the chamber. But glancing round, I saw pain writhe beneath the frozen anger on her face—and in silence she and Lugur and the council and Von Hetzdorp watched us as we passed through the portals. And it was not until we had reached the pillared entrance that Larry spoke.

"I hated to talk like that to a woman, Doc," he said, "and a pretty woman, at that. But first she played me with a marked deck, and then not only pinched all the chips, but drew a gun on me. What the hell!—she nearly had me—*married*—to her. I don't know what the stuff was she gave me; but, take it from me, if I had the recipe for that brew I could sell it for a thousand dollars a jolt at Forty-Second and Broadway.

"One jigger of it, and you forget there is a trouble in the world; three of them, and you forget there *is* a world. You'll admit, Doc, that it wasn't the kind of thing for a lady to pull on an unsuspecting guest, won't you? Hardly cricket—what? No excuse for it, Doc; and I don't care what *you* say or what Lakla may say—it wasn't my fault, and I don't hold it up against myself for a damn."

"I must admit that I'm a bit uneasy about her threats," I said, ignoring all this. He stopped abruptly.

"What 're you afraid of?"

"Mostly," I answered dryly, "I have no desire to dance with the Shining One!"

"Listen to me, Goodwin." He took up his walk impatiently. "Cut the bated-breath approach you use whenever you talk about that bunch of animated fireworks. I've seen stuff at the front that had it beaten a mile—and that took more people when it moved off, too. Can the slow and dirgeful music, won't you? Now I'm going to tell *you* something—you won't be hurt, will you?"

"No," I said.

"I've all the love and admiration for you in the world; but this place has got your nerve. Hereafter one Larry O'Keefe, of Ireland and the little old U. S. A., leads this party. Nix on the tremolo stop, nix on the superstitions! I'm the works. Get me?"

"Yes, I get you!" I exclaimed testily enough. "But to use your own phrase, kindly *can* the repeated references to superstitions."

"Why should I?" He was almost wrathful. "I'm going to be frank with you, Goodwin. You scientific people are such slaves to fact that when you meet a new one that isn't in your own neat little catalogue you either pass it by with the haughty air or hold up your hands in wonder and scream.

"You build up whole philosophies on the basis of things you never saw, and you

scoff at people who believe in other things that you think *they* never saw and that don't come under what you label scientific. You talk about paradoxes—why, your scientist, who thinks he is the most skeptical, the most materialistic aggregation of atoms ever gathered at the exact mathematical center of Missouri, has more blind faith than a dervish, and more credulity, more superstition, than a cross-eyed smoke beating it past a country graveyard in the dark of the moon!"

"Larry!" I cried, a little dazed and more than a little indignant.

"Olaf's no better," he said. "But I can make allowances for him. He's a sailor. No, sir. What this expedition needs is a man without superstition. And remember this. The leprechawn promised that I'd have full warning before anything happened. And if we do have to go out, we'll see that banshee bunch clean up before we do, and pass in a blaze of glory. And don't forget it. And hereafter—I'm—in—charge!"

By this time we were before our pavilion; and neither of us in a very amiable mood, I'm afraid. Rador was awaiting us, and, to my surprise, cold indeed was his greeting. He took us from our guard, placed a whistle to his lips, and down the paths came a score of his own men.

"Let none pass in here without authority—and let none pass out unless I accompany them," he ordered bruskly. "Summon one of the swiftest of the *coria* and have it wait in readiness," he added, as though by afterthought.

But when we had entered and the screens were drawn together his manner changed; all eagerness, he questioned us. Briefly we told him of the happenings at the feast, of Lakla's dramatic interruption, and of what had followed.

"Three *tal*," he said musingly; "three *tal* the Silent Ones have allowed — and Yolara agreed." He sank back, silent and thoughtful.*

"*Ja!*" It was Olaf. "*Ja!* I told you the Shining Devil's mistress was all evil. *Ja!* Now I begin again that tale I started when he came"—he glanced toward the preoccupied Rador. "And tell him not what I say should he ask. For I trust none here in Trolldom, save the *Jomfrau*—the White Virgin!"

"After the oldster was *adsprede*"—Olaf once more used that expressive Norwegian word for the dissolving of Songar—"I knew that it was a time for cunning, craft. I said to myself, 'If they think I have no ears to hear, they will speak; and it may be I will find a way to save my Helma and Dr. Goodwin's friends, too.' *Ja*, and they did speak. When I left that place with the red devil and the German, they made many signs.

"The red *Trolde* asked the German how came it he was a worshiper of Thanaroa." I could not resist a swift glance of triumph toward O'Keefe. "And the German," rumbled Olaf, "said that all his people worshiped Thanaroa and now fought against the other nations that denied him. He said that his ruler was high priest of Thanaroa, and because the other nations had defied him his people had taken up arms to make them bow their necks to him. *Ja!* And Lugur believed—for Lugur he worships Thanaroa more, much more than the Shining devil. *Ja!*

"And then we had come to Lugur's palace. They put me in rooms, and there came to me men who rubbed and oiled me and loosened my muscles. The next day I wrestled with a great dwarf they called Valdor. He was a mighty man, and long we struggled, and at last I broke his back. And Lugur was pleased, so that I sat with him at feast and with the German, too. And again, not knowing that I understood them, they talked.

"The German had gone fast and far. No longer was there talk of his ruler, his Kaiser, but of Lugur as emperor of the Germans, and Von Hetzdorp under him. They spoke of the green light that shook life from the oldster; and Lugur said that the secret of it had been the Ancient Ones' and that the council had not too much of it. But Von Hetzdorp said that among his race

* A *tal* in Muria is the equivalent of thirty hours of earth surface time.—W. T. G.

were many wise men who could make more once they had studied it.

"Then he spoke of the robes that protected from the Shining Devil. Lugur told him of the priests who make them and of the earth they dig that coats them. Then said the German that his wise men would make many for themselves, in case the Shining Devil should ever grow too strong, and that Lugur and he and his nation would give the Shining Devil all the rest of the world to eat, so that Lugur and he and all the Germans should always be mighty as he was when the Shining Devil ate up those who cast themselves into it.

"And the next day I wrestled with a great dwarf named Tahola, mightier far than Valdor. Him I threw after a long, long time, and his back also I broke. Again Lugur was pleased, saying that now was I worthy to be slain by him. And again we sat at table, he and the German and I. This time they spoke of something these Trolde have which opens up a *Svaelc*—abysses into which all in its range drops up into the sky!"

"What!" I exclaimed.

"I know about them," said Larry. "Wait!"

"Lugur had drunk much," went on Olaf. "He was boastful. The German pressed him to show this thing. After a while the red one went out and came back with a little golden box. He and the German went into the garden. I followed them. There was a *lille Hoj*—a mound—of stones in that garden on which grew flowers and trees.

"Lugur pressed upon the box, and a spark no bigger than a sand grain leaped out and fell beside the stones. Lugur pressed again, and a blue light shot from the box and lighted on the spark. The spark that had been no bigger than a grain of sand grew and grew as the blue struck it. And then there was a sighing, a wind rush —and the stones and the flowers and the trees were not. They were *forsvinde*—vanished!

"Then Lugur, who had been laughing, grew quickly sober; for he thrust the German back—far back. And soon down into the garden came tumbling the stones and the trees, but broken and shattered, and falling as though from a great height. And Lugur said that of *this* something they had much, for its making was a secret handed down by their own forefathers and not by the Ancient Ones.

"They feared to use it, he said, for a spark thrice as large as that he had used would have sent all that garden falling upward and might have opened a way to the outside before—he said just this—'*before we are ready to go out into it!*'

"The German questioned much, but Lugur sent for more drink and grew merrier and threatened him, and the German was silent through fear. Thereafter I listened when I could, and little more I learned, but that little enough. *Ja!* Lugur is hot for conquest; so Yolara and so the council. They tire of it here, and the Silent Ones make their minds not too easy, no, even though they jeer at them! And this they plan—to rule our world with their Shining Devil that Lugur says has grown strong enough to fare forth.

"Already have they tunneled upward at that place they call the Lower Waters, and that I think is under Ponape itself. There was to be their gathering-place to sweep out upon the earth. But now Von Hetzdorp has told Lugur of the passage through which we came, and Lugur and he now plan to open that.

"The *ladala* they will almost utterly destroy before they go, except the soldiers and the dream makers. They talk of 'sealing' the Silent Ones within their Crimson Sea, but—and this is point of trouble—they fear that if they do it they may pull down all this place they call Muria. Those who speak against it say—'The Silent Ones can have no power on earth, never have they had it. And it may be that we shall not do well under the sun; perhaps we may wish to return—and let the haven be open in case of our need.'

"Lugur would burn all bridges behind him; destroying all. But not so Yolara. And Von Hetzdorp would not, because he would keep what is here for Germany and in his heart, too, he laughs at the Silent Ones and he schemes to—*smadre*—smash all these people. Yet has he played upon

Lugur by promising him that his own people will cast aside their rulers and will muster to Lugur and that Lugur as Kaiser and the Shining Devil as Earth God shall rule all the world for Thanarca — and under his whisperings Lugur begins to forget even Thanarca!"

The Norseman was silent for a moment; then, voice deep, trembling—

"Troildom is awake; Helvede crouches at Earth Gate whining to be loosed into a world already devil ridden! And we are but three!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE COUNCIL'S DECISION.

I FELT the blood drive out of my heart. But Larry's was the fighting face of the O'Keefes of a thousand years. Rador glanced at him, arose, stepped through the curtains; returned swiftly with the Irishman's uniform.

"Put it on," he said, bruskly; again fell back into his silence and whatever O'Keefe had been about to say was submerged in his wild and joyful whoop. He ripped from him glittering tunic and leg swathings.

"Richard is himself again!" he shouted; and each garment, as he donned it, fanned his old devil-may-care confidence to a higher flame. The last scrap of it on, he drew himself up before us.

"Bow down, ye divils!" he cried. "Bang your heads on the floor and do homage to Larry the First, Emperor of Great Britain, Autocrat of all Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales, and adjacent waters and islands! Kneel, ye scuts, kneel."

"Larry," I cried, "are you going crazy!"

"Not a bit of it," he said. "I'm that and more if Herr von Hetzdorp keeps his promise. Whoop! Bring forth the royal jewels an' put a whole new bunch of golden strings in Tara's harp an' down with the Sassenach forever! Whoop!"

He did a wild jig.

"Lord how good the old togs feel," he grinned. "The touch of 'em has gone to my head. But it's straight stuff I'm telling you about my empire."

He laughed again; then sobered.

"Not that it's not serious enough at that. A lot that Olaf's told us I've surmised from hints dropped by Yolara. But I got the full key to it from the von himself when he stopped me just before—before"—he reddened—"well, before I acquired that brand-new brand of souse. Do you remember, Goodwin, away back in the Moon Pool Chamber that the German made a very curious remark about being certain that I always spoke what was in my mind—and that he'd remember it.

"Funny, funny psychology — the German. He made a picture of me in his mind—a little innocent, frank, truthful, and impulsive Larry O'Keefe; always saying right out just what I thought and with no more subterfuge or guile about me than there is hair under John D.'s wig! That's the picture he carried in his neat German mind—and by the shade of Genseric the Vandal let me be any different if I dared!

"Maybe he had a hint—maybe he just surmised—that I knew a lot more than I did. And he thought Yolara and I were going to be loving little turtle doves. Also he figured that Yolara had a lot more influence with the Unholy Fireworks than Lugur. Also she could be more easily handled. All this being so, what was the logical thing for the Hun to do? Sure, you get me, Steve! Throw down Lugur and make an alliance with me! So *he* calmly offered to ditch the red dwarf if *I* would deliver Yolara. My reward from the All Highest was to be said emperorship! Can you beat it? Good Lord!"

He went off into a perfect storm of laughter. But not to me in the light of what Germany has done and has proved herself capable, did this thing seem at all absurd; rather in it I sensed the dawn of catastrophe colossal.

"But how would they get to Germany—how carry the Shining One—"

"Oh that's all worked out," answered Larry, airily. "There's a Hun war-ship hiding down there in the Carolines somewhere. It got away from Kiaochow before the Japs took it. The von knows where it is. Also he has a nice little wireless rigged up on one of the Nan-Matal islets.

With that boat equipped with the *Keth*—and Fritz confided to me that they had apparatus that could sweep it over a fifty-mile range—and a few of those gravity-destroying bombs Olaf described—

"Gravity-destroying bombs!" I gasped.

"Sure! The little fairy that sent the trees and stones kiting up—Von Hetzdorp licked his lips over *them.* What they do is to cut off gravity, just about as the shadow screens cut off light — and consequently whatever's in their range just naturally goes shooting up toward the moon." He sobered. "I admit I'm a bit scared about them, Doc! Anyway with those two things and—oh, yes, gentle, invisible soldiers walking around assassinating all the leaders of the rest of the world—well, *bingo* for all the rest of our world, Goodwin!

"And take it from me old chap, it's not a dream. We've got to beat Von Hetzdorp and all the rest of 'em to it, Goodwin," he ended, solemnly enough.

"But the Shining One?" I began.

"Yolara's to nurse the sweet little thing," he said. "It 'll follow her like a lamb, Von Hetzdorp says — and there's something about that I don't understand at all—"

"Something? I don't understand a bit of it," I interrupted, almost testily.

"No," he grinned. "I don't mean what It is—I mean how it's controlled—oh, well, I'll bet Lakla knows all about it. And I'll bet we'll damned soon be hearing her tell us," he ended grimly.

"But Larry," I exclaimed, stupidly enough I confess. "You shook hands with Von Hetzdorp on it."

"Oh, the ingenuous, the unsuspecting childlike mind of science," he intoned, piously. "Old dear — aren't you spoofing me? Why, Doc, just as I'd make love to Hecate at the gates of Hades if it would find me the way to the Golden Girl, I'd kiss—yes, actually kiss—Von Hetzdorp if it would give me one more minute to block a game like this. It's bad medicine for our old world Doc, whichever way you look at it. And as Olaf says—there's only three of us!

"Not that I mind Fireworks," he concluded. "If I had Fireworks outside I could finish — It — with one splash of a down-town New York high-pressure fire hose. But the other stuff—*are the goods!*"

For once his courage, his unquenchable confidence, found no echo within me. Not lightly, as he, did I hold that dread mystery the Dweller—and a vision passed before me, a vision of an Apocalypse undreamed by the Evangelist.

A vision of the Shining One swirling into our world, a monstrous, glorious flaming pillar of incarnate, eternal Evil—of peoples passing through its radiant embrace into that hideous, unearthly life-in-death which I had seen enfold the sacrifices—of armies trembling into dancing atoms of diamond dust beneath the green ray's rhythmic death—of cities rushing out into space upon the wings of that other demoniac force which Olaf had watched at work—of a haunted world through which the assassins of the Dweller's court stole invisible, carrying with them every passion of hell—of the rallying to the Thing of every sinister soul and of the weak and the unbalanced, mystics and carnivores of humanity alike; for well I knew that, once loosed, not even Germany could hold this devil-god for long and that swiftly its blight would spread!

And then a world that was all colossal reek of cruelty and terror; a welter of lusts, of hatreds and of torment; a chaos of horror in which the Dweller waxing ever stronger, the ghastly hordes of those it had consumed growing ever greater, wreaked its inhuman will!

At the last a ruined planet, a cosmic plague, spinning through the shuddering heavens; its verdant plains, its murmuring forests, its meadows and its mountains manned only by a countless crew of soulless, mindless dead-alive, their shells illumined with the Dweller's infernal glory—and flaming over this vampirized world like a flare from some hell far, infinitely far, beyond the reach of man's farthest flung imagining—the Dweller!

Panic gripped my throat; strangled me. My science could not help—what god or gods could? Olaf had turned to ancient Thor and Odin—O'Keefe's faith was in—banshees! A glimmer of laughter came to me; lifted me out of my fear.

Rador jumped to his feet; smiled amiably

at us; walked to the whispering globe. He bent over its base; did something with its mechanism; beckoned to us. The globe swam rapidly, faster than ever I had seen it before. A low humming arose, changed into a murmur and then from it I heard Lugur's voice clearly.

"It is to be war then?"

There was a chorus of assent—from a council I thought.

"I will take the tall one named—*Larree.*" It was the priestess's voice. "After the three *tal,* you may have him, Lugur, to do with as you will."

"No!" it was Lugur's voice again, but with a rasp of anger. "All three must die."

"He shall die," again Yolara. "But I would that first he see Lakla die—and that she know what is to happen to him."

"No!" I started—for this was Von Hetzdorp. "Now is no time, Yolara, for one's own desires. This is my council. At the end of the three *tal* Lakla will come for our answer. Your men will be in ambush and they will slay her and her escort quickly with the *Keth.* But not till that is done must the three be slain—and then quickly. With Lakla dead we shall go forth to the Silent Ones—and I promise you that I will find the way to destroy them!"

"It is well!" It was Lugur.

"It *is* well, Yolara." It was a woman's voice, and I knew it for that old one of ravaged beauty. "Cast from your mind whatever is in it for this stranger—either of love or hatred. In this the council is with Lugur and the man of wisdom."

There was a silence. Then came the priestess's voice, sullen but—beaten.

"It is well!"

"Let the three be taken now by Rador to the temple and given to the High Priest Sator"—thus Lugur—"until what we have planned comes to pass."

Rador gripped the base of the globe; abruptly it ceased its spinning. He turned to us as though to speak and even as he did so its bell note sounded peremptorily and on it the color films began to creep at their accustomed pace.

"I hear," the green dwarf whispered. But now we could no longer distinguish the words. He listened.

"They shall be taken there at once," he said, at last, gravely. The globe grew silent.

He stepped toward us. Larry had drawn his automatic; Olaf and I followed their example. We faced the green dwarf defiantly.

"You have heard," he said, smiling faintly.

"Not on your life, Rador," said Larry. "Nothing doing!" And then in the Murian's own tongue. "We follow Lakla, Rador. And *you* lead the way." He thrust the pistol close to the green dwarf's side.

Rador did not move. But his eyes gleamed their approval as they looked up into the Irishman's determined ones.

"Of what use, *Larree?*" he said, quietly. "Me you can slay—but in the end you will be taken. Life is not held so dear in Muria that my men out there or those others who can come quickly will let you by—even though you slay many. And in the end they will overpower you."

There was a trace of irresolution in O'Keefe's face.

"And," said Rador, "if I let you go I dance with the Shining One—or worse!"

O'Keefe's pistol hand dropped.

"You're a good sport Rador, and far be it from me to get you in bad," he said. "Take us to the temple—when we get there—well, your responsibility ends, doesn't it?"

The green dwarf nodded; on his face a curious expression—was it relief? Or was it profound emotion higher than this?

Whatever it was he turned curtly.

"Follow," he said. We passed out of that gay little pavilion that had come to be home to us even in this alien place. The guards stood at attention.

"You, Sattoya, stand by the globe," he ordered one of them. "Should the *Afyo Maie* ask, say that I am on my way with the strangers even as she has commanded."

We passed through the lines to the *corial* standing like a great shell at the end of the runway leading into the green road.

"Wait you here," he said curtly to the driver. The green dwarf ascended to his seat, sought the lever and we swept on—on and out upon the glistening obsidian.

Then Rador turned and laughed.

"*Larree,*" he cried, "I love you for that spirit of yours! And did you think that Rador would carry to the temple prison a man who would take the chances of death upon his own shoulders to save him? Or you, Goodwin, who saved him from the rotting death? For what did I take the *corial* or lift the veil of silence that I might hear what threatened you—"

Laughing again into our amazed faces he swept the *corial* to the left, *away* from the temple approach.

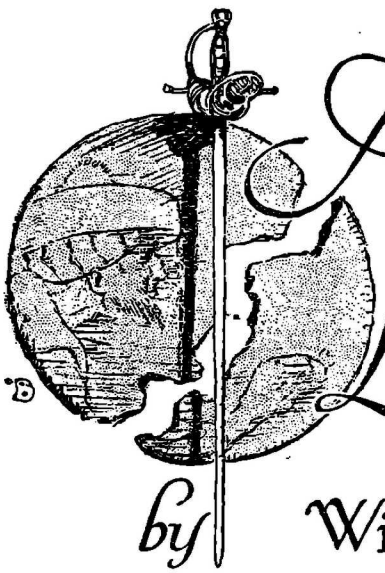
"I am done with Lugur and with Yolara and the Shining One!" cried Rador. "My hand is for you three and for Lakla and those to whom she is handmaiden!"

The shell leaped forward; seemed to fly.

"Whence go we, Rador?" I gasped in his ear.

"Straight to that bridge that guards the way to the Crimson Sea," he shouted, "and pray whatever gods you worship that we pass it before ever Yolara finds whence our way has led!"

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.



A Broken Louis d'Or

by William Holloway

CAPTAIN HENRY JOHNSTON, of Boston, Massachusetts, aide-de-camp to the governor of Nova Scotia, and known from Newfoundland to the Carolinas as the finest sword in the British half of the New World, held a grievance against fate.

Other men had been lucky enough to meet Coulon de Villiers. Bounderby, Jefferson, Thesiger—he ran over their names as he descended the Nova Scotian hillside—had all encountered the young French officer, sword in hand. True it was they had not retained their swords long, but the brief clash had been enough to give them a momentary fame.

The annoying part of it was that after each bit of sword-play Coulon de Villiers had inquired politely after Captain Johnston, the famous fencer, and, with one of his boyish laughs, had openly expressed a wish that they might one day cross swords. This gave an added fillip to the tale as the defeated men told it, without in the least increasing Johnston's peace of mind.

He paused an instant on the hillside. Beneath him lay the Bay of Fundy, which separates the peninsula of Nova Scotia from the American continent, its wrinkled surface like a huge silver platter, outspread to the sky.

And far out of sight to the north, where the bay finally narrows to its end, was the Isthmus of Chignecto, joining Nova Scotia to the mainland—Chignecto where an invading French army from Quebec, with

Coulon de Villiers second in command, was at this moment menacing Nova Scotia.

His hand on his sword-hilt, Captain Johnston stared moodily in the direction of Chignecto. Other men had luck; they crossed swords with Coulon de Villiers, the best man in the Canadas, while he, who by all right was the one to meet him, wasted his time in the tumble-down fortress of Annapolis Royal.

The French invasion had been managed surprisingly well, Johnston admitted. At Chignecto the Frenchman menaced not only the entire Nova Scotian peninsula as far as Annapolis Royal, a few miles from where Johnston was standing, but also the main coastline toward Boston.

If he choose he might work his way down the peninsula by land to Annapolis Royal. If he preferred, he might follow the coast of the mainland southward to the St. John River, seize the trading vessels he was sure to find there, and thence sail across the Bay of Fundy to Annapolis Royal, or, if he judged the occasion suitable, raid Boston itself.

What such a stroke might accomplish in his native Boston, Johnston did not care to think. The whole system of Massachusetts' defense was so based upon an attack from Quebec by the Lake Champlain route that a sudden incursion from the sea might well prove disastrous.

He was thinking this as he descended to the shore, when his eye was caught by a little flash of color beyond a cluster of rocks. Five minutes later the flash of color revealed itself more distinctly as a blue cloak covering the top of a huge box not far from the water's edge.

Two minutes after, as he stumbled over the rocks, there was a sudden movement beneath the cloak, a dainty foot was set firmly upon the beach, a girl sat upright on the box and stared with sparkling eyes at his face.

"*Mon Dieu!* You startled me, *monsieur!*" she exclaimed in French, narrowing her eyes that she might survey him more attentively. "I was resting here—for the first time since the storm began."

Johnston looked about him at the lonely waste of beach against which this small figure made so brave a showing. Then his three-cornered hat swept the ground.

It was very fortunate he had met her, he explained in French. The shore was practically deserted. The storm of the day before had been heavy, but at the fort they had heard nothing of the shipwreck.

The girl, who was petite and vivacious, with a self-possession that made it seem the most natural thing in the world for a girl to be sitting upon a box beside a lonely shore, motioned toward two red-capped sailors, who were bailing out a small boat. The three were the only survivors, she explained.

Johnston was engaged on a special errand for the governor, which brooked no delay, so that he had no time to ask questions. The young lady was Miette de Rohan, shipwrecked on her way to Quebec. This much he learned as he stood hat in hand beside her.

Then, one of the Acadian peasants having appeared upon the scene, he gave directions that a wagon should be brought to carry the newcomer and her box to Annapolis Royal, after which he strode on his way.

Henry Johnston was no squire of dames. Yet more than once he turned about to gaze at her. She sat once more curled upon the huge brown box, the blue satin cloak wrapped about her, a tiny figure poised between the twin immensities of sky and sea.

She had pretty eyes, he reflected, and a coquettishly uptilted nose. He paused again at a turn in the shore line. A white hand, like a flag of truce, fluttered a farewell to him.

II.

It was odd about that *louis d'or,* Miette de Rohan reflected. She had handed it to Medina, the old Spanish astrologer—a perfect coin. She herself had remarked upon its brightness.

Next minute the frail old Spaniard had passed it back broken in two pieces. *Sapristi!* That was a droll thing, if you please!

And the same coin! Not a doubt of it! She had watched Medina closely.

She came to herself with a start. She was in the office of the gray-haired governor of Nova Scotia, as the barbarous English had renamed the land of Acadia, and the governor was speaking.

"It is very awkward, *mademoiselle,*" he said frowningly, laying aside his quill and rising to his feet; "your shipwreck, I mean."

Miette de Rohan, seated upon a high-backed, spindle-legged oaken chair, was fully as captivating as she had been a few hours earlier, when perched upon a box at the water's edge. Now she glanced at the grim colonial dignitaries, whose portraits frowned at her from behind the governor's bent figure, and smiled.

"Very awkward!" she conceded. "I lost three of my trunks in your horrible Bay of Fundy."

The governor strode to and fro unheeding, his high-heeled, silver-buckled shoes clattering noisily upon the polished wooden floor, his long ruffles swaying against his yellowed fingers.

"No ships sail from Annapolis Royal to Quebec," he said seriously. "Later on we might send you to Boston, perhaps. But not now."

"Boston!" cried the girl in dismay, her face growing pale. "Oh, not Boston, *monsieur!* It is further than ever from the Canadas!"

"Suppose you look out of the window and admire the capital of Nova Scotia," said the governor grimly, "while I think what is to be done with you."

To Miette de Rohan, fresh from the glittering Paris of Louis XV, there was something pitiably inadequate in the view that met her gaze. Port Royal, France's first colony in the New World, English now for thirty years, and called Annapolis Royal, lay before her—a fringe of houses, hemmed in landward by a wilderness of pines.

In place of imposing arrays of troops she saw—a solitary sentry in a tattered uniform; instead of towers frowning with heavy guns—a tottering, worm-eaten bastion across whose rusted cannon a gusty autumn wind drove vagrant leaves in intermittent yellow showers.

The girl gave a little sigh as she looked upon the scene, about which so many French legends clustered. As she pressed her forehead against the panes her fancy peopled the bastion with its alloted ghosts.

Champlain, the great explorer, was there, strolling arm in arm with the Huguenot nobleman, De Monts, both come again to the founding of Port Royal. Perched securely on one of the cannon, Marc Lescarbot, the poet, once more dreamily repeated his verses to the Baron de Poutrincourt, the stately seignior of Port Royal, while the seignior's son, Biencourt, his eyes agleam with youth and courage, beat time with his scabbard on the moldy gun-carriage, till it rang again.

A little aside from Biencourt, Imbert, the old pirate, fierce of countenance and mighty in sword-play, stood staring seaward together with Gilbert Du Thet, the Jesuit lay-brother, and many another cavalier whose bones had whitened on that smiling shore.

She was still standing by the window, watching the shadowy tenants of the bastion, when the governor, his mind evidently made up, came to her side again.

"I have made a minute of your case for my records," he said, presenting the document which he had left upon the table shortly before; "will you look it over?"

The girl took the paper with some curiosity.

"'Name of prisoner—Miette de Rohan,'" she read aloud.

"A mere form!" interrupted the governor hastily. "A mere form, *mademoiselle!* England and France are still at war, as you know."

"'Shipwrecked *en route* to Quebec,'" she went on; "'going to Quebec to be married to—'"

She paused a moment at the blank space reserved for the name.

"To M. Coulon de Villiers, captain in the service of His Most Christian Majesty, Louis XV," she added proudly; and, bending over the table, she inserted her lover's name with the governor's own quill.

The governor shrugged his bent shoulders.

"I have heard of M. de Villiers," he remarked dryly, staring out at the battered

defenses of his capital as if the very mention of the name reminded him of his need of cannon. "You have documents of identity, I suppose?" he added.

The girl, who still stood beside the table, opened a small, silver-mounted bag of soft Spanish leather, which she carried on her arm, and from it selected a parchment with heavy seals.

"Here is a letter from the king, commending me to the good sisters of Quebec, and asking safe-conduct and protection from all foreign nations," she said proudly. "Surely you will honor this?"

The governor glanced at the dangling red seals, and at the sprawling signature of the King of France above them, and slowly and, as it seemed, reluctantly, shook his head.

"Oh!" cried the girl in dismay. "But I must go to Quebec."

The governor explained patiently.

"This province of Nova Scotia, so lately won from France, *mademoiselle,* is a huge wharf jutting out into the Atlantic. Adjoining it on the landward side lie the Canadas, with their mighty fortresses of Quebec and Montreal.

"What more natural than that French armies from the Canadas should at times come to this wharf to drive the English into the sea? A French force is here now, *mademoiselle,* part way down the wharf itself, at a place called Chignecto.

"M. Coulon de Villiers happens to be second in command. Now you see why I cannot speed you on your journey?"

"I understand," said the girl, with quick comprehension. She lifted her bag and something tinkled upon the floor.

The governor bent with unexpected alacrity and picked up a broken coin, which he held out on his palm.

"Half a *louis d'or!*" he remarked with sudden interest. "A keepsake, *mademoiselle,* I wager."

She stood a moment with the broken *louis d'or* in her fingers, gazing from it to the governor and then back again. Peste! It was odd how that *louis d'or* came into her thoughts!

"Did you ever have your fortune told?" she asked.

"I was young once," replied the governor with a wintry smile.

"The night before M. de Villiers left Paris," said the girl, "we two were standing at the foot of the horseshoe staircase of Fontainebleau, when Perez de Medina, the old Spanish astrologer, passed by.

"A sudden impulse led me to stop him. I can still see his dark, wrinkled face, in the light of the flambeaux his servants carried, and the strange embroideries upon his yellow jerkin.

"'Only fools care to know their fortune,' he said harshly. 'But here are three sentences, young woman, worthy to be kept in mind.'

"He lifted his forefinger in air. 'You two will keep a tryst and meet again. Your lover will come through red and white to honor the token. You will marry the man who hands you the token.'

"He looked at me strangely a moment in the glare of the flambeaux. 'Give me a piece of gold,' he demanded more harshly still. 'Make haste, for I am old, and the rain is chill.'

"I gave him the only piece of gold I chanced to have—a *louis d'or.* He juggled it a moment in his hands, and then showed it broken in two. One piece he handed to each of us.

"'Wherever you are the halves of the coin bind you,' said he. And, with a nod of his grizzled head, he went his way into the palace where Mme. de Pompadour awaited him."

The governor had listened with eager attention, his head thrust forward, his sunken eyes shining. A sudden breath of romance had invaded his gloomy office, recalling things long forgotten.

"Perez de Medina!" he said slowly. "Aye, I have heard of him." He looked at her more kindly. "Perchance I, too, young lady, had my fortune told—years ago," he went on.

"At any rate, I have changed my mind about detaining you. I will permit you, *mademoiselle,* to join your lover on condition that you give your word to answer no questions regarding my fortress of Annapolis Royal. This is very important, indeed essential."

A smile flickered across her mobile face at thought of the sagging bastion.

"Word of honor," she promised solemnly.

"Very good!" remarked the governor, touching a silver bell upon his table. He was silent an instant.

"The way is long and rough, *mademoiselle,*" he went on; "indeed, in places, there is no road at all; nor can I give you other escort than the peasant who will guide you. But the countryside is peaceful enough."

A soldier entered, received instructions, and stood waiting. "To those of French blood," added the governor, with a grim nod.

III.

THREE days later Captain Henry Johnston, riding toward Grand Pré, once more encountered Miette de Rohan.

She stood leaning against a gray boulder, her chin cupped in a slender white hand. In front of her lay the wreckage of the wagon in which she had been traveling, and, not far away, the dead body of a horse, its gray coat dabbled with blood. At the noise of hoof-beats she looked up.

"Ah!" she said softly, half to herself; and she bowed gravely.

Johnston's practised eye took in the scene at a glance. The footprints in the brown mud of the roadway merely confirmed a story he already knew.

"There has been an accident here," he said quietly.

The girl lifted her eyebrows.

"Do they call attempted murder an accident in Nova Scotia, *monsieur?*" she asked icily.

Johnston pointed to a moccasin mark in the roadway.

"That is not your driver's; his heavy bootprints are here. It belongs to the man who fired the shot. He thought you were English. He missed you and killed the horse. So you see—an accident."

She nodded understandingly.

"When the horse fell I climbed out of the wagon. The assassin, a tall man the color of a red savage, came up and spoke to me in French. I gave him my name and told him that I was traveling to meet M. de Villiers."

"What did he say to that?" asked Johnston eagerly.

"He was startled and drew back," said the girl proudly. "Evidently he has heard M. de Villiers's name. Then he sent my guide ahead for a new wagon, said he was in haste, plunged into the forest and disappeared.

"That was early this morning. Since then I have been alone."

"I have been looking for that man for weeks," Johnston explained. "His tracks caught my eye the minute I saw them. The moccasin, you see, is different from those of our Indians here; it was made not far from Hudson's Bay."

He pointed toward the footprints.

"A white man's mark; see how the toes turn out. A French spy from the Canadas, without doubt. We have many of them."

The girl started with sudden apprehension. Her blue eyes sought his face.

"Are you not in danger, *monsieur?*" she questioned. "Ought you to be so careless?"

"There is no danger," he assured her. "I saw your dead horse from a hill back yonder, hid my mount in the bushes and circled about the spot. The fellow is miles to the north now. He was in such a hurry that he ran through the mud on tiptoe."

He paused an instant.

"I have something of yours, *mademoiselle.*" From his pocket he produced a small bag of Spanish leather. "You left it in the governor's office," he explained, "and the governor sends it by me."

She took the bag in her hands with the due amount of thanks and opened it unthinkingly. The broken *louis d'or* lay upon its accustomed background of blue satin!

For a moment she stood staring at the glittering fragment of gold, the color deepening on her cheeks. Then she slowly looked away at the autumn landscape, and thence back to the broken *louis d'or.*

Peste! It was strange! Medina had said, clearly and distinctly: "You will marry the man who brings you the token."

And here was this stranger from a sav-

age place in the Americas, called Boston, carrying out Medina's prophecy!

She glanced cautiously at Captain Henry Johnston's sunburnt face and was pleased to find that he had turned sidewise and was staring at the broken wagon.

As she stood with the *louis d'or* in her hand the whole story of her engagement to Coulon de Villiers flashed across her mind; his arrival at the court two years before, a young man of whose exploits fame was never weary of telling; the family council of the De Rohans and the De Villiers at which the betrothal had been arranged; her first formal meeting with the hero the week before he sailed again for Canada; other formal meetings in the presence of her aunt, the Duchesse de Rohan, and the one little episode of a romantic nature at Fontainebleau when they had eluded their duenna long enough to have Medina tell their fortunes; and then the chill that had struck to her heart two months before when a second family council had decided that, as affairs of state would detain M. de Villiers in Canada, it behooved his destined bride to journey to Quebec for the marriage.

She looked again at the *louis d'or*, and Medina's words imagined themselves upon her brain in letters of fire: "You will marry the man who brings you the token." This time the red upon her cheek rose to high tide.

"It was good of you to come so far," she observed quietly, no outward sign, except her crimson cheeks, betraying the storm within. "You are very kind."

"Not a bit of it!" he protested. "The governor sent me because"—he hesitated an instant—"because he wishes to warn you that you can go no further. The woods are unsafe."

He pointed to the dead horse. "I do not refer to accidents like this. But four settlers in the Cumberland Mountains, just across the Basin of Minas, were scalped a week ago."

She stamped her foot impatiently as the meaning of the ill tidings came to her.

"You mean I must stay here until the road is safe?" she asked; "stay here in this out of the way corner of the world alone? *Mon Dieu, monsieur!* Does the governor think he is amusing me with his news?"

Captain Johnston's face grew serious.

"The governor of Nova Scotia, *mademoiselle*, in times like these, is the most important man in all America, for it is upon him that French attacks center. Nova Scotia, if you will pardon free speech, *mademoiselle*, is a spearhead thrust into the side of France.

"That is why our good Governor Shirley, of Massachusetts, is ever solicitous for the defense of Nova Scotia—why, indeed, Massachusetts blood was shed last year to capture Louisburg.

"And if now, in the midst of many troubles, the governor sends me to you with a message, believe me, *mademoiselle*, it is a high compliment."

She nodded, smilingly, at the reproof, her blue eyes agleam.

"I remember now—the governor put me down in his records as a prisoner of war. That being so, perhaps you will lead the prisoner to her dungeon."

Johnston glanced at the wreckage.

"We will send for your box," he remarked. "If you can mount behind, *mademoiselle*," he added politely. "It is a matter of three leagues only."

And so it was that, two hours later, Miette de Rohan, maid of honor at the court of France, entered the romantic village of Grand Pré, pillion-fashion, behind the broad shoulders of a man from the barbarous English settlement of Massachusetts Bay—and found the two hours strangely short.

IV.

BENEDICT BELLEFONTAINE'S house, to which Johnston, at the suggestion of old Father Felician, the old village curé, took Miette de Rohan, stood at the far end of the village of Grand Pré—a rambling structure in Norman style, with portentous eaves and a broad slate-stone before the door.

From her room on the right the girl could look into the huge kitchen, where Benedict and his daughter, Evangeline, sat with their friends each evening on the long

settle, talking in low tones of the calamitous events which they were firmly convinced hung over Acadia.

She found her life not unpleasant, though a trifle lonesome after Johnston's speedy departure to Annapolis Royal. In the few hours they had been together she had come to feel an odd sense of freedom in his presence. He had been very kind to her, too, going out of his way to make arrangements for her comfort.

He was rather superstitious, this strange soldier from Boston. She knew this because she had told him the story of the *louis d'or*, and he had taken it very seriously and had even learned Medina's prophecy by heart.

But his views on marriage—*mon Dieu!* Even in the solitude of her own room she raised her hands to Heaven at the recollection!

The savage from Boston believed in love, and in the milkmaid fashion of choosing a husband common in France only among the peasants. When she had explained that a marriage was a matter to be arranged by one's family, with due regard for financial settlements and the increase of family prestige, and no regard at all to the sentiments of the contracting parties, he had asked pointblank if she loved Coulon de Villiers, and on her indignant protest that love came after marriage, had laughed immoderately, and turned his horse's head toward Annapolis Royal.

Yes, indeed! A very strange man!

Life in Grand Pré was not without its compensations. The dikeland, stretching for miles in curious curves, was a perpetual fascination, as were also the tides, fifty feet in height, which played strange tricks in the Basin of Minas, a scant league away.

Evangeline, the constant companion of her walks, a demure nut-brown maiden full of odd bits of woodland lore, was constantly urging her to explore the dikeland.

Weeks passed, and winter set in. The sinuous dikeland was now hidden beneath an even white shroud; the bay smoked in the frosty air; fishing vessels came in hung with ice. And, with this closing in of winter, Grand Pré unexpectedly became the scene of great events.

One day a strange rumor shook the village to its foundations; the English army was coming. Pierre Leblanc had seen it three miles away and had run back with the news. Every one was to be killed, said the breathless peasant, who told Miette the story. The English were already close to the village!

And, to prove his statement, he waved his hand westward, where a dark splash lay upon the white snow—a splash that presently resolved itself into a column of soldiers upon the highway half a mile distant. A faraway creaking of boots upon the frozen snow followed, as the column slowly advanced.

All in all it might number four or five hundred men—a vast army to the farmers of Grand Pré! And, coming from the westward, they were surely English!

Descending the hill, however, Miette began to notice incongruities. Save for one red coat, worn by a tall officer, who had divested himself of his fur-cloak, not a trace of English color appeared in their uniform; their march was the essence of a martial ease very unusual in the stately soldiers of England.

Then, in a flash, the truth dawned upon her; these were some of the warlike British colonists from the south, whose capture of Louisburg the year before still echoed through the New World! So it was with a feeling of novel interest that she went with Evangeline to view them nearer at hand.

The descent was circuitous, leading by a winding footpath to the rear of the smithy, and thence upon the road. As they drew near the forge a sudden babel of voices arose, mingled with loud outcries of relief; and Miette understood that the men had fallen out of rank.

Presently the scraping of a violin followed, the player accompanying himself in a shrill, boyish tenor; a few steps more and the two stood at the edge of the road.

It was a strange scene—one of the strangest, indeed, that Miette had ever looked upon. A flighty snowstorm had begun to beat in from the north, and, in its sudden sallies, the men lounging in the highway seemed to appear and disappear like fantoms.

By the shelter of the forge the officer in red, who, upon near approach, turned out to be no less a person than the governor's aide-de-camp, was writing down the householder's names as Basil, the blacksmith, repeated them; across the road, one, whose richer uniform marked the chief in command, was speaking slowly to an alarmed group of peasants, among whom she noted Benedict's puzzled face; a little to the right, beside an oak sapling, stood the violinist, a boyish officer of twenty, with round dimpled face.

He it was who first noticed the newcomers in the shelter of the smithy. With a quick wave of his bow he pointed them out, saying with inimitable impudence: "My prisoners, gentlemen!"

The next instant, a group of officers, Johnston at their head, surrounded them, bareheaded in the falling snow.

In the medley of introductions that presently followed, Miette caught only one name—that of Colonel Noble, chief in command—for a strange fancy that instant seized her. Far away, in the lulling of the storm she saw another band of soldiers, with darker faces and another flag, and at their head none other than De Villiers.

For a moment the vision was so vivid that it seemed she must cry out and betray them to these alien foes; then it faded, and she saw only the dark-clad American soldiers, leaning on their muskets in the driving snow, and heard Colonel Noble say with a laugh:

"It was an odd chance that brings us here, Mlle. de Rohan—the sudden resolution of our watchful Governor Shirley of Massachusetts—yet after all a most fortunate one."

For the remainder of the few minutes she lingered by the smithy she was pale and distraught, replying absently to the conversation of the officers about her; a strange menace on the instant seemed to float above the peaceful dikeland; then, the storm having grown worse, she began to move homeward.

But the newcomers, noticing her pale face, laughingly forbade walking; a litter was hastily improvised, and, ere Miette had time to wonder, Evangeline and she, cushioned on military cloaks, were being borne rapidly along by four stalwart soldiers.

It was, indeed, almost a procession, the violin player leading the way with a warlike march, and a detachment of soldiers, billeted in neighboring houses, following behind.

V.

NEXT morning Henry Johnston came to Benedict Bellefontaine's door to bid Miette de Rohan good-by. He was dressed in a hunting-suit of dark fur; he wore snowshoes, and, in addition to his sword, carried a musket under his arm and a hunting-pack across his shoulders.

The girl greeted him with a certain constraint. The two had talked late the night before—Miette de Rohan had an uneasy feeling that they had talked too late.

At any rate, she felt sure that she had shown entirely too much interest in this tall, straight soldier from Boston; consequently her "good morning" was rather cold.

Johnston did not appear to notice. "I have been thinking of Medina's prophecy," he said abruptly; "can't get the thing out of my head. Suppose—" He hesitated an instant. "Suppose some one else got the other half of the *louis d'or* and brought it to you — then you would have to marry this other chap, wouldn't you?"

She laughed aloud.

"Surely, *monsieur,* if the prophecy is true. But you forget one thing—"

"Yes?" he questioned.

"M. de Villiers has the other half of the *louis d'or* in his keeping, and he is not likely to give it up."

"Of course not," Johnston agreed. "I was wondering what you would do."

"I would have to marry the man with the token," she said smilingly. "That is, if Medina's prophecy is true."

He held out his hand in farewell.

"The governor does not allow me to stay," he explained.

She gave him her hand, which he held a trifle longer than necessary. Then, with a low bow, he turned away on the road to Annapolis Royal, leaving the girl looking after him with a curiously wondering gaze.

Perhaps her wonder would have been the deeper had she followed his traces a few miles down the road. For, once clear of Grand Pré Henry Johnston left the highway leading to Annapolis Royal and struck boldly into the heart of the forest.

There was a smile upon his face now as he went on his way. After weeks of galling inaction, a man's task had fallen to his lot. The governor was sending him to Chignecto to obtain first-hand news of the French forces there—to Chignecto, where Coulon de Villiers, the deadliest sword in the Canadas, lay in winter quarters.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the intense, overmastering longing to meet De Villiers which possessed Henry Johnston's soul.

For years he himself had been known as the finest sword south of the St. Lawrence River. He had long since grown accustomed to have men point him out upon the public street and whisper to each other tales of his marvelous tricks of fence.

And then, unexpectedly, there had come a little interruption in the chorus of praise.

Coulon de Villiers had arrived in Quebec from Paris, had killed a bully in a duel in the narrow streets of the old seaport, and from that slight beginning had proceeded to set the Canadas in a blaze.

The man was a marvel, a whirlwind, whose wrist was the iron continuation of his sword-hilt. Men who had fenced with him were emphatic on this point.

Henry Johnston's reputation, it is true, grew, none the less, as years passed—yet always there was De Villiers in the background. The thing had begun to loom so portentously in Johnston's thoughts that it was with difficulty that he had refrained from resigning his post as aide-de-camp in order to meet De Villiers.

That autumn day when he had descended the hillside and encountered Miette de Rohan on the shore, he had been on the point of doing that very thing. That he had not carried out his plan was mainly from a deep-rooted conviction that Nova Scotia would soon need every soldier in her ranks.

And now, by a queer turn of Fortune's wheel, he was going to beard the lion in his den—to seek De Villiers in his camp at Chignecto!

For, after all, he was really going to meet De Villiers. The governor did not think it necessary, but Johnston, mindful of the narrow isthmus and the alertness of the French Indians, had no illusions as to the danger he was in.

If captured, he would boldly face De Villiers and fling a challenge in his face. If he won—the governor would receive his information; if he lost—why, then, it would show De Villiers's wrist steel beyond the faintest glimmer of a doubt.

The first day's journey proved a trying one, as he ran constant danger of discovery from the French farmers near Grand Pré. Here and there might be one loyal to the British cause, but for the most the French Acadians were silent though none the less unrelenting haters of Massachusetts and its flag. England, far on the other side of the world, was to them merely an abstraction; Massachusetts and the other colonies were the real enemies of France in the New World. Wherefore Johnston went warily on his way, avoiding the scattered farms, and holding a course that took him through the densest parts of the forest.

Day followed day as he plunged deeper and deeper into the primeval wilderness, making his way slowly through dense snowdrifts. At night, secluded in the depths of the forest, and miles from any trail, he made camp in some deep gully where the light of his fire was hidden by overhanging rocks.

His hunting pack yielded cooking utensils and provisions, as well as a heavy woolen blanket. Rolling himself snugly in the blanket as the fire died, and cradled on balsam boughs, he slept peacefully beneath the stars.

Then came a time when he deemed it advisable to risk discovery. His journey had taken him a little north of the line to Chignecto—this to avoid the possibility of meeting any of De Villiers's men.

Now, cautiously, with the infinite pains of one who has learned his woodcraft from the red men and has learned it well, he began to swing back to the line of Chignecto.

It was early morning as he peered cautiously through the spruce upon the side of a hill not ten miles south of his destination. Below him, hidden by outjutting crags, was the Chignecto trail. He moved cautiously through the bushes, and the trail itself came sharply into view.

The Chignecto trail! Was this the Chignecto trail? This pathway of soiled and trampled snow, dark from the passing of many feet?

For an instant Johnston stood spellbound. Then he ran hastily down the hillside and paused in the pathway, beaten hard by snow-shoed feet.

At one side of the trail were broad, flat marks, with longitudinal graining, which told of the movement of toboggans; everywhere was evidence of the passing of many men on the trail that leads eastward from Chignecto.

The situation was so totally unexpected that Johnston felt momentarily dazed. De Villiers, with all the man's splendid audacity, had declined to fill the rôle of the hunted.

With the recklessness of the born gambler or the great general, he was attempting the well-nigh impossible task of marching an army through the snow-bound forest to Grand Pré!

Johnston was very thoughtful as he once more surveyed the trail. It was absurd; it was audacious; it was impossible!

Yet it was just such a fantastic stroke as De Villiers loved. When he glanced up again, it was to see two bearded Frenchmen, with drawn swords, rushing upon him.

Where he stood, with the trees as a background, he was safe from a rear attack. And his assailants, as the touch of their blades upon his quickly showed, were rather indifferent swordsmen. So that presently a lucky parry twisted one's sword from his grasp, while, an instant later, a quick turn of the wrist helped to run the second man through the shoulder.

Then Henry Johnston, his moccasined foot upon the fallen sword, bowed smilingly to his assailants.

"A trifle careless in your fence, *messieurs*," was his only criticism. "It's the straight line that counts. Keep your line, and you will fence well. Leave the straight line, as you both do, and you will shorten your reach so that the man with a straight line will run you through."

He paused an instant. "Every time," he added.

The wounded man smiled grimly as he bowed. "Thank you, Captain Johnston," he cried brightly. "It is an honor to cross swords with you."

Johnston's eyebrows lifted. "You know me, then?"

"Who doesn't?" asked the man lightly. "The second best sword in the New World!"

"And the first?" asked Johnston quickly.

Both his prisoners looked surprised.

"De Villiers, of course," was the puzzled answer of the one whom he had disarmed.

Johnston smiled grimly. It was time, he reflected, that he challenged De Villiers. He stood looking thoughtfully at the Frenchmen.

"I must ask your word not to have me molested if I let you go," he said. "I am in search of Captain de Villiers."

Both men gave the required promise.

"But you will not overtake De Villiers," one explained. "He has five days' start."

"Five days!"

The other took up the tale.

"A vessel from Annapolis Royal brought news of the soldiers from Massachusetts, and of their departure for winter quarters in Grand Pré. M. de Ramsay, our chief, is ill, so that M. de Villiers is commander of the expedition.

"It was his suggestion — this descent upon Grand Pré. He has three hundred men, including Indians. And there is a rumor—I cannot vouch for this—that M. de Villiers's fiancée is in Grand Pré."

"Five days!" repeated Johnston blankly. "Five days!"

And, without a word more, he turned and ran down the beaten trail toward Grand Pré, his snow-shoes clicking upon the frozen snow as he went.

Five days! Coulon de Villiers, with three hundred men, trained in the wild warfare of the north, was rushing to the attack of Colonel Noble and his five hundred Mas-

sachusetts soldiers! And he had five days' start!

Ordinarily it would have seemed childish folly for three hundred to attack five hundred in an encampment of their own choosing. But De Villiers evidently was counting upon a surprise attack. He would unquestionably bide his time and make a night assault.

And Henry Johnston knew, too, much of the wiles of Indian fighting not to feel a chill of doubt at thought of the possible outcome.

That night he slept by the blackened ashes of French camp-fires—slept an uneasy sleep, that was haunted by visions of French soldiers dragging toboggan loads of provisions and ammunition over the winter trail to Grand Pré. In the morning, after a hasty breakfast, he flung himself once more on the trail, running like a madman where the ground was hard, floundering through heavy drifts, pressing on over a thousand obstacles in a desperate endeavor to warn the Massachusetts soldiers.

For two days he had the advantage of a packed trail. Then snow fell blindingly over the wilderness and the trail vanished, reducing his chances of gaining on the foe. On the eighth day, which broke clear and cold, he reached the shores of Minas Basin, almost opposite Grand Pré.

With good snow-shoeing, he might hope to make the remainder of the journey in four days. De Villiers, judging by his tracks in the lately fallen snow, was almost two days ahead, and traveling rapidly.

Could he pass him? He stamped his snow-shoed feet and broke into a run.

A blizzard, fierce, biting, edged with the cruel sharpness of the north, smote him in the face; yet on and on he went, pausing at intervals to eat a few bits of broken biscuit and then plunging on his way.

Once, after a brief thaw, he came upon a moose caught in the crusted snow. The sportsman in him cried out that the animal was helpless and must therefore be spared, yet he killed it relentlessly, broiled moose-steak over the fire, and with a plentiful supply of frozen meat upon his shoulders sped onward, faster than before.

On the evening of the twelfth day, struggling through the darkness, he crossed the river to the near side of Minas Basin, about fifteen miles below Grand Pré. He was traveling cautiously now, his eyes alert for any sign of life, his mind intent upon passing De Villiers, while he rested for the night.

For he had seen De Villiers and his little army several hours before from a distant hillside, during a lull in the storm. They would cross the river to Pisiquid and camp there for the night, while he would go on in the darkness.

It had begun to storm early in the morning, and the new fall of snow was now four feet deep on the level. The wind, sweeping across countless leagues of icy wilderness, bit to the bone. The fifteen miles that lay before him in the darkness would be miles of buffeting and struggle.

He halted cautiously on the outskirts of the village. He was passing on the side farthest from De Villiers's route now, on the chance—small enough in that weather—that there should be Indian scouts about.

The gleam of a candle in a farmer's cottage caught his eye. He reconnoitered an instant, then entered boldly.

Certainly the Acadian peasant had seen the French soldiers. They had eaten supper in the village, and had then gone on in the driving storm.

Yes; it was three hours ago. Their chief made them a speech before they left. They were going—there was no need for *monsieur* to hold a poor man's arm so tightly—they were going to Grand Pré.

On, on, through the driving storm Henry Johnston ran. There was the faintest possibility that he might yet arrive in time. If only De Villiers could be halted by the storm!

Yet mile by mile went by and still there was no sign of the invading forces. Then, far ahead in the distance, a dull haze of light showed through the blur of the storm.

As he ran on the light grew brighter. Dawn seemed to be coming hours before its time. He mounted a hill. Part of Grand Pré was already flaming like a torch.

He ran nearer, and could see the burning buildings, ringed about with men; could hear wild Indian war whoops and brisk

French words of command. He had lost the race and De Villiers had won!

That was only a small part of it, however. De Villiers had won more than a race; he had won a battle. As Johnston approached the village he could plainly see that all resistance was over.

The houses, where the Massachusetts men had been quartered, were now furnaces of flame. Dead men littered the blood-stained snow. The survivors of Colonel Noble's little army, weaponless and defeated, were huddled together in the road, hemmed in by armed men.

By the doorway of a house not far away, on the same side of the street as Johnston now was, and plainly visible in the glare of the burning houses, a man was standing in an attitude of easy grace, wiping his dripping sword.

Coulon de Villiers, without a doubt! Johnston watched him as he returned his sword to its scabbard and entered the house.

Then, with a noiseless motion no Indian could have bettered, Captain Henry Johnston slowly began to make his way to the rear of the building.

VI.

COULON DE VILLIERS entered the house which he had made his headquarters and proceeded to do something which in its way was even more extraordinary than his daring march from Chignecto.

A packet, brought by a French soldier, and now lying on a table in his room, yielded shirts of the finest cambric and a uniform that was heavy with lace. With the swiftness of an old campaigner, he cast off his blood-stained hunting garb and arrayed himself in the immaculate uniform he had brought from Chignecto.

Then, flicking the dust from his slender white fingers, he stood contemplating his reflection in a narrow glass.

He was going to call upon Miette de Rohan. How pleasant it would be if it were only Mlle. de Lotbiniére, whom he had met last summer at Quebec!

But the De Rohans were powerful, and it behooved him to forget Mlle. de Lotbiniére, fascinating though she was, and call upon his fiancée, to reassure her after the disturbance of the night. He was still gazing at his moody reflection in the glass when a hoarse whisper reached his ears.

"Hands up! Or I shoot!"

He swung about, his hands in air, to face Henry Johnston, pistol in hand.

"Keep them up," that individual advised curtly.

There was a momentary silence. Then De Villiers's boyish dark face broke into a smile of greeting.

"Captain Johnston, is it not?" he asked pleasantly. "Truly I am glad to meet you, sir. I have been hearing of your fencing a long time."

He raised his eyebrows with a droll gesture.

"Much too long, *monsieur*," he added.

"Do you yield, rescue or no rescue?" asked Johnston, with no answering smile.

"What else can I do?" asked De Villiers. "I am your prisoner."

"The Massachusetts men out yonder," Johnston went on—"what is to become of them?"

"Prisoners of war! Quebec!" was the laconic answer.

"I buy their freedom with yours," said Johnston abruptly. "Is it a bargain?"

De Villiers reflected an instant, one hand on his cheek, his lace ruffles falling in a snowy cascade down his sleeve.

"They may go to Annapolis Royal on parole not to fight within a year," he said finally.

Johnston's heart leaped furiously. If the French Indians had chanced to get out of hand, he knew the lives of their prisoners would not have been worth a shilling. Besides which Quebec meant indefinite exile.

He had won something out of the ruins of war—won all that any man could hope to win. He smiled for the first time as he lowered his pistol.

"It is a bargain," he said briefly.

Coulon de Villiers shrugged his shoulders with an air of supreme content.

"This has been a real pleasure," he said politely. "I have always been curious about your sword-play. Perhaps you would so far honor me as to cross swords

in this very room? We can send for more candles."

Henry Johnston shook his head with decision.

"I have played for big stakes to-night, and have both lost and won. I do not care to fence for amusement, *monsieur.*"

De Villiers, his oval, dark face alert and watchful, surveyed his antagonist thoughtfully.

"You wish a stake," he said in some perplexity. "What shall I put up as a wager? Gentlemen do not fence for money."

Johnston smiled.

"If you only chanced to have a broken *louis d'or* with you," he suggested. "One that Medina had handled."

De Villiers's eyes narrowed to pin-points. But he spoke no word until he had laid upon the table the broken half of a *louis d'or.*

"And against it—what?" he asked quickly.

"Myself," was Johnston's quiet answer. "Give me to your Indians to torture if you will."

"Evidently," remarked De Villiers grimly, "you are willing to pay high for odd coins."

He opened the door and called for fresh candles.

"This gentleman and I are to try some tricks of fence," he said curtly to the soldier who appeared with the candles. "See that we are not disturbed."

The door closed, he began to arrange the candles so that the light should fall equally fairly in all parts of the room, humming a chanson as he walked about. Presently he gave a final glance to see that all was in order, drew his sword, and saluted gravely.

"*En garde, monsieur!*" he said briefly, his voice on the instant harsh as the clangor of iron upon iron.

To say that Henry Johnston was surprised at the touch of De Villiers's steel is to put it mildly. In all the tales defeated men had told him of De Villiers's fencing, he had allowed for a certain percentage of exaggeration.

The crossing of swords, in that lonely room, quickly undeceived him.

De Villiers was a master—by all odds the finest swordsman he had ever faced. This was Johnston's first thought; the second — that magnificent swordsman as the young Frenchman was, he depended to a great degree on his agility and lightning-like speed of movement.

Lunge, parry, and complicated ripostes succeeded one another with dazzling speed, and still Henry Johnston's sword kept time to each movement of his enemy. Coulon de Villiers was fighting as though drunk with wine, his face flushed, his eyes aflame, the whole spirit of the man keyed to heights of daring.

Johnston, on the other hand, fought with grim aloofness, as though he had been carved out of a piece of New England granite.

It was an odd scene, for the candles, in sconces on the dark, unplastered walls, responsive to the blizzard, wagged continuously to and fro. Odd shadows floated across the room, touching their faces with a momentary darkness.

On the walls and ceiling were heavy blurs of blackness, cast by their twisting swords. And, circling to and fro about the room, bending in and out, sometimes leaping back as a thrust came home, the two fought on.

De Villiers was wounded in the left shoulder.

"Good sword!" he cried loudly. "A man after my own heart!"

Johnston was touched in the left arm.

"You fence well, *monsieur,*" he said courteously.

And still the two fought on, their shoulders heaving now with the strain of conflict, their swords flashing fire. Then came an unexpected thrust. De Villiers's blade appeared to leap with a serpentine curve to the pommel of Johnston's sword.

For an instant it seemed to Johnston that his wrist must break. Then, with a parry of his own invention, which he had been waiting an opportunity to use, he sent De Villiers's sword crashing to the floor.

"Damn!" cried De Villiers furiously. Next instant he stepped forward with outstretched hand. "It was a good bout while it lasted," he said philosophically. "An-

other time, Captain Johnston, we must try again."

He picked up the broken *louis d'or* and handed it to his late opponent.

"It was a family arrangement," he said smilingly. "And in Quebec—" He paused to hum a love-song. "Oh! In Quebec—"

Johnston took the *louis d'or* with eager fingers. He had moved to one side of the door, when it was flung open in his face, shutting him from the view of Miette de Rohan, who now stood upon the threshold.

"Captain Johnston?" she asked hurriedly. "I saw him from my window coming here. He came to fight with you, and you have killed him—you—you wild beast!"

Coulon de Villiers's eyebrows went up.

"Why wild beast, *mademoiselle?*" he asked gently, rearranging his lace ruffles with exquisite care. "Why wild beast?"

The girl's face grew pallid.

"He has been very kind to me, *monsieur,*" she said slowly. "He has opened a new world to me. I did not understand it myself until I saw him come in here. He—"

De Villiers smiled.

"Captain Johnston came in here, *mademoiselle,* to get a broken *louis d'or.*"

He pointed to his successful rival now emerging from behind the door.

"As he got what he came for, Mlle. de Rohan, I have the honor to bid you good-by."

And, gracefully as if in a ballroom, Coulon de Villiers, loser in a contest for which he did not care, but winner in the great game he had played with Governor Shirley of Massachusetts, bowed his farewell, his long lace ruffles falling whitely across his sword-hilt.

Miette de Rohan and Henry Johnston faced each other in the flickering candle-rays.

"I know what you are thinking!" she cried with crimson face. "That I have been—"

"I was thinking," explained Johnston, as he placed a broken *louis d'or* upon her rosy palm, "that, after what has happened, I shall always love the very name—of Medina."

She smiled at him with sudden comprehension as he drew closer.

"I also was thinking," she said demurely, oblivious of the arm about her waist, "that I myself shall always love the very name of—Medina."

A GIRL OF PRINCIPLE

BY W. B. KERR

LUELLA was a pious lass;
At Sunday-school she taught a class;
"Resist not evil—let it pass,"
Was her refrain.
Then after church, quite free from guile,
She'd meet her beau and chat a while;
She would, if asked to stroll a mile,
Go with him twain.
He'd take her coat—when days were warm—
To give it up she thought no harm,
She'd even let him take her arm—
Just like a brother;
And when her sweetheart then would speak
Of love, she'd listen mute and meek,
And if he kissed one pretty cheek,
She'd turn the other!

The Grouch

by E. J. Rath

Author of "Too Many Crooks," "When the Devil Was Sick," "Too Much Efficiency," etc.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

THERE had been method in that madness of the Grouch which impelled him to make a settlement of the bet he so vehemently disputed, although it did not bring to him the result he wished. It was only incidentally an acknowledgment of gratitude for the services rendered by Miss Dean; it was chiefly in the nature of an attempt to inspire gratitude in the lady herself, in the hope that she would surrender the negative and the print which showed Mame in his arms.

Miss Dean, however, had not seen fit to make that response to his cash offering. The Grouch was disappointed; he had hoped for better.

And yet he found a certain grim humor in contemplating the receipt, and wondered if the additional payment of a pair of slippers to replace those lost in the creek might not finally round out the transaction to his liking.

He was so far recovered in the afternoon, having eaten a lunch of satisfying proportions, as to requisition the services of Sally and the buckboard for a trip to the village. Mame said she would make the journey with him, but when she reappeared from the house wearing her hat the Grouch was already out on the main road, plying the whip.

"He must have wanted to go alone," mused Mame, as she watched the disappearing conveyance. There were times when her opinion was worthy of respect.

The Grouch filed a long telegram with Joe Gildersleeve. It was addressed to his business partner, and it demanded an early report on the character, antecedents and station in life of two persons who called themselves Augustus J. Tilley and John William Higgins, both supposedly of New York City.

The Grouch had decided that he would no longer worry along in ignorance concerning this pair, if there was any way in which knowledge could be obtained.

In the mean time Tilley was still in a turmoil of mind over the plateholder and its astonishing contents. He had, of course, suspected something of the kind, but he did not for an instant believe it had reached the point indicated by the photograph.

If the picture truly meant all that it implied, then it was certain he had been cruelly deceived by Miss Dean, when she gave him to understand that her attitude toward the fisherman was one of mere indifference or, at the best, friendly interest.

Tilley closely examined Knock and his sister concerning the mysterious reappearance of the missing plateholder, but they could give him no light whatever.

Yet if Tilley was puzzled, Higgins was in an even greater state of bewilderment. He had seen with his own eyes a photograph of something that never happened; it almost suggested the supernatural. He had heard of spirit pictures, but he never for an instant believed in them, for his mind was of the solid and literal kind.

Yet here was something that he could neither admit nor deny to his own satis-

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faction. It was impossible, yet how could he refute it? In fact, the best proof that the photograph had produced a profound impression upon Higgins was that it precipitated him breathlessly into a declaration of love and a proposal of marriage.

He had, of course, contemplated both; but never would he have hurried so recklessly to his fate if it had not been for the unbelievable yet compelling picture that had fallen into the hands of the naturalist.

Miss Dean, who knew more about some things than other people, even if she did not yet know all she wished, was in a more equable mood than any of the gentlemen in the case. Having learned that the Grouch was no longer in need of medical attention or nursing, her interest in him waned as suddenly as it had been aroused. She asked no more questions concerning him; she made no more visits to the cottage; she did not even favor him with a nod when they chanced to meet.

It was as if he had passed completely from her scheme of life, or rather as if he had never been in it. This manner of disposing of the Grouch naturally gave her more time for Mr. Higgins and Mr. Tilley, and she neither grudged the hours nor showed partiality in her employment of them. Miss Dean, in truth, was expert in a certain type of legerdemain, which enabled her to keep two gentlemen constantly and simultaneously in the air, with little or no display of effort.

She could even smile lazily at the audience while she did it. Really, she was juggling three gentlemen, but of the third she appeared to be entirely unconscious, while to the audience he was an invisible stage property.

By diverting her attention wholly from the Grouch, Miss Dean unwittingly contributed to the peace of mind of Mame Brundage. For a time, the latter young lady had been sorely disturbed over the possible results of Miss Dean's visit to the cottage; but now she believed that the peril was safely bridged, inasmuch as the volunteer healer was content to drop the case the instant the patient was out of danger.

"It ain't that I approve the way she carries on with Mr. Higgins and Mr. Tilley," Mame assured herself. "But at least she ain't meddlin' where she's got no concern. It's a good thing I was kind of sharp and positive with her."

Mame, in fact, was even willing to forgive. She did not consider that the incident of the sweater constituted a break in relations. She was still willing to treat Miss Dean as an equal.

She was even anxious to avail herself of Miss Dean's wisdom and counsel, for she had great respect for that lady's experience and acumen in matters of the heart. It was with a view to counsel that Mame visited the cottage, soon after the convalescence of the Grouch; for she had reached a difficult place in love's journey, where it seemed that insurmountable barriers stood in the way of further progress.

"Did you ever read in papers where it says how to make your gentleman friend love you?" she asked abruptly.

"I never had to," said Miss Dean.

"Well, we ain't all so fortunate," declared Mame, in a tone of sad envy. "I mean where it gives advice in the papers about what you ought to do and what you mustn't ever do."

"You mean the love-lorn columns."

"Yes, ma'am; that's it."

Mame reached into her skirt-pocket and drew forth a folded paper.

"This one's printed down to Hurleyville; pop gets it in his mail every week. There's a lady named Millicent Mannering writin' for it; I don't know as that's her right name, but she goes under it. You write letters to her and then she prints 'em, along with telling you what to do."

Miss Dean reached for the paper and glanced at a column indicated by Mame's finger.

"'Hints for the Heartsick,'" read Miss Dean aloud.

"Uhuh," nodded Mame. "No; not that one. The third from the bottom. I got it marked with a pencil."

Miss Dean ran her glance down the column to the indicated spot and again read aloud:

"DEAR MISS MANNERING:

"He is rich and handsome and is about forty, while I am only eighteen. He does not love any-

body else, and I know that he is fond of me. But he has not yet declared himself. Instead, most of the time he treats me in a cruel way, saying harsh things. And yet I can see that he cannot get along without me. He is strong and brave and very manly, and I feel in my heart that I am just the type for him. What can I do to make him show his love for me? M. B."

"Ah," said Miss Dean nodding. "You wrote it, of course?"

"Yes, ma'am; and now read what she writes back."

Miss Dean read:

"My dear Little Girl:

"First, are you sure that he loves you? There is a great difference in your ages, and while it is not necessarily a bar to happiness, it is something you must consider very carefully. Are you sure that you are just the type for him? And it seems to me that you lay too much stress upon the fact that he is rich. Never make the mistake of thinking that riches are essential to happiness. If you are sure of his feelings toward you, I cannot understand why he should treat you cruelly. He must be thoughtless of others and extremely selfish. As to what you can do to make him love you, it is difficult to answer. Of course, you will not be so foolish and unmaidenly as to attempt to force him into a declaration. It seems to me that you should simply be your sweet and natural self toward him. Treat him as a valued friend, but do not attempt to thrust your attentions upon him. Let him see that you are kind and thoughtful always; try to talk in an interested manner; study the things in which he is interested himself. Make him feel that he has no reason for treating you harshly; always make your appeal to his better self. If he loves you, he will respond; if he does not love you, it is far better that your affair should end where it is. But think well and carefully, M. B., for your whole life's happiness may depend upon it."

"There!" said Mame, when Miss Dean had finished reading. "What do you think of that for an answer?"

"Cautious and conservative," said Miss Dean.

"How!"

"It means that you are to be very careful."

"That's what I think. But it ain't a good answer."

"I think myself it's somewhat ambiguous," admitted Miss Dean thoughtfully.

"It don't work," affirmed Mame. "I tried it."

"On the Grou—I mean Mr. March, of course?"

"Yes, ma'am. Who else would I try it on? I tried to be kind and thoughtful and to talk in an interestin' manner, but it hasn't made any diff'rence. I ain't so sure as Miss Mannering always knows what's best.

"You see, I wrote her once before. It was about another man who was payin' attentions to me. He worked at a soda fountain down to Hurleyville. He didn't want me to go out with anybody but him, but he kept goin' with somebody else."

"They do that," assented Miss Dean.

"I know it," agreed Mame. "So I wrote to this lady who writes 'Hints for the Heartsick,' and she told me to go out with anybody I wanted to and show him that he wasn't the only one, because he didn't have any rightful claim on me, anyhow, not havin' asked me to be his. And I did it.

"And the very first time, he saw me out with another feller; we went round to the soda fountain where he worked, and he had to wait on us. And after that he never come to see me at all. So I don't think she's very good at givin' advice, do you?

"Seems to me when one is givin' advice, one ought to know what one is talkin' about. Don't you think so? I do."

"She seems to have been unfortunate in her prescriptions," admitted Miss Dean. "I imagine it's necessary to have some personal knowledge of people before it's safe to give any advice."

"That's why I've come to you," declared Mame. "You know me and you know him. And you know—oh, you know—"

"Life, perhaps?"

"Yes, ma'am. Being a vam— Having run around with such a lot of men, you come pretty near knowin' what to do."

"I'm afraid you rate me too highly," said Miss Dean gravely. "And yet if I can be of any help, I'll be glad."

"Just tell me what I ought to do," urged Mame. "I don't mean just about bein' kind, and all like that; I mean some partic'lar things."

"You mean to get right down to brass tacks, Marigold. I understand. You don't want any generalities. You want something specific."

Mame nodded vigorously.

"Well, let's see," said Miss Dean slowly. "You must show in a practical way that you are really interested in his welfare. Now what does Mr. March drink with his breakfast?"

"Coffee, of course."

"It's probably just what he ought not to have; I've no doubt it helps to make him irritable. To-morrow morning I suggest that you bring him tea, just for a change.

"It will show that you are thinking about him. And it is the people who *think* who rule the world. You must always *think*. There is a man who writes that in the papers all the time, and he gets a great deal of money for saying it five or six times a week, in capital letters. So if I were you, I'd bring him tea, just to show that you are *thinking*."

"I'll do it," said Mame.

"I'd also take an interest in his clothes," continued Miss Dean, after a pause. "I don't mean just to admire them, but to make suggestions. He has probably fallen into a rut, and he will appreciate advice.

"Change the arrangement of the things in his bureau-drawers. Put his collars in a different place; change his shirts around. I noticed when I was up at the cabin that he keeps his shoes in a certain order, standing along the wall. Change them about.

"Don't let his suits hang on the same pegs all the time. Try to make things more convenient for him and at the same time give him a pleasant surprise. That will show him that you are not only thoughtful, but that you have a *brain*, and the man who writes for the papers says that one thought in the human *brain* is more powerful than the strength of all the prehistoric mastodons that ever lived. He proves it to you by pictures."

"I'll do all of that," said Mame in an awed whisper. "Gee, but you know things!"

"Just odds and ends," said Miss Dean, with a wave of her hand. "If he has books, take them away for awhile and replace them with some of your own. That will help to get him out of a rut, and it will also give him an insight into your own literary taste. It will show him that you have *ideas*, which is something else that the man who writes for the papers is very particular about."

"I've got some fine books," said Mame nodding. "Love stories."

"The exact thing!" exclaimed Miss Dean. "Pick out the tenderest ones you can find. They will help to soften his disposition.

"And you must be very careful to study his personal comfort. For instance, what kind of a pillow does he sleep on?"

"He's got the hardest one mom could find."

"Change it for a soft one. He is probably cruel to you because he doesn't sleep well. Get a real soft pillow, filled with feathers."

"Yes, ma'am; I'll remember."

"Now, about his meals. You always carry them up to the cabin, I believe, at certain hours."

Mame nodded.

"Change the hours," advised Miss Dean. "Prove to him that you are thinking about his welfare, and if he says anything tell him that you feel that he is eating at the wrong hours.

"Always keep impressing on him that you have his welfare at heart. Do you talk to him much?"

"Not much," admitted Mame slowly. "He don't give me a chance."

"But you must. You must make your own chances. Talk to him about literature, and art, and science. Show him that you are thinking of higher things. You must let him feel that you are not his servant; you must make him understand that in some things you are his master.

"Argue with him; that is usually very important. So many men feel that they are superior in argument; you must show him that he is not. If he loses his temper, you must still argue."

"I'll—I'll try," faltered Mame.

She had in mind an alarming vision of the Grouch.

"You must have courage and not be put aside from your course," declared Miss Dean emphatically. "He will not seem to appreciate opposition; no man does. But he will respect you for it, and out of respect often comes love."

"You're just wonderful, Miss Dean!"

"Thank you, Marigold. I don't want to go into too many details, but bear this general rule in mind; wherever you find that he does certain things in a certain way, do them differently. In that way you will awaken his interest.

"From the things himself he will turn to you, because he will discover that it is your *thought* which has brought about the changes. And he will admire you for your thought, because, as the man in the paper says, *thought* is the only thing in the world that is worth while.

"You see, Napoleon was a great man, because he *thought;* the only reason that he lost at Waterloo was that he forgot to *think,* so they bumped him off." Miss Dean rarely descended to slang.

"So you must show the Grouch—forgive me, Marigold—you must show Mr. March that you are always *thinking,* and when he gets that idea fixed in his mind he will understand that you have a *brain,* and after that it seems to me that it ought to be very easy for him to love you."

Mame sat in superb silence for several minutes, while Miss Dean took up her book and resumed reading. At last the despair of the Brundage family stirred and rose from her seat. She tossed the newspaper away.

"I'm goin' to do just as you say," she declared.

"I feel sure you'll get results," said Miss Dean quietly.

"From here on I'm a thinkin' woman," added Mame after a pause.

Miss Dean only nodded.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BEAUTY SHOW.

FAR away in her secret corner of the woods — the place she thought was secret, for she was happily unaware that it had been shamelessly violated— Mame sat and wrote her copy for another edition of the Daily News.

She did not know that this diary of hers was the Daily News. But the Grouch did; that was what he called it. Whenever he wanted the latest bulletins he would summon Knock and say:

"Go get me the Daily News."

And Knock would get it. Afterward it would go back to the secret corner, carefully wrapped in its oilcloth, and Mame would always find it there when she went to file her report.

On this occasion she was anxious in spirit, a fact that she betrayed by long and frequent pauses between writing, during which she mouthed her pencil to the point of saturation. She reviewed a paragraph, reading aloud:

"There is something wrong. It seams worse than ever. He has openly utterd curses at me where before that he woud say them under his breth which is not so bad. He told me if I ever fixed his cloths again that I would die by the sord. He did not seam to understand that I made things better. When he found out the way I arranged his necktys he called me an attrossity and he said that burning at the steak was too good for me. It was the same about his collars and his shirts and his coats and pants and everything. He did not take it right. I thought my hart woud stop and when one feels that way one might as well be dead. He made me sware I woud let everything alone. But how can I."

Mame dry-sobbed for awhile and rallied herself for another paragraph, which she wrote with cramped but trembling fingers:

"Just like she told me to I brought him tea insted of coffee. He through the teapot out the door and the handel broke off and he said things which I cannot repeat even in writing on account of my finer instinks. He wanted to know if I ever had anything the matter with my head and I said not that I new of and he said I ought to have it opened up and refilled. He ment by that a sergical opperation. He does not understand how afraid I am of a knife or he woud not sugest it. I told him it showed I was thinking about him just like she said and I told him that people must always think and he wanted to know how I got along eighteen years without it and why did I begin now when it mite reck my whole life. And indeed I fear it has recked it for I never saw him in such a raje although he was grand to look at all hansome and spirrited like the hero I saw in The Crushed Hart down to Hurleyville."

She rested again and resumed, after a period of bitter memories:

"I took and hid his books and put some of my own on the tabel with the one called Her Lifes Great Love on the top. He through them out like the teapot and spoke things which again it

is not fitting I shoud write down. I told him it was only showing him I had a brane and how strong the human brane is and he said if I had a tea spoon full of branes the weight of them woud brake my neck. And he woud not let me talk to him about art and syence or about Napoleon like she said but he told me to get his books back or he woud not be responsibel if my father and mother wore morning for me after I died some horribel deth."

She reread and then poured out more of her troubles through the moist point of the lead-pencil:

"She made some terribel mistake in what she told me to do for he took everything wrong and carryed on something fierce. I dont think she knows as much about men as she puts on she does. Or has she betrade me. O awful thought if I have been betrade by that woman. One never knows when one can trust a vampire. It seems they are worse toward other women. Of coarse it is her jellusy for she has seen the way I get on with him just being my naturl and uneffected self and she does not want anybody to have any of the men but her. She can keep Mr. Higgens and Mr. Tilly but I will defie her to reck my life with David. Their—I have called him by his first name. Cease my hart. It may not be moddest of me but what care I. When a woman loves she will go to any lenth. She had better bewear of me for I will not be triffled with."

Mame kissed the spot where she had written his name, closed the book for the day, clasped it to her breast for a moment, and then hid it away carefully in the spot where Knock would find it.

She was downcast, but far from beaten. In fact, even then she resolved to make a pilgrimage to the cabin, to learn if the Grouch would like to have some fresh buttermilk, made only that morning.

"He cannot cast me out of his life so long as I only made a mistake," she said. "I will tell him how I came to make it. I'm goin' to put the blame just where it belongs."

The Grouch was taking a nap when she entered the cabin, and she walked softly, so as not to awaken him. For an instant she stood near his bedside; even in sleep she found him not unbeautiful, which was a gage of the strength of Mame's affection, for no man has yet lived who looked handsome in his slumbers.

Most of them look stuffy and inane. Tearing herself away from the heart-thrilling spectacle, Mame walked over toward the mantel, to see if he had replaced all of his properties to his liking.

She paused suddenly a few feet from it, gasped faintly and then moved nearer. The mantel had undergone a change complete and appalling. From end to end it had become a gallery of fair women!

There were a dozen of them at least, in photographs of all sizes. There were ladies who smiled out at her with tantalizing lips and eyes; other ladies who glowered tragically; still others whose faces were in calm and insolent repose.

And all of them were beautiful—Mame noted that with a clutch at her heart.

Never before had the Grouch displayed a photograph in his cabin; but now he had embarked upon a pictorial debauch of a surprising and sinister significance.

Mame Brundage's eyes reflected the agony of her soul. She glanced quickly toward the bed. He still slept, unconscious of the frightful havoc he made of her life. She moved closer to the mantel and steeled herself.

There was a picture in the center that awakened some slumbering memory in her brain; there was something distinctly familiar in the curl of a pair of cruel yet beautiful lips, something reminiscent in the deep-set, languid eyes.

As Mame studied the face she became aware of some writing in a lower corner of the photograph, running upward in a northeasterly direction until some of the words reposed on the lady's fair bosom. She bent nearer and deciphered:

To my old pal, David.—ROSALIE.

And then full recollection flooded Mame's brain. She knew the face now. Could she ever forget it? Down at Hurleyville, in the darkened precincts of the Elite, she had seen that mocking and cruel face flashed out upon the screen for five full reels.

A vampire of vampires—Rosalie Revelle!

Mame steadied herself as she gazed in horror. And the picture was for David—her "old pal"! Rosalie Revelle's pal!

This man who hated all women—this *Galahad*, this paragon of masculine power—

was the pal of America's most affluent vampire!

With a deep intake of breath, Mame passed to the next photograph. It was that of a laughing blonde, who looked tauntingly out from a sunbonnet. Mame did not recognize the face, but she knew the name in an instant. A dozen times at least she had read it in "Seen on the Screen."

Who, indeed, had not heard of Darling Dottie Driscoll, who played ingénues in the Titanic releases? And what did Dottie say? Simply—"For Dave, in memory of happy days."

"I am lost!" whispered Mame.

Next to Dottie was a young lady in a bathing-suit, standing on the end of a spring-board, arms and body arched for the plunge. Such a bathing-suit! Mame shuddered.

Never before had she realized the fatal beauty of Helene, the famous diving nymph of the Paradise Studio. Just under the spring-board Louise said: "Follow me, Davy; the water's fine."

"Hussy!" hissed Mame.

She paused at the next, whom she recognized in an instant, for this lady's countenance had visited Hurleyville in five thousand-foot lots on several occasions, to Mame's personal knowledge. Blanche Le Fere always played heart throbs; she was the woman sinned against by one leading man after another.

Mame could remember when she had cried over the misfortune of this dark-haired and pitiful damsel and when her heart had poured out sympathy full fold every time the shadow was cast over Blanche's life. She had pictured this idol as sad, sweet and gentle, whose private life was as unhappy and tragic as her public career on celluloid.

Blanche, in fact, was Mame's favorite. Yet Blanche wrote boldly:

This picture is for Davie, the little old rascal. Oh, what I could tell about you!

Mame's hand went forth to seize the picture, then paused, for the next photograph caught her eye. April May—such was the seasonable name of the lady—wearing her familiar calico gown and displaying all that was needful of her little-girl legs, was saying to David March, in a handwriting bold and challenging:

It only costs a nickel to telephone. Don't forget the number.

Adjoining April May in the gallery of the Grouch was Capitola Carruthers, the slim and serpentine comédienne, who wrote with assurance:

Do you remember what happened when you tried to stand on your head?

That was the end of Capitola, so far as Mame Brundage was concerned. She glanced over at the sleeper.

"He—he just couldn't have tried it," muttered Mame. "He's too dignified."

There were others in the gallery whom Mame knew by screen reputation and concerning whom the question and answer man of "Seen on the Screen" was kept extremely busy telling people how old they were, who they were married to, how much they weighed, whether they owned automobiles, and why they left the Jazzmarazz Studio to go to the Interplanetary Film Corporation.

There were a few she did not know, but they were no more comforting than the others; in fact, they were worse, because they added mystery to sheer wickedness.

One of the unknowns, it seemed, was simply known as Hazel, from what she wrote at the bottom of the photograph. Evidently she worked with the animals, for she was clad in the costume so much affected by lady lion-tamers and carried a short, heavy whip. Hazel's message to the Grouch was:

Lucky for me I work inside a cage, you old cradle-robber.

That showed clearly that Hazel had all the necessary nerve to subdue lions, for her cradle-years had passed into the dignity and quiet of history.

Mame stood battling with herself, trying to resist the impulse to tear the fair faces of those ladies into thousands of small pieces, when she heard the voice of the Grouch. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, watching her.

"How do you like them?" he asked.

For once in his life he seemed to be pleased about something.

Mame did not answer immediately. Surprise and fury were struggling for mastery.

"Well," said the Grouch, "I believe I asked a question!"

"They're—simply awful!"

Blanche Le Fere never registered any more horror than Mame Brundage.

"Don't understand you," said the Grouch, smiling. "I thought you were something of a movie-fan yourself."

She looked at him in disdain.

"I have been to the pictures," she said, "but I never said I approved of the people that was in them."

"Probably because you never met them," he observed calmly. He waved his hand toward the group on the mantel: "That's what I call a pretty classy lot of friends."

"I—I think they're hussies," declared Mame.

"It's the point of view," he explained. "You can't judge them until you know them. At any rate, they suit me. I'm sorry I didn't bring the rest of them along."

"You mean—you've got more pictures?" Mame gasped.

"Dozens."

"All written on, like these?"

"Every one has its little personal message," he nodded.

"Oh, Mr. March!"

The Grouch laughed, walked over to the table and found a cigarette.

"I never thought you were that kind of a man," she said stiffly.

"Oh, I'm average," he admitted. "Now Helene over there"—he gestured toward the diving nymph—"Helene says I'm over average. But probably that isn't a fair estimate, because she admits she's rather partial to me."

Mame listened, aghast. Never had she heard the Grouch talk so fluently and complacently, and it shocked her to realize that this change in his manner had been due to such a shameful cause.

"You—you told me you come up here to get away from women. You said you hated them!"

"Who? Me? Well, maybe I did come up here to get away from them. You can't carry enough speed to travel with that bunch of girls all the time.

"But as for hating them—looks like it, doesn't it?"

He grinned amiably and waved the cigarette in a graceful arc.

"It's shameful!" said Mame hotly.

"I can't help it if they like me."

"But to keep their pictures around—like that!"

"It wouldn't be polite to throw them away," observed the Grouch.

"Why—why didn't you put 'em up before?"

"Well, as I said, I was trying to get away from the bunch for a while. I stood it as long as I could, and then I dug into the trunk.

"Now I feel as if I was in the hands of my friends again. The more I look at them the more I feel like inviting some of them up for a few days."

"Here?"

"Certainly. I think it would liven up the farm a bit—particularly if I could get Dottie and April May. Where could we put them, Mame?"

Her eyes blazed at him.

"We couldn't put 'em anywheres!" she retorted. "Pop wouldn't have 'em on the place. What an awful thing for you to say!"

"We could put them in tents, I suppose," he mused. "They'd have a lot of fun camping out. I'll think about it, anyhow."

"I won't have 'em!"

Mame stamped her foot until it tingled.

"They're all good fellows," he said, persuasively.

"Don't speak of 'em!" she groaned. "Oh, how can you keep on knowin' such people! And all the time I thought—I thought—"

Her voice broke, but she rallied quickly.

"I shall never go to the movies again," she said, firmly.

"Twaddle," said the Grouch good-naturedly.

"It ain't twaddle! It's my life's resolve. Never again will I set foot inside the Elite. I won't encourage such things!"

He tossed his cigarette aside and began to whistle.

Mame watched him with amazed eyes.

She could not understand this awful transformation. Better to be spurned and scorned and to suffer her daily penance of bitter words than to have him cast this blight upon her life, even though he did it so light-heartedly and with a smile on his lips.

"*Don't* bring 'em here," she pleaded.

"Oh, cheer up! It might do you good. They're a good-hearted crowd. I wouldn't be surprised if some of them could help you land with a studio."

"Never!"

"Thought you had ambitions?"

"I've changed 'em," she said. "I—I never knew that the women were that kind."

"They're all kinds. That's what makes them interesting. What? Going?"

Mame was moving toward the door, dragging her feet as though they had suddenly turned to lead. She was trying desperately to think of the final word to say. Then memory helped her.

"I have tasted the cup of life," she said with a tragic sob.

"Well, drink hearty!" advised the Grouch.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GROUCH'S BAIT.

MAME was sitting in the orchard, weeping, when Higgins found her. His round face expressed immediate concern.

"What's the trouble, Mame?" he asked.

"I'm—I'm done," she answered in a strangling voice.

He inspected her with a swift and anxious glance, and then understood that she spoke figuratively.

"How?"

"Mr. M—M—March."

Higgins frowned blackly and clenched his fists.

"You mean to say that dog—"

"He—he isn't a dog," interrupted Mame quickly. "But he's got pictures—of awful women—all over the place. And it's disreputable!"

The fisherman's frown faded.

"Tell me about the pictures," he suggested.

Mame told him to the last detail, and Higgins nodded his head in sympathy.

"I thought we'd get a line on him at last," he said. "So that's the kind of a bird he is. Well, don't bother your head about him, Mame."

"M—Marigold."

"Marigold, of course. Don't go near him. Make him fetch his own meals or go without 'em. The sooner he gets out of here the better for everybody. He's no good."

Mame looked at Higgins doubtfully and began to dry her eyes.

"We mustn't judge people too quick," she said. "But—oh, I feel terrible!"

He talked consolingly to her for a few minutes and then moved along in the direction of the cottage. He found Miss Dean sewing.

"Like to go fishing?" he asked.

"I'd like to, but I mustn't," she replied. "This is my sewing day. It's really long overdue, and if I don't do something now I'll never catch up. So don't tempt me."

He watched her for a while, but found it difficult to keep the conversation in progress.

"Saw Mame in tears a while ago," he said, after exhausting more common subjects.

Miss Dean laid her sewing in her lap, to indicate that she was willing to sacrifice a few minutes. He told her everything that Mame told him. She listened without a trace of expression, other than that of close attention.

"So now you've got his rating," said Higgins in conclusion. "If he ever bothers you, send me word."

"He won't," she said confidently. "Not so long as he keeps his interest in these ladies you've just told me about. Did I understand you to say that one of them made a reference to his having stood on his head?"

"Having tried to," corrected the fisherman.

"Ah, yes. I dare say he doesn't do it very well."

She resumed her sewing, and after a

while Higgins made off for the lake again, realizing that she could not be lured away from useful occupation. He was no sooner out of sight than she put aside her work and fell into a reverie.

It ended in her abrupt rising from her chair. Picking up a parasol, she went for a walk, and a few minutes later found herself in the neighborhood of the cabin. Some time before she observed that the Grouch had driven off by himself in the buckboard, a form of diversion in which he had recently displayed interest.

"Now for a look," said Miss Dean.

She walked briskly up to the cabin and entered. Laying her parasol on the table, she approached the mantel. The ladies were there in unbroken array, and she studied them systematically.

Apparently they puzzled her, for there were little wrinkles in her forehead as she went from picture to picture, her keen dark eyes omitting no detail, however trivial.

Presently she reached up and took down the photograph of Capitola Carruthers, carried it over to the window, and made a closer examination of that inscription which asked the Grouch if he recalled his acrobatic attempt.

She nodded and bit her lip, and then carried Capitola back to the mantel, where she examined the handwriting on all of the pictures, comparing one with another. She was smiling mysteriously when she completed the task.

"Poor Mame," she murmured. "Let's see how she keeps his room."

Miss Dean wandered about the cabin, inspecting everything within it. The Grouch's clothes, hanging straight and precise, interested her. She examined each suit critically. His shoes attracted her, too; they were lined up against the wall, company front, each at attention and each rigidly braced from within by a tree.

She smiled and passed on to the dresser. It was more orderly than her own. Curiosity impelled her to open the top drawer, and she nodded as her glance surveyed its contents.

"He's frightfully neat," commented Miss Dean.

She walked over to the table and turned the leaves of a book. It did not interest her, and she picked up another. She was still standing there when the Grouch entered the cabin.

There was a moment of silence and staring. Miss Dean felt that her cheeks were beginning to flush, and tried to fight it off.

"Well?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm caught!" she answered.

"Caught at what?"

"Snooping."

The Grouch did not seem surprised at the confession.

"What were you snooping for?"

"That's useless to ask. I'm a woman," said Miss Dean. She was beginning to feel more at ease.

"Perhaps you expected to collect a pair of slippers?" he suggested coldly.

"Oh, hardly so soon. I don't care for the ones they have in the village. I've looked at them. No; I was just snooping."

It pleased her that frankness seemed to irritate him.

"Perhaps you came to deliver a photograph and a negative," said the Grouch, with a searching survey of her face.

"No; I didn't."

"Well, it's time you did, then. I want them."

"Yes, I know. But I haven't decided to surrender them yet."

"They're safe?" he asked anxiously.

"Safe," she assured him with a faint smile.

"They won't do you any good; not one solitary bit. I paid the bet, but you won't get anything more out of me, madam. You can bank on that. Don't for a minute get it into your head that I'll stand for any nonsense."

"I never attempt nonsense," said Miss Dean significantly.

The Grouch walked across the cabin and back, his hands clasped behind him. His neck was beginning to redden.

"Don't forget there's a photograph of you in existence," he said sharply.

"I've heard of it," she answered quietly. "I believe you've seen it. Is it a good one?"

He paused in his walk and looked at her sternly.

"It's good enough," he said ominously.

Miss Dean laughed and shrugged.

"There seems to be quite a bit of photography at the Brundage farm," she observed, glancing toward the mantel.

The Grouch smiled grimly.

"Like 'em?" he asked.

"A rather common lot, I'd say."

"Oh, that's the idea, is it? Common! Which ones?"

"There's little to choose," said Miss Dean. "I believe they send them in return for a quarter, don't they?"

He snorted.

"Maybe you'd like to look at the inscriptions," he suggested.

"I have, thank you. I dare say you paid as high as half a dollar for them."

"Not one red cent!" he exclaimed, glowering. "They're gifts—from friends."

"In that case, I think they're rather disgusting," she said calmly.

"Don't like my friends, eh?"

"I don't know any people of that kind, but I don't imagine I should care for them. Is that all you do—run around with friends like that?"

"They seem to worry you," he sneered.

"No, I wouldn't say that. But it's educational to have seen them; possibly even useful," said Miss Dean, meeting his glance evenly. "I'd no idea you were such a collector of hearts."

The Grouch laughed harshly.

"You seem to be doing pretty well yourself," he remarked.

"I?"

"The ass Tilley, for instance."

"He is at least a gentleman, and I'm inclined to think he's respectable."

"I know better. And that fat idiot, Higgins, too."

"I find Mr. Higgins a very good friend," said Miss Dean.

"Oh, that's apparent! There's a picture to that effect."

"It may interest you to know that Mr. Higgins has asked me to marry him."

"What?"

The Grouch turned suddenly purple.

"Is it so surprising? I may as well add that Mr. Tilley has asked me the same thing."

He checked an explosive word and stood staring.

"Well, what did you tell them?" he barked.

"That part of it is none of your business," she answered sweetly.

The Grouch fell to pacing again, and kept it up for several minutes. Miss Dean picked up her parasol and yawned.

"Fine business!" he snarled. "Entangling a couple of boobs. What's the game, anyhow?"

She looked mysterious and tapped the end of her parasol on the floor.

"It discourages me," she said, with a glance at the picture gallery, "when I think how far I must go before I can hope to equal the record."

"Don't lose your nerve; you're getting along nicely. The only thing that 'll stop you is a shortage of raw materials."

"That would be depressing," she admitted. "But I imagine there are opportunities at the village. I shall probably drive there in the morning."

The Grouch was scowling in his best manner.

"And corner the market," he said. "Well, you ought to be able to buy cheap."

"I'm good at a bargain," she agreed, as she walked toward the doorway.

"Wait!" commanded the Grouch.

She waited.

"I want to know what you're going to do about it," he said, waving his hand toward the ladies' gallery. "Don't get the idea I'm open to blackmail."

"Have I suggested it?"

"No; but—" He ended the sentence in a grunt. "Go as far as you like."

"I will," she promised.

In the doorway she collided with Mame Brundage, who, watching from the orchard, had witnessed the invasion of the cabin and the subsequent return of the Grouch. She now threw aside caution.

"Ah! It's Marigold!" said Miss Dean, stepping back into the cabin.

"Yes, it's me!" assented Mame significantly.

The Grouch watched them both, a twisted smile on his face.

"Now we have both art critics together," he remarked.

"What brought you here?" demanded Mame abruptly, as she eyed the lady from the cottage.

"I was just snooping," answered Miss Dean with humility. "Incidentally I looked at Mr. March's pictures."

Mame flushed. She had forgotten the pictures in the peril of this extraordinary intrusion.

"Do you like 'em?" she asked suspiciously.

"I've just been telling the owner they're rather cheap and vulgar. He doesn't seem to agree with me."

Mame felt that she had reached one of the turning points in the lane of life. This, coming from the lady of the cottage, was a challenge. It was no time or occasion for neutrality.

"I don't see where you can call 'em cheap and vulgar," she said. "I shouldn't think he would agree with you."

The Grouch's jaw dropped and his eyes widened as he heard this amazing speech. Miss Dean inadvertently disclosed surprise by a raising of her eyebrows.

"I don't see anything the matter with 'em," continued Mame. "Not a thing. I'm sure they're all prominent ladies. It ain't everybody who could know 'em."

The Grouch cleared his throat and looked embarrassed, for the first time since he had entered the cabin. Miss Dean glanced at him and smiled warily.

"I'd no idea I was in a minority," she murmured.

Neither did he, and the discovery did not suit his purpose. He glared at Mame, and tried to put a command into the glance. She either misinterpreted or ignored it.

"You've got to look at professional women diff'rent from others," she said, addressing herself to Miss Dean. "You've got to take what they call a broad outlook.

"When one has made something out of one's own life, who's got a right to say anything? 'Specially people who've never done anything partic'lar."

Mame placed a hand on her hip and hitched herself over so that her weight rested on one foot. Her head was tilted.

She recalled that *Carmen* of the movies stood that way; also, all the principal vampires.

"You really approve of them, Marigold?" asked Miss Dean.

Mame swallowed her conscience; it was all for the cause.

"Certainly!" she snapped.

The Grouch looked disappointed. Miss Dean knew that he was disappointed, and did not disguise the fact that she knew it. She laughed musically and shrugged.

"You're growing up, my dear," said Miss Dean, smiling at her. "When youth becomes tolerant, it is no longer youth. When you get to be an old woman, like myself, you'll begin swinging back again. I admit to prejudices and preferences."

"Seems to me Mr. March has got a right to his friends," said Mame coldly. "Thank Heaven, I'm not narrer!"

The Grouch looked at both of them. Then, suddenly, he burst into a laugh that frankly surprised his visitors. It was a reckless, taunting laugh; it made a triumphant devil out of him.

"Well, you both took the bait," he exclaimed, "just as if you were a pair of red-eyes up in Higgins's lake."

"Did we?" asked Miss Dean innocently.

"Did you! You certainly did. Know where those pictures came from?"

The lady of the cottage shook her head. Mame merely stood, expectant.

"They belong to Higgins and Tilley!" he announced, chuckling.

Mame Brundage underwent an astonishing transformation. She became fairly radiant.

"Then they ain't yours, Mr. March?"

"Never were," he affirmed, pleasantly.

"I—I just *knew* it couldn't be true!" gasped Mame. "Dear me, but ain't I happy!"

Miss Dean had permitted herself to become puzzled.

"I admit to being curious," she said, "as to how they came into your possession."

"Easy," said the Grouch, grinning. "I stole 'em; that's all."

"Just to get us all excited, I suppose?"

"You've got it. And perhaps I didn't!"

Mame was still beaming. The flood of

happiness almost overwhelmed her. There was no resentment in her heart over the Grouch's peculiar notion of a joke. It was enough to know that there was still hope.

"Well," said Miss Dean, philosophically, "this is what comes of snooping. But even the ownership of these beautiful pictures by Mr. Higgins and Mr. Tilley doesn't seem to explain something."

"What's that?" demanded the Grouch.

"The fact that every one of them bears the same handwriting."

"Oh, I did that," he admitted cheerfully. "They're addressed to me, you notice."

"Yes, I did notice," admitted Miss Dean. "And I was wondering all the time how you expected people to believe that these dear ladies had done the writing themselves."

The Grouch, momentarily taken aback, made a quick rally.

"You both bit," he said with impartial joy. "I'm satisfied. After this perhaps you'll both mind your own business."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GROUCH IS HAPPY.

MISS DEAN went down the hill to the farmhouse, and while she stood there talking to Mrs. Brundage, Tilley appeared. His face was somewhat paler than usual; his eyes were stern.

"When you have a moment I'd like to speak with you, Miss Dean," he said.

"You may have the moment now," she answered. "Shall we walk?"

When they had passed beyond ear-shot of Mrs. Brundage, the naturalist halted and turned accusingly upon his companion.

"You've been up to the cabin," he said.

Miss Dean looked faintly surprised, but nodded.

"Well, I don't want you to go there, Miss Dean."

"You don't *want* me to?" she echoed.

"Exactly. I don't want you to meet this man March."

He spoke with an authority that would have irritated her, if it had not begun by amusing.

"Why?" she asked.

"He is not a proper person," declared Tilley. "I think that's a very good reason."

"Assuming it, for the sake of argument," she said, looking up at him with cool eyes, "I don't yet understand where you exercise any control in the matter. That's what puzzles me."

Tilley coughed and hesitated.

"I can't explain," he declared briefly. "But I'll just have to ask you not to go there."

Miss Dean smiled and shook her head.

"I'm afraid that won't do, Mr. Tilley. It's not responsive. Even if you were my guardian, I should have to ask for a reason."

Again he hesitated, this time for a longer period.

"You ought to understand why I don't want you to go," he said, with an appeal in his eyes. "You know that my offer is still open; it 'll be open always."

She gave him a queer glance. It was born of a devilish thought. Squaring her shoulders, she measured him from head to foot in a long, sweeping survey.

"I wish to say that I do not think you a proper person to make me an offer, Mr. Tilley," she said.

He gaped at her.

"And therefore not fitted to decide whether any other person is proper for me to meet or not," she added.

"*I'm* not proper!" he exclaimed.

"I fear not," answered Miss Dean gravely. "Thanks to Mr. March, I have been put into the possession of some information."

The naturalist was a bewildered man, but he held his ground stoutly.

"What did he tell you about me?" he demanded.

"He told me nothing. He merely showed me some photographs."

At the word "photographs" Tilley started.

"Photographs of women," continued Miss Dean calmly. "Of actresses. To be specific, of ladies who pose before the camera."

"What have they got to do with me?" asked Tilley.

"Why, they're yours, you see."

"Mine? Oh, absolutely ridiculous!"

"Yes; I think there is something ridiculous about it," she admitted as she viewed him comprehensively. "But in view of the circumstances, I can say that I do not value your offer very highly, Mr. Tilley, nor can I accept either your advice—or your orders."

Tilley began to swallow his Adam's apple with great rapidity, but it bobbed back into place again after each swallow.

"Never owned a picture of an actress in my life!" he cried. "Never! Never knew an actress. Never want to know one. Don't believe in them."

"I was told that the pictures came from you—at least a part of them," said Miss Dean. "It is not difficult to believe; there is a great similarity in men."

She bent her head so that her broad-brimmed hat concealed her face from him. If Tilley had been able to see and read her eyes, he would have been still more perplexed.

"If he showed you any pictures of women and said they were mine, he's a liar! I—I beg your pardon, but he is. And I'll settle with him, too.

"He's trying to queer me with you; that's all. And I won't have it!"

As the naturalist concluded this vehement speech, he became suddenly aware that Higgins had joined the group. The fisherman was staring at him with calculating eyes.

"Did I understand you to say you were going to settle with me?" asked Higgins ominously.

"I wasn't talking to you," said Tilley irritably. "Go away!"

"No; but you were talking about me."

The naturalist did not demean himself by answering the charge. He turned again to Miss Dean.

"Now you can see there's every reason in the world for my saying that you must keep away from him," he declared.

Higgins advanced and clenched his fists.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Miss Dean," said the fisherman, in a booming voice. "I'll attend to him later. I think I'd better see you back to the cottage."

Miss Dean turned to face Higgins, and regarded him with a look that chilled him no less than it utterly amazed him. It was as though he stood before her an utter stranger, and an unpleasant one, at that.

"I don't consider you a proper person to give me any advice, Mr. Higgins," she said.

"What?" His mouth remained open and fixed.

"I think I made myself clear."

Higgins cleared his throat and made nervous gestures with his big hands.

"It's not clear at all!" he cried. "Not a bit. Why ain't I proper? Who said so? Tilley? Good Lord, Miss Dean, you know what I think of you?"

She shook her head coldly.

"I'm afraid I do not," she said. "After what I saw to-day, I find that I am only one of several persons of whom you think."

"What persons?" he demanded.

"Actresses."

Higgins stared at Miss Dean, and the naturalist stared at Higgins.

"To make a painful interview brief," added Miss Dean, "I will simply say that I have seen a number of photographs of actresses that belong to you. They are in Mr. March's cabin.

"Under the circumstances, I do not think it is necessary for me to say anything further. I will bid both of you gentlemen good afternoon."

She walked away, leaving fisherman and naturalist facing each other, each too overpowered for immediate speech. Higgins recovered first.

"You've got something to do with this!" he bellowed.

Tilley shook his head miserably.

"No, I haven't," he protested. "She said the same thing about me."

"About you? Actresses' pictures?"

"That's what she said. And I don't know a thing about 'em. I don't like actresses. They're not my kind."

Higgins scratched his head and pondered.

"Let's get this thing straight," he said. "I don't know anything about any actresses' pictures, on the level. Somebody's framing us."

Tilley related the entire conversation, up to the point where the fisherman had entered it. He repeated it in a voice that was bewildered and sad.

"Now you've got the whole business," he said. "What do you make of it?"

"Nothing—yet," answered Higgins grimly. "But we'll make something out of it pretty soon. Come on!"

"Where?"

"Up to see the Grouch."

Tilley fell in by his side, and they marched through the orchard and up the hill to the cabin. Neither spoke on the way. There was no suggestion of comradeship; it was an alliance of necessity. After the Grouch had been dealt with, each knew that he would be on his own again.

So eager were they to invade the castle of the enemy that they jammed in the doorway and were forced to back out again, Higgins finally taking the lead and entering first. The Grouch, who was sitting in a chair, reading, looked up.

"Where are those pictures?" demanded Higgins.

"I see 'em!" cried Tilley, pointing to the mantel.

They made a joint rush that almost upset the table, and then stood for a minute, staring at the ladies of the screen.

"Never saw a damned one of 'em before!" said Higgins, as he finished the inspection.

"Same here," declared Tilley.

Together they turned upon the Grouch, who had laid aside his book and was watching them with a quizzical expression.

"Did you say you got some of those pictures from me?" asked the fisherman.

"And from me?" echoed Tilley.

The Grouch paused long enough to light a cigarette and to make certain that it burned evenly.

"I believe I did," he said.

Higgins and Tilley looked at each other. The ease with which this shameless confession had been forced amazed them.

"What did you mean by it?" demanded Higgins, advancing a step.

"Yes," said Tilley. "Explain."

The Grouch smiled up at them and tilted the chair backward.

"I didn't know you took things so seriously," he said. "But it seems that both of you have a deficit in humor."

"Humor!" shouted Higgins. "Call that humor?"

"We'll call it a little joke," said the Grouch, compromising. "How will that do?"

"A joke!" exclaimed Tilley bitterly. "Well, it's a joke that's ruined me."

"And me," said Higgins. "Who's the joke on?"

"Well, it was on Miss Dean for a while," remarked the Grouch. "But I gather that she has passed it along."

"A fine joke," commented Higgins. "Do you know what your joke has done? It's got Miss Dean so she won't speak to me."

"What's that to me?" asked the Grouch mildly. "She doesn't have to speak to anybody if she doesn't want to."

Again the members of the dual alliance exchanged glances.

"I've been slandered—infamously slandered!" said Tilley.

"And I'm finished!" groaned Higgins.

The Grouch laughed.

"Rot!" he said. "Why, she'll think all the more of you for it. Every woman likes to find a bit of wickedness in a man."

"Not Miss Dean," declared Tilley, shaking his head.

"No, sir!" said Higgins. "She's not that kind of a woman."

Again the Grouch discovered something amusing in the situation.

"What do you two think you are? A couple of paragons! A couple of Y. M. C. A. boys? Why, instead of standing here bawling me out, you ought to be thanking me for giving you a reputation."

Higgins and Tilley did not see it from that standpoint at all. They continued to glower at him.

"Well," said the fisherman, turning to his companion, "there's nothing to argue about any further. It's just a case of who's going to lick him first."

Tilley nodded mechanically.

"I shall insist on being first," he said. "I was told first."

The Grouch roared and came within an ace of upsetting his chair.

"Going to lick me, eh?" he observed. "Taking a high moral ground, aren't you, Tilley? You're a fine specimen to climb up on a pedestal."

"What's the matter with my morals?" demanded Tilley.

"They're suspicious; that's all. Any man who makes a business of sending secret telegrams to the city about a lady ought to take a little time off and explain himself."

Tilley's jaw sagged, and his hands began to fumble each other. Higgins turned and regarded him with a surprised stare.

"What telegrams?" he demanded.

"Ah—nothing," said the naturalist.

The Grouch chuckled.

"Go ahead and explain," he urged. "Tell Higgins all about it."

"You'd better," remarked Higgins ominously. "What kind of telegrams have you been sending about Miss Dean? Who to?"

"It's—it's a personal matter," said Tilley stiffly.

"All right. You can settle that with me later," growled Higgins significantly. "So far as Miss Dean is concerned, you're out of this. You're not fit to take her part." He turned belligerently to the Grouch. "So I'm the one that's going to lick you."

But the Grouch did not yet see the necessity of rising from his chair. He eyed the fisherman calmly.

"You're another ornament for a pedestal," he sneered. "It's a cheap enough trick to go and have your picture taken with your arm around a lady's waist, but to go around displaying it afterward is nothing less than depraved."

Higgins turned a violent color.

"I never displayed it!" he cried. "I never had it taken! Where did you see it?"

The Grouch turned an accusing eye on Tilley. "Ah! So you've been showing it around, have you?" said Higgins, whirling upon his ally.

"I—I was excited," faltered the naturalist.

Higgins seemed to be undergoing a swelling process, which threatened to make him too large for the cabin.

"Sending telegrams and showing pictures," he said. "Why, you're a cur! Come outside!"

Tilley pulled himself together with dignity.

"I'm not afraid of your threats," he said. "I'll go outside when I'm ready."

"You can pull it off here, if you like," suggested the Grouch, rising and preparing to move the table. "Seems to me that's the only way to settle who's going to lick me.

"And if you'll wait a few minutes I'll send for Miss Dean. She might enjoy it."

The two gentlemen who had planned to thrash the Grouch looked uncomfortable. They exchanged malevolent looks, but did not move toward the door or offer to assist in clearing a space within the cabin.

"Glad to offer my services as referee," the Grouch added.

"Miss Dean doesn't care to witness a fight," said Tilley in a positive tone.

"You mean, she wouldn't care to see a murder," observed Higgins, with a meaning glance at the naturalist.

The Grouch decided it was not necessary to move the table. He made a gesture of disappointment and reached for another cigarette.

"It seems to me," he said, "that so long as neither of you is ready to roll around the floor, the best thing you can do is to accept the reputations I tried to give you. You're a pair of boobs if you don't.

"You'd better go back to Miss Dean and plead guilty to all these ladies on the mantel. If she gets the notion that you're a couple of uplifters, you'll be all through. I never saw a woman yet who fell in love with a human reformatory. Take my tip and try being wicked, just for a change."

The fisherman was listening stolidly, but Tilley shook his head uncertainly.

"Let a woman think you're wicked," added the Grouch, "and it's just like showing a fat young frog to a bass. You can't hold her back."

There was a gleam of interest in Higgins's eyes.

"Is that the game you're playing?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't have to play a game," an-

swered the Grouch. "I'm congenitally wicked. But you notice she came up here to look at the pictures after she heard about 'em."

He smiled satanically.

"I'm sure," said Tilley, after a thoughtful pause, "that I never claimed to anybody I was a saint."

Higgins glared at him.

"I'm going," he said, and strode out of the cabin.

As he descended the hill he muttered to himself:

"This Grouch guy is a man of the world. I'll admit that. He knows some tricks. At any rate, he doesn't seem to be in any worse than we are."

Back in the cabin, Tilley lingered in embarrassed silence. Finally he broke it himself, after a glance at the mantel.

"Where do you get pictures like that?" he asked.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TILLEY'S LETTER.

INTO the world of wickedness, at first with hesitating steps, because of the uncertainty of the way, walked Higgins and Tilley. They ventured not together, but as rivals; yet it was inevitable that their paths should cross and recross, because of the inexorable limitations of the Brundage farm.

There was so little tangible wickedness to be encountered that both fisherman and naturalist found it necessary to rely chiefly upon imagination and, as a consequence, their excursions into the haunts of sin were almost wholly confined to relation of shameless adventures in the present and immediate past.

It would have been difficult to decide which of the pair achieved the greatest progress. Higgins appeared to fall into certain paths of sin more readily than his antagonist, yet Tilley usually managed to offset this unfortunate facility on the part of the fisherman by a persistence which often carried him to the point where he gravely shocked himself.

To both, for instance, it seemed that swearing was one of the foundation-stones of attractive sin, and swearing came easier to Higgins than it did to Tilley, whose superlative oath had always been "My goodness!" until the great turning-point in his life came. Yet Tilley, by assiduous application, eventually managed to damn as many things as Higgins, and if he lacked natural fluency there was a quality of unexpectedness and explosiveness in his damning that overcame the handicap.

They had even fallen to swearing within earshot of Miss Dean and of omitting apologies.

Naturally there was a great deal of talk about their pasts, delivered into the ears of anybody who would listen, and without the usual injunctions to secrecy, so that it might be repeated to the lady of the cottage in no fear of violating confidence.

It appeared that Higgins had a wide acquaintance with chorus girls and white lights and road-houses and expensive limousines. Much of this he disclosed to Pop Brundage, sitting on the doorstep of the farmhouse after supper, where Mrs. Brundage could hear without appearing to eavesdrop.

"It's the only life for a live one," said Higgins, yawning. "But you need a constitution to stand it."

"I got the constitution, all right," observed Pop Brundage, confidentially. "Only thing bothers me is the lumbago. I'm kinda plannin' to visit the city next winter, if I don't git one o' them attacks in my back."

Mrs. Brundage compressed her lips, but affected to continue her work in the kitchen.

"You look me up when you come down," said Higgins, "and I'll put you in with a bunch who won't give you time to get lumbago."

"I reckon you'll see me," muttered pop wickedly, for such is the contagion of sin.

Later, Mrs. Brundage informed pop that he was a depraved old man, that he was not going to the city, that he would meet no iniquitous women so long as she had a say in the matter, and that he would have plenty of time to enjoy his lumbago at the farm, not only next winter, but during all the winters of his future.

Subsequently she recounted the affair to

Miss Dean, with free-hand comments on the unrighteousness of men, and she found Miss Dean sympathetic and quite agreed that it would be most unwise to permit pop to rush to his ruin among the white lights. The lady of the cottage pondered the whole affair in the seclusion of her dwelling and began to see a glimmer of understanding.

Tilley, in the course of his sinful adventuring, confided to Mame Brundage that his life at the farm was nothing but a virtuous pose. In the city, it seemed, he was known to his intimates and even in the public prints as "Champagne Gus," a title bestowed upon him not only because of admirable capacity for that vintage, but also because of his well-known generosity in opening it for the benefit of others.

Actresses, the naturalist assured Mame, traveled at a pace that was quite too slow for him; if you would attain a really exhilarating speed it was necessary to fare forth with a fast society set. He gave her to understand in so many words that it was with just such a set that he habitually consorted.

"Oh, Mr. Tilley! Oh, ain't you just dreadful!" was Mame's comment.

Yet, withal, she found a new interest in him, which eventually impelled her to consult Miss Dean about the matter. Miss Dean listened to the intimate narrative with every evidence of surprise, although she told Mame afterward that the ungodliness of men was unfortunately one of the chief ailments of modern civilization; that nearly all of them suffered from it and that few were cured.

Occasionally Higgins and Tilley approached the subject of their sinfulness in the presence of Miss Dean herself. They found a certain gloomy satisfaction when her manner betrayed that the business shocked her.

For a time neither of them reverted to his affair of the heart: each felt that it was essential, first, to establish a reputation, after which the appeal might be renewed with better chance of success.

"A man can't shut himself up in a convent," explained Higgins one day, in amelioration of his misdeeds.

"I should hope not!" said Miss Dean.

"I mean a men's convent, you understand," he added, hastily.

"He means a monastery," said Tilley, in a superior tone. "And yet I'd think I was living in one if I ran around with your crowd, Higgins."

It was a reckless speech, with delinquency sticking out all over it, and Miss Dean did not omit to gasp.

"You would, eh?" growled the fisherman, uncomfortably, with a glare at Champagne Gus. "Say, if you ever happen to meet any of my bunch you'll think you've been spending your life in a reform-school."

"Can't we change the subject?" asked Miss Dean, in distress.

They did, but the conversation presently drifted around again to the obliquity of the lives they led and Miss Dean patiently resigned herself to a series of amazing confessions.

Whenever it seemed to Tilley and Higgins that the fount of wickedness was running dry they sought the Grouch, who invariably managed to replenish it with suggestions. His mind proved to be a fertile source of sinful ideas, upon which the fisherman and the naturalist did not hesitate to draw at will.

The Grouch, in fact, devoted a good deal of his time to the matter, as soon as he perceived what was afoot, entering into it with a proper spirit and rarely failing to be ready with helpful hints.

Mame Brundage confided to her diary a great deal of this amazing self-revelation on the part of Higgins and Tilley. After the first shock was over, she found comfort in it, for it now appeared that the Grouch was a paragon by contrast and that whatever his transgressions may have been they ranked no worse than innocent mischief.

She learned that there were degrees of wickedness, and that some of them were so harmless as to merit womanly tolerance and even forgiveness. Thus, through the columns of the Daily News, brought to him by Knock Brundage whenever he signified his wish, the Grouch managed to keep fairly accurate track of the Higgins-Tilley competition and found a great deal of unholy joy in watching it.

In due course the Grouch received a let-

ter from the city, in which his business partner enclosed two reports, one dealing with John William Higgins and the other with Augustus J. Tilley.

The first report was eminently satisfactory; it contained no surprises. Higgins, it appeared, was reputable, if not prominent. He was in the business of retailing hardware. He paid his bills, could obtain any necessary credit, belonged to three fraternal societies, had lodgings in a respectable neighborhood, and was known to all his friends as a bachelor. The Grouch nodded his head as he noted the facts and tossed the report aside.

It was the second report, concerning Tilley, that gave him disturbance. This might as well have been a piece of blank paper. Nobody named Augustus J. Tilley could be located. He was neither in the directory nor the telephone-book; he was unknown among the fraternity of naturalists.

Couldn't the Grouch send something in the nature of a clue, from which a start might really be made? And what was all the fuss about, anyhow? And when was the Grouch coming back?

For answer, the Grouch scrawled a savage note to his partner, saying that anybody who couldn't locate such a person as Augustus J. Tilley was deficient in sense and energy; that he had no more clues, except that Tilley was an idiot superlative; that there wasn't any fuss about anything; and that he would come back when he was pleased and ready. After that he tore the Tilley report into shreds and tossed it into the fireplace.

"At any rate," growled he, "she can't say I didn't tip her off. Not that I care a hoot what happens, but I hate sneaks and that's what he is—a sneak. I've a good mind to open his mail."

Miss Dean, partly because of the Grouch's tip and partly because of her own observations, had a curiosity concerning Tilley that matched that of the lord of the cabin. It was also an unsatisfied curiosity.

She had, acting quite independently of the Grouch, taken a course that was identical with his, for she wrote to an elderly lawyer friend in the city concerning this mysterious naturalist, and received a reply to the effect that he did not know anything about such a person and had been unable to obtain any information. The answer came with such promptness that Miss Dean suspected a most perfunctory investigation.

Concerning Higgins she asked no questions at all; that gentleman did not sufficiently puzzle her, and it would not have interested her in the least had she known all that the Grouch knew concerning him. Higgins was reasonably transparent; but the naturalist was opaque.

As to the Grouch, she made no inquiries whatever. That gentleman she set aside for personal observation, either at her leisure or as the fancy seized her.

Meantime, wickedness continued to move at a reminiscent pace, whenever Higgins and Tilley found persons who would listen. It seemed to both that Miss Dean was somewhat softened in her attitude toward the transgressions of men, for she no longer reproached them as on that day when she reported the discovery of the Grouch's photograph-gallery—a gallery, by the way, that disappeared as mysteriously as it came.

She had ceased to chide; she even listened to the tales of the fisherman and the naturalist with a hint of tolerance, although she did not for an instant permit herself to speak a word of approval or encouragement. This placed both gentlemen in a position of uncertainty.

Each was ready to put his fortunes once more to the test as soon as it appeared that the field had been sufficiently cultivated; but neither succeeded in obtaining the necessary sign of encouragement. In fact, they appeared neither to have gained nor lost by their imaginative excursions into sin, and it was difficult to decide whether to move ahead or turn back.

In Tilley there was no change whatever until the arrival of a letter. The Grouch brought the mail up from the village, and on the way he examined this letter several times. The envelope was a plain one, however, and was tightly sealed, much to his dissatisfaction.

Notwithstanding that the temptation to open it was strong upon him, the Grouch resisted; he felt that he had not yet arrived at the point of dire necessity. But he

looked with fierce significance at Tilley as he gave him the envelope and made note of the fact that the naturalist did not open it in his presence, but thrust it into his pocket and stalked away.

It was some time later in the day that Miss Dean, strolling idly along the bank of the creek, looked across into the meadow and saw Tilley standing there. He was not far distant, but he seemed to be unaware that he was under observation.

He was reading something. There was not a hint of wickedness in his face; nothing but heavy gloom. The very droop of his figure spelled dejection. She saw him shake his head slowly at the paper he held in his hand.

Then, suddenly, he squared his shoulders with a suggestion of defiance and began tearing the paper into strips. With an angry gesture, he threw the pieces from him and made off across the meadow.

Miss Dean waited until he disappeared from sight, then walked briskly back to the bridge, crossed and went directly to the spot where she had seen the naturalist standing. She began searching for strips of paper. Much to her annoyance there was a stiff breeze across this open sweep of farm-land, and it seemed that most of the strips and disappeared.

She retrieved two and persisted for a while in her search, which finally revealed a third. As there seemed to be no prospect of further success, she began a study of what she possessed.

One strip contained two lines of typewriting, representing the end of one sentence and the beginning of another:

. . . any more fool telegrams at my expense. All but one came collect, and you may as well get the idea out of your head that you are expected . . .

The second strip contained but part of a line:

. . . not to cause any suspicion.

Miss Dean studied the third strip with much greater attention. It was more generous in its contents than the others, for it contained three lines, which said:

. . . making an idiot out of yourself. Don't lose your head. It is evident that you have entirely exceeded your instructions, and have made the mistake of trying to think for yourself. It is imperative that she . . .

This, of course, was not a satisfactory ending to Miss Dean's search, which she renewed immediately and with the utmost determination and patience. But, although she hunted down the wind as far as the meadow stretched, she found no more strips of paper.

"I ought to have done all my searching first and my reading afterward," she reflected. "If I could only have found the part with the signature!"

Finally she retreated to her cottage, where she renewed her examination of the specimens from Tilley's letter—a letter that had evidently caused him some disturbance of mind, as she could judge from the fragmentary pieces in her possession.

"'It is imperative that she—'" quoted Miss Dean, reading from the last strip of paper. "It's about me, of course; but what's imperative, and why is it, and who says so? And what has Mr. Tilley to do with it, in any event?"

She sat for a long time staring at the exhibits that lay before her, then slipped them into the drawer of the table.

"I'll know something more about him before I'm much older," she said, aloud, "if I have to be a burglar or a footpad."

And then, for the moment, all thought of Tilley and his letter was driven from her head by a vision she saw through the open doorway. The Grouch and Mame Brundage were walking together in the meadow.

"Now the world is coming to an end!" whispered Miss Dean, as she stood and stared.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HIGGINS PLAYS THE FOX.

THE letter that had engendered in Tilley such anguish of mind also served the purpose of putting an end to his wicked career. He decided that it was a time to put away the vanities of sin and to become his normal self, somber and solemn and chaste to the point of primness.

But in order to retransform himself without risk to the fortunes of his heart, he felt that it was important to reach a gentleman's agreement with the fisherman, if such a thing were possible.

He sought Higgins at the lake, whither the fisherman had gone for communion with the red-eyes and perhaps even to beg their forgiveness for a considerable period of neglect. Besides, Higgins felt himself bereft of sinful ideas and he hoped that the power of invention would return to him while he was in solitude; he often did some famous thinking when he held a rod in his hands.

"Let's call it off," said Tilley with a bluntness that was somewhat foreign to him.

"Call what off?" demanded Higgins, suspiciously.

"Well, perhaps not exactly off," amended Tilley, "but let's suspend things for a while. Call a truce; that's the idea."

"A truce about what?"

"Why—Miss Dean."

Higgins, who was casting from the shore, reeled his line deliberately and stood the rod against a tree.

"Make it plainer," he advised coldly.

"It's like this," said Tilley. "Neither one of us seems to be getting anywhere. Why can't we both stop for a while? Then, when we want to start again, we can notify each other. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Who says *neither* of us is getting anywhere? As far as I'm concerned, you can cut out that 'we.'"

"But we aren't," persisted the naturalist.

"Maybe you aren't. But don't try to talk for me. What's the idea in stopping? I'll do as I like."

"I'm speaking out of consideration for Miss Dean," said Tilley, stiffly.

"Yes, you are! You sound to me like you wanted to curl up and quit. What's the matter? Afraid you're licked?"

The naturalist favored his antagonist with a supercilious smile.

"I'll risk being licked," he retorted. "I'm just thinking about Miss Dean, I tell you. You know, all this stuff about your past and mine, and all the things we do, only seems to be bothering her and it doesn't help either one of us. It's too much of a fake."

Higgins puffed his cheeks and reddened.

"Finding out that you can't put it over, eh?" he sneered.

"Or you either," said Tilley.

"Don't be so sure," remarked the fisherman darkly. "I guess I know how to handle myself."

"No, you don't. You're just being silly. If it was true it would be different. But she knows better."

Higgins set his jaw stubbornly.

"She knows the truth when she sees it," he declared.

The naturalist permitted himself to laugh.

"The truth!" he echoed. "Why, you never knew a chorus girl in your life."

"Barrels of 'em," affirmed Higgins stoutly.

But the naturalist shook his head.

"Oh, no, Higgins. You can't make anybody believe it. You took a tip from the Grouch, that's all; and he made a fool of you."

"And where did you get your tip?" demanded Higgins.

"Same place," acknowledged Tilley, with a certain pensiveness in his effrontery. "He made fools out of both of us. That's why I say let's quit."

"Then go ahead and do your own quitting. What are you worrying about me for?"

"I'm not," said the naturalist, hastily. "But it's only fair for us to quit together. We started together, didn't we?"

The constant "we" annoyed Higgins and he made no endeavor to conceal the fact.

"You run your own affairs and let me alone," he counseled. "Maybe you think you're Miss Dean's guardian?"

Tilley swallowed, but controlled himself. He was determined not to sacrifice dignity, unless driven to the final extremity.

"I have her welfare at heart," he admitted.

"By whose authority? Hers?"

"I—I'm not going to discuss details."

Higgins laughed brutally.

"I bet you're not," he said. "There's a lot of things you can't afford to discuss. There's a picture, for instance."

The naturalist shifted his weight uneasily.

"I give you my word, Higgins, I don't

know anything about that picture. I wish I did. I just found it; that's all."

"I don't care how you came by it. It was none of your business. That's flat."

"It was the business of anybody interested in the welfare of Miss Dean," declared Tilley stubbornly.

"Listen here, little welfare worker," said the fisherman. "If you had anybody's welfare at heart you wouldn't ask 'em to marry you. You'd just leave 'em alone.

"Why, she wouldn't marry you if they put an amendment in the constitution that said she had to. She wouldn't do it if it was international law. That's where you get off with Miss Dean."

"Well, she won't marry you, either," responded Tilley. "She told me so."

"What?"

"She said there wasn't anybody else."

"Oh," said Higgins in a relieved voice. "They all say that. It's part of letting you down easy. It doesn't signify anything at all. It's just like the way you get rid of a book-agent."

Tilley meditated a reply, but realized that they were drifting far from the matter in hand.

"Let's get back to where we started," he said. "Will you call it off?"

"You mean the wickedness?"

Tilley nodded.

"A man can't change his nature," said Higgins oracularly.

There was a raucous laugh from the naturalist.

"I won't agree to call anything off," added Higgins.

"But I'll be doing the same thing. So it's fair for both."

"Don't trust you, Tilley. You're too anxious. I think you've got a cold deck up your sleeve, or else I've got you worried.

"You go your way and I'll travel mine. I'm going to use my own judgment."

The naturalist pondered this for a while, and then shook his head with slow insistence.

"I've made you a fair offer," he said. "I tried to appeal to your better sense, but I guess you haven't got any. So there's only one thing I can do: I've just got to order you to keep away from Miss Dean."

It was an appalling speech for Tilley to make; he realized it himself. But he felt that things had come to a desperate pass and he was therefore prepared to take his courage in both hands.

The peremptory order had an effect upon Higgins that might have been expected. He purpled and became rigid.

"Order me!" he shouted.

"Order you," repeated Tilley as calmly as possible.

"Who gave you the right to give orders? Hey?"

"I take the right. I hold myself responsible for the future of Miss Dean."

The naturalist straightened his figure as he said this and regarded the fisherman with an inexorable eye.

"Responsible! Future!" cried Higgins. "Why, you big idiot, you talk as if you owned her!"

"No. But I have the interest that one dear friend takes in another."

The "dear friend" speech was not soothing to the ears of the fisherman. He glowered and gurgled and clenched his big fists.

"She doesn't need anybody to take care of her future," he avowed, explosively. "unless—unless she wants to choose somebody. Don't you go around trying to bully her—or me, either. I won't stand for it.

"You're not the proprietor. I'll do whatever I see fit, and if you happen to get in front of me I'll stick you on a pin and chloroform you. Neither you nor the Grouch nor anybody else can tell me what to do. Understand?"

"Oh, I heard you," sneered Tilley. "But you've got your orders, just the same."

Higgins moved closer, feeling that the time for words was nearly at an end. The naturalist stood his ground.

"Just give me those orders again," said Higgins ominously.

"I don't need to," was the diplomatic response. "You know what they are. Just see that you obey them."

The fisherman glared steadily for several seconds. Then he suddenly changed his mind about something. With an abrupt movement, he turned away and rushed over to the shack, where his hat was hanging on a peg alongside the door.

Seizing it, he clapped it on his head and started off along the path through the woods. Tilley stood by the edge of the lake, looking after him.

It was some fifteen minutes later that Higgins encountered Miss Dean, returning from a walk to the spring. He was seeking her with the utmost determination.

"Oh, hello!" she said. "You're quite out of breath."

"I want to know if Tilley is responsible for your future," he demanded without preface.

"For my future?"

"I want to know if he's your dear friend."

"Why, how funny, Mr. Higgins!"

"I want to know if he's got any authority to give orders about you."

Miss Dean was very plainly astonished and made no attempt at concealment.

"I don't think I understand what you're talking about," she said. "I'm sure I don't."

"Thought so!" exclaimed Higgins triumphantly. "Knew you wouldn't!"

"Suppose you explain," she suggested. "It's not clear yet, Mr. Higgins. It sounds as if you'd left off the beginning of something."

"I was absolutely certain you wouldn't know anything about it," he declared with a vigorous gesture.

"And you're absolutely right," she assured him. "I don't. I'm completely surrounded by fog. I'd be glad if you'd explain."

"Well, he told me he held himself responsible for your future," said Higgins, in a calmer tone.

"Perhaps he does, then. But I didn't know it, Mr. Higgins. Truly, I didn't."

"But is he?"

Miss Dean became thoughtful — she studied the fisherman with her calm, dark eyes.

"I suppose you mean to ask if I intrusted him with the responsibility?"

"That's it."

"I wouldn't think of asking anybody to shoulder that," she said. "It would be too much."

"No, it wouldn't."

"That's kind of you, Mr. Higgins. I think it's a very pretty speech. But I'm still certain that I wouldn't expect anybody to be responsible for me. Of course, if anybody wanted to volunteer—"

"Then he is!" groaned Higgins.

"Oh, I didn't say so. What I meant was, if anybody wanted to volunteer, how could I help it? I might try to discourage it: I might explain that it wouldn't do a bit of good. But I don't see just how I could stop it."

"He gave me orders to keep away from you."

"How odd, Mr. Higgins. But you seem to be disobeying."

"Who wouldn't?"

"Another nice speech. You say those things rather well. Are you aware of it?"

The fisherman ignored the digression.

"He wanted to call a truce, but I wouldn't have it," he declared. "He offered to keep away from you if I would."

"How extraordinary!"

Miss Dean was stalling. She was greatly mystified by these disclosures concerning Tilley and she was considering them as well as the excited mood of her companion would permit.

Just why the naturalist had decided that both of them ought to avoid her she could not imagine; it was a change in tactics utterly unexpected. The torn letter suggested itself as a possible explanation, but she lacked sufficient facts to form the basis of a satisfactory conclusion.

"Well, I'm not going to keep away from you," announced Higgins, with finality.

"I'm very glad to hear it, Mr. Higgins."

"And you don't take any orders from him, do you?"

"I haven't yet," she said cautiously.

"Or from anybody?"

Her eyes narrowed slightly and a smile flashed swiftly, to be gone as quickly as it came.

"I think perhaps that's my trouble," she said. "I don't take orders from anybody. I'm not a good soldier."

"Don't ever take 'em," he advised. "Why, I wouldn't think of giving you orders, Miss Dean."

"I feel sure of it."

"I—I'd just let you do as you please all the time. Yes, I would. You could have anything you wanted."

"And probably that would be very bad for me."

"No, it wouldn't. You've got sense: you're reasonable. Why, we'd never have a fight or an argument or—"

She looked up at him appealingly.

"You're proposing again, Mr. Higgins. You mustn't. Besides, it's Friday, and I'm superstitious."

Higgins sighed.

"I suppose I'll have to wait awhile longer," he said. "I'll try not to bother you about it, but I'm not going to let go. And say, Miss Dean, you know all that stuff about—about my being a little bit wild?"

She nodded.

"Well, there's nothing in it!" he whispered hoarsely.

She regarded him in surprise.

"Not a word of truth, Miss Dean. I was just fooling about it. Just having a little fun."

"Oh!"

"I don't claim to be a Sunday-school teacher," he confided, "but I've got some old-fashioned notions about things. You'll never have anything to complain of me on that score.

"I'll tell you something more: I never knew a chorus girl in my life."

He left her abruptly, believing that she would require time to adjust herself to this new order of things. As he took the path in the direction of the lake he smiled wisely to himself.

"A truce, eh?" he muttered. "Truce nothing! Now let Tilley go ahead being wicked, if he wants to. I'm out from under, but he doesn't need to know it.

"That boob 'll keep right on till he ruins himself."

CHAPTER XXX.

BAD NEWS FOR MAME.

HAVING read the last edition of the Daily News, the Grouch closed the book and sat thoughtfully for several minutes. Then he called Knock Brundage, who was just outside the door, throwing stones at a catbird in a near-by tree.

"Here," said the Grouch, handing him the book, "and listen to what I tell you."

Knock received the sacred volume.

"I don't want you to take this back to the usual place," the Grouch told him. "I want you to leave it in Miss Dean's cottage. But first you must make sure that she is not there. Understand? If she's in, just wait until you get another chance."

"Ain't Mame never goin' to get it again?" asked Knock.

"Don't ask questions, but do what I say. And be careful how you do it. If Mame asks you anything about the book, you don't know anything. The same with Miss Dean. After you leave this book in the cottage you forget that you ever saw it."

Knock gave him a doubtful nod.

"How'm I goin' to forget?" he asked.

"By not thinking about it and not talking about it. It's easy enough."

"Gee, I dremt about it once."

"Quit that, too. It 'll be unhealthy for you if you're ever caught knowing anything about it. Hurry along, now. I won't need you for the rest of the day."

"Do I get paid just the same?" asked Knock suspiciously.

"Just the same. I'm giving you a vacation."

Knock slipped the book inside his shirt, for safety in case he encountered Mame, and went to carry out the bidding of the Grouch.

His bare feet made no noise as he ascended the steps and crossed the porch of the cottage. The door stood open and he made a quick survey of the living-room. There was nobody within.

Boldly, therefore, he entered, fished the book from its hiding-place and laid it on the table. He was retreating when Miss Dean stepped out from the bedroom.

"Good morning, Knock," she said. "Are you looking for me?"

"No, ma'am," he said hastily, accelerating his retreat.

"Oh, wait a moment, please. I had an idea you brought something." She glanced at the object on the table. "Did you bring that?"

"I forget," said Knock.

Miss Dean smiled, but held him steady with her glance.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I—I don't know nothin' about it," he answered, shaking his head.

"Knock, I'm ashamed of you. You're telling lies; I can see inside of your head."

He was doing his best to obey the Grouch's instructions, but this was discouraging. What was the use of trying to forget something when somebody else could look right into your head and see it there?

"I got to go," he said.

"Who told you to bring this?" she asked, picking up the diary in its oilcloth cover.

"I—I can't remember."

"Knock!"

"I'm paid not to," he said desperately.

"Oh. Well, that's different, of course."

Miss Dean walked over to the mantel and picked up her purse. Knock, who had turned to resume his exit, noted her movement and halted again. His excellent eyes observed that she held a quarter in her fingers.

"Who did you say told you to bring it?" she asked.

"You won't never say I told you?"

"I promise."

"Cross your heart?" —

She crossed it.

"Mr. March!" he whispered, in a loud tone.

Miss Dean tossed the quarter. He caught it and was gone.

"Now to see what it's about," she murmured, as she unwrapped the oilcloth and brought the Daily News to view.

Choosing the rocker, Miss Dean settled herself in a comfortable post and opened the book. For a long time after that she sat quietly, making no movement except to turn a page every few minutes. Occasionally she smiled; once she frowned. But for the most part she studied the diary of Mame Brundage with no outward evidence of emotion. The concluding passage, which represented the "last edition," she read three times:

Well he has changed at last and I am happy again. I new that he had a better nature. Yesterday he drove me down to the vilage and today I been walking with him. At last he has begun to understand what I mean to him. All my dreams are comeing true. He does not scold me any more and say cruel words to me. Deep in his hart he is thinking of me. He took me by the arm to help me acrost a rock and I felt one of those thrils that comes to every woman when she knows that she is being loved by somebody. We walked right near the cotage where she coud see us if she was looking the cat. I need not fear her now for she can never hope to be my rivle. I think he will ask me soon. Thats why he is staying around here so long. O what will my parents say when they lern that their daughter is going away to live in the city as the wife of one who is so good and nobel. He hasent asked me yet but that is what I will be. When one knows down in ones hart one never can be wrong. I wonder when I will dare call him David. I guess it woud not be ladylike untill after he asks me for my hands wich he can have.

Miss Dean laid aside the book, arose from the rocker and walked the length of the sitting-room. The "last edition" had not brought a smile to her lips.

On the contrary, there was a slight corrugation of her usually smooth forehead and a grave look in her eyes. She stood for a while, looking out of the window, then turned with an abrupt movement.

"The idiot!" she exclaimed.

It took but a moment to choose a hat and a parasol and thus accoutred, with Mame's diary under her arm, she set forth from the cottage.

Mrs. Brundage said that Mame was out in the wash-house, engaged with the weekly laundry, and thither Miss Dean made her way. She found the object of her search sighing over a tub.

"Oh, my! You here?" exclaimed Mame, not too cordially, for she was in a state of partial dishevelment.

"Yes; I came to have a little talk," said Miss Dean.

Mame's glance, always quick to survey the details of a costume, came to a rest upon the object that was tucked under the visitor's arm. Her eyes were round and startled, and there was a sudden flush in her sallow cheeks.

Her knees shook. She raised a hand quickly to her breast.

"Yes; it's about this," observed Miss Dean, nodding, as she held forth the Daily News.

Mame snatched it with a cry and clasped it in her arms. And then anger flooded her soul.

"You—you stole it!" she exclaimed.

"No; I didn't steal it, Marigold. I found it."

"You've been follerin' me!"

"No; not that," said Miss Dean with a faint smile. "I found it in the cottage."

"In the cottage! Who — who put it there?"

"That I cannot tell you. It's not important, however. The main thing is, I found it."

Mame nursed the diary against her breast and regarded the cottage lady with pale and malevolent eyes.

"Did—did you read it?" she asked, in a voice of horror.

"Almost all of it, Marigold."

A groan escaped the author of the Daily News. Then rage became uppermost again.

"Shame on you!" she cried. "It's private; it's mine! It's—it's— Oh, how awful of you to read it! And I thought you were a lady! Oh, merciful Heavens!"

Miss Dean calmly waited for the storm to subside.

"Ordinarily I shouldn't have read it, after I discovered what it was," she said. "But because of certain passages it contains I thought it necessary to examine it quite thoroughly, which I did.

"And I think the result will be of benefit to you. As to the contents of it, you need not fear that I shall discuss them with anybody else."

"I guess you wouldn't!" exclaimed Mame. "But that don't excuse you for readin' it. You had no right! I—I suppose you've been readin' what I said about you?"

"Yes; I read that."

"Then I guess you found out that listeners never hear good of themselves."

"That's true," assented Miss Dean with a smile. "But I didn't come to talk to you about what you said concerning me. I'm not interested."

"Maybe you don't like what I said about Mr. Tilley and Mr. Higgins," observed Mame, with a studied sneer.

"I'm not interested in that, either, Marigold."

Mame was turning pale again. She clutched the book still more tightly.

"You mean Mr.—Mr.—"

"I mean chiefly what you say about yourself," said Miss Dean. "That's the most interesting and important part of it."

"How do you mean?" demanded Mame, suspicious.

"It appears, Marigold, that you are headed in a very foolish direction. I want to give you a little advice. Being older, that's my privilege."

"I guess I don't need advice from you."

"You need it from somebody," observed Miss Dean quietly. "So I'm going to give it to you. It's evident, not only from your book but from what I have noticed myself, that you are infatuated with Mr. March."

Mame's eyes began to blaze again. Her thin figure stiffened into rigidity and the stoop came out of her shoulders.

"I got a right to be," she exclaimed. "I love him! There!"

"Good. I see we can talk frankly. You're in love with Mr. March. Very well. Then this is my advice: keep away from him."

Mame leaned back against the washtub, defiant and triumphant.

"Jealous!" was the word she flung in return.

Miss Dean smiled patiently.

"Just jealous," repeated Mame. "You want him for yourself!"

The lady of the cottage laughed pleasantly.

"Be easy, Marigold. If I wanted him I'd go and get him."

Mame gasped in horror.

"I—I believe you would! You're that kind!" she cried.

"I am," assented Miss Dean frankly. "I'd certainly go and get him. But you need have no worry on that score.

"The reason I'm advising you to keep away from Mr. March is to save you from getting yourself into trouble. I'm looking at it from your standpoint."

"I guess I can take care of myself," said Mame haughtily.

"That's just it; you can't. You're very badly in need of advice."

"What's the matter with Mr. March?"

"He's not the man for you; that's all. He may be only amusing himself with you, of course; but that's rather dangerous for you, Marigold."

Mame flared in defense of the Grouch.

"He's an elegant gentleman," she declared vehemently. "He's good and he's kind and he's got refined ways about him. You needn't think just because you're from the city that he ain't goin' to look at anybody else."

"He may be all that you say," agreed Miss Dean, who maintained her annoying calm. "But even at that, his path and yours are wide apart."

"But they're gettin' closer."

"No; the paths are not closer. It's simply that you've stepped off yours. It will be safer for you to get back again. Mr. March is not at all the type for you, Marigold."

"Jealous!" hissed Mame.

"I'm trying to do you a little service," said Miss Dean with a sigh. "You persist in getting away from the point entirely. Now, it happens that I've learned certain things about Mr. March and that's why I'm advising you."

"You've been spyin' on him?"

"It's not material how I got my information. I simply have it; that's all. And besides, there are so many things you can observe for yourself. Do you believe you could be happy with a man who has a temper like Mr. March's?"

"His temper's changed," said Mame. "He's—he's sweet to me now. I suppose you read that in the book, too."

"Yes; I read it. When a man with a grouch becomes sweet, watch him. He needs it. Another matter you may have observed for yourself was the collection of photographs in his room."

"Huh! They didn't mean anything. Besides, he got 'em from Mr. Tilley and Mr. Higgins."

"Who both deny it," said Miss Dean. "And then has it occurred to you that Mr. March is somewhat old for you?"

"He ain't old! And it wouldn't make any difference if he was. When one loves one doesn't care how old anybody is."

"Has it occurred to you that his interests and his tastes are quite different from your own?"

Mame studied her antagonist with calculating eyes.

"Say!" she exclaimed. "You *are* jealous, ain't you? It won't do you a bit of good to stand there and try to run down Mr. March. I guess I know a nature's nobleman when I see him.

"I haven't always been up here 'round the farm. I've been down to Hurleyville and I've seen things. I know what I'm doin'. You just keep out of my affairs."

Miss Dean refused to become ruffled. She even smiled.

"Just because you've got a lot of clothes," continued Mame, emboldened, "don't make you any better than some other people. I guess I'll be havin' clothes some day. Just because you're wearin' your Sunday stockin's every day in the week you needn't think you can come round givin' me advice about how to behave.

"Huh! I guess I could say some things about the way you're behavin' with Mr. Higgins and Mr. Tilley. I believe you're just breakin' your neck to marry one of 'em."

"I dare say my behavior is disgraceful," assented Miss Dean. "But I've decided not to marry either one of them. I've refused them both."

Mame's eyes widened. How was it that a vampire could thus bring men to her feet, while a sweet and shy maiden encountered the most appalling obstacles? It wasn't fair, she told herself.

"But that's again getting away from the point," added Miss Dean. "I still advise you, in the light of my information, to beware of Mr. March."

"You haven't given me any information that I don't know," retorted Mame. "Somebody's been lyin' to you. That's the way people do when they're tryin' to break up an affair."

Miss Dean shrugged and sighed.

"Well, Marigold, it appears that you're not satisfied to take a woman's advice. Evidently you insist on details. I'm sorry, because I wanted to spare you."

Mame was alert and suspicious again.

"What details!" she asked.

"Oh, there are a number. But probably one will be sufficient. Nevertheless, it's better for you not to insist on it."

"Is it about Mr. March?" demanded Mame.

Miss Dean nodded.

"Then I insist," said Mame stiffly. "Go ahead and tell your awful lies. He's got one party who'll defend him."

"I'm not so certain," observed Miss Dean. "It's a rather difficult thing to defend, you see."

"You go ahead and tell it," challenged Mame. "I ain't scared."

"Remember, Marigold, that you asked me for it."

"You go ahead and say it. I guess I ain't the kind that's goin' to get upset over things."

"Very well," said Miss Dean, nodding. "Then this is what I think you ought to know: I have reason to believe that Mr. March is a married man."

Mame dropped the diary. Her face went as white as the suds in the washtub. She stared at Miss Dean with terror in her eyes. She groped at the air with both hands. She shrieked.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MARRIED!

MISS DEAN waited with great patience for the paroxysm of Mame to pass. It surprised her agreeably that it was not attended with fainting, for she had little sympathy for weak sisterhood and, remembering the flash-light in the woods, she knew that Mame constituted a very ungraceful burden in a swoon.

No, Mame did not faint. But she became for the moment inarticulate, so far as words were concerned, being able only to emit short shrieks, after the first long one, and to make a gurgling noise in her throat in between the shrieks.

She remained alarmingly white, but she kept her feet; and although she swayed somewhat, it was from emotion rather than weakness. All the while she favored Miss Dean with a stare that was wild and vacant.

"M-m-m—" she began. "M—"

"Yes, married," said Miss Dean.

"Oh, my Heaven! Oh, my heart! M-married!"

The lady of the cottage nodded.

"I'm undone; I'm undone!" moaned Mame, rocking now from side to side. "You've—you've blasted my life."

"Oh, no," said Miss Dean soothingly. "I've only stopped the blast from going off. I cut the fuse. It seemed necessary."

"And the only man I ever loved!" said Mame miserably. "He deceived me."

"Cheer up. Most of them do, Marigold."

Mame had begun to weep, which caused her to make unpleasant sniffling noises.

"I—I'll die; I know I'll die," she mumbled thickly. "I'll go into a decline."

"Nonsense," said Miss Dean.

Mame looked up at her with sudden fierceness.

"I guess I know when I'm goin' into a decline," she snapped. "I *will* go into one."

"Oh, by all means, Marigold, if you wish it. I didn't understand. I thought you were alarmed at the prospect."

The outburst had the effect of rallying Mame from her condition of wo. She measured Miss Dean with a long glance and then squared her own shoulders.

"I don't believe a word of it!" she exclaimed.

"I'm sorry, then."

"Who told you he was married?"

"It's not necessary for me to give you the source of my information. I've simply told you the fact."

Mame shook her head and a harsh laugh escaped her.

"Don't believe it," she reiterated. "It ain't true. It can't be true. He'd have told me if it was true. It's all a lie; I don't care who says it.

"He's too good and noble and kind to—to be married. He's a gentleman. I guess I know more about him than you do. Married! I say he *ain't!*"

"Suppose you ask him," suggested Miss Dean.

"I'll do it!"

Mame took off her apron and rolled down her sleeves, displaying a determination in these simple acts that was in complete harmony with her mood.

"Come on," she said.

"It won't be necessary for me to come, Marigold."

"Oh, yes, it will," declared Mame. "You're comin'. Are you gettin' scared to come?"

"No, I don't think it's exactly that," said Miss Dean. "But as the interview may be somewhat painful I imagine you'd rather not have a third person present."

Mame shook her head decisively.

"You're comin'," she said. "You did the accusin'. You're carryin' around this awful story. Now you're agoin' to hear him deny it. And you're goin' to apologize!"

"Very well," remarked Miss Dean with a shrug, "let's go."

So from the wash-house they crossed the yard into the orchard, and beyond the orchard they climbed the hill to the cabin. Mame was always in the lead, moving swiftly with her loose stride. Miss Dean had never seen her in such a mood of resolution.

Without pausing to knock, Mame entered the cabin.

"Come in here!" she said peremptorily, beckoning to Miss Dean, who had paused at the threshold.

Miss Dean entered.

The Grouch, who had been fussing with some articles on his dresser, turned and regarded them with an expectant stare.

"Now, say it again!" ordered Mame, who appeared to have taken complete command of the affair.

Miss Dean glanced at her and merely smiled.

"Say it!"

"I've nothing more to say, Marigold. I'll let you do the talking."

Mame turned to the Grouch triumphantly.

"There!" she exclaimed. "See how it is? She's afraid to say it. She only says it behind your back."

The Grouch was very plainly mystified, and he also seemed to be annoyed at this interruption of his solitude.

"What's all this about?" he asked sharply.

"It's about you," said Mame, with a scornful look at her companion. "She's been sayin' things about you. So I made her come up here, and she's goin' to apologize.

"She's tellin' lies about you, and I won't have it; that's what. She's tryin' to reflect on your character. And now she don't dare say it herself."

In truth, Miss Dean wore a strangely meek look. Perhaps this was an effect of comparison, for Mame Brundage fairly towered over her and looked formidable in her wrath.

The attitude of the lady of the cottage was passive. She stood toying with her parasol, eying the Grouch furtively.

"Well, then, you say it," ordered the Grouch irritably as he glanced at Mame. "Don't stand there hemming and hawing."

Mame ignored his manner.

"All right; I'll say it," she declared with a short laugh. "Only it sounds so silly. It's so awful ridiculous. She told me I better keep away from you because—"

She paused for another glance of derision at Miss Dean.

"Because you're a married man!"

The Grouch regarded Miss Dean thoughtfully, and she returned his scrutiny with entire composure. He appeared to have forgotten Mame entirely; in fact, he did not seem to be keenly conscious of the presence of anybody. His manner was somewhat abstracted.

"Did you ever hear anything so ridiculous?" demanded Mame.

The Grouch turned slowly and transferred his gaze.

"How's that!" he asked.

"I say it's so ridiculous. Ain't it? Goin' 'round sayin' that you're married. Huh! Some people 'll say anything."

The Grouch mechanically reached for a cigarette and lighted it. His bearing was one of singular indifference.

"Now you can see the kind of lies that people who are jealous 'll tell about you," added Mame.

Miss Dean looked up at her with mild eyes.

"Why don't you ask him if it's true, Marigold?" she suggested.

Mame blazed scorn at her for a second or two and then turned to the Grouch with a confident laugh.

"Hear what she says, Mr. March? She wants me to ask you if you're married. That's what one would call a scream, I think. Don't you? Married! Ain't it silly?

"But I'll ask it, since she's scared to ask it herself. Are you married, Mr. March?"

Mame asked it with a smirk and a giggle, for now she was the complete mistress of her emotions.

The Grouch looked at Miss Dean steadily, then transferred his gaze to Mame. He exhaled a thin blue cloud of smoke and watched it dissolve.

"Yes, I'm married," he said.

There was a sudden din in the cabin. Mame, her body rigid, her thin hands clenched, her face upraised toward the ceiling, was yelling like a coyote. It was a very wild sort of yelling, just a series of purposeless and ear-threatening shrieks, mingled with high-pitched bursts of laughter.

The marvel of it was the lung power hidden behind her flat breast. She yelled, and yelled, and yelled.

"Shut the door!" said Miss Dean authoritatively, with a nod to the Grouch. "She'll be heard at the village."

He obeyed on the instant, while Miss Dean walked over to Mame, seized her by an arm and led her to the rocker, into which she firmly pushed her. During all this the screaming continued.

"Get a glass of water," commanded Miss Dean.

The Grouch hastened to get it. He was swearing volubly under his breath. Miss Dean took the glass from his hand and dashed the contents in Mame's face.

The yelling ceased abruptly, to be succeeded by a gasping and choking. Then the laughter came again.

"Another glass of water! Don't be so slow!"

The Grouch obeyed again. As he handed the glass to Miss Dean he growled:

"You started this!"

"Yes; and I'm going to stop it, too."

A second deluge struck Mame full in the face, and the laughter ended in a sputtering. Miss Dean put aside the glass, seized her by the shoulders, and shook her sharply.

"Now don't start again," she warned. "Don't be absurd. You can't have hysterics here."

Mame sat and blinked at her. Suddenly she began to whimper, and soon she reached the dignity of a full-blown crying spell.

"She's all right now," said Miss Dean, stepping away.

"Bellowing like that!" cried the Grouch.

"Certainly. Do you want her to start laughing again?"

"The Lord forbid!"

They stood aside, while Mame did her weeping unmolested. Miss Dean, capable and calm, eyed the Grouch. He did not flinch from the scrutiny. There was a quality of deliberate calculation in the look that each bestowed upon the other.

"Fine mess you've made of it," he said in a low voice.

"I think I've done excellently."

"You started a riot."

"Merely brought it to a climax," she corrected. "In good time, too."

She glanced again at Mame, whose sobbing had become more measured.

"Suppose anybody else heard her?" he asked uneasily.

"I dare say they heard her as far as Hurleyville."

At the sound of a familiar word Mame roused herself, wiped her eyes, and glanced up.

"Feeling better?" asked Miss Dean.

"I'm ruined!" said Mame in a choking voice.

"She's coming along all right," affirmed Miss Dean, with a nod at the Grouch.

Mame rolled her head from side to side, then steadied it, and stared at her heart's idol.

"You're married!" she moaned.

"Of course."

"You—you deceived me."

"Never did anything of the kind," he answered sharply. "You never asked me."

"You let me think that you loved me."

"Damnation! I never did anything of the kind."

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" whimpered Mame.

Miss Dean walked over to the table and began turning the leaves of a book. There was no further work for her to do.

"Why—why didn't you tell me?"

"Because it was none of your business," declared the Grouch. His voice was resuming its normal edge.

"My life is over," Mame groaned, after a pause.

"Stop piffling!"

"I want to go away and die."

"All right. I'm in favor of it."

His manner of speech was rallying her; it was soothing to find him once more in a natural mood.

"You're—you're happy in your married life?" asked Mame fearfully.

The Grouch scowled at her.

"I act like it—don't I?" he demanded.

"Then you're not happy?"

He gestured fiercely and helped himself to another cigarette. Mame wiped her eyes again and sat a little straighter. Through the clouds she seemed to see a glimmer.

"You—you ain't got the right kind of a wife?" she ventured.

"I've got a devil."

Mame breathed more easily.

"I knew there was something wrong," she said slowly. "I knew you wasn't happy. You're—you're livin' with her?"

"No, thank Heaven!"

Mame sighed. She was beginning to feel comfortable again. A glance toward Miss Dean showed her that that lady was still turning the leaves of the book.

"I don't know as I blame you any," said Mame softly. "There's a lot of things I can understand now. I knew there was something bowin' you down. It was noble of you to keep on sufferin' in silence.

"No, indeed; I'm not blamin' you. I think you took a perfectly grand attitude. You've got to be brave to suffer and not tell. Are—are you gettin' a divorce?"

"Looks like it," he said.

Mame smoothed her skirt and dabbed at the wet spots on her waist. She put her hands to her hair and rearranged straggling wisps. She wondered if her eyes were red.

"How soon you expectin' it, Mr. March?"

"As soon as she'll go and get it."

Mame glanced toward Miss Dean. Once more there was a hint of triumph in her eyes.

"See?" she said. "It's just the same as if he wasn't married. He's goin' to be divorced. I guess you ain't so right, after all. He's married to a wicked woman."

Miss Dean put aside the book and rejoined the group.

"I've an idea," she said, "from what I learn, that Mr. March's wife is a fairly reasonable sort."

"A devil!" exclaimed the Grouch, glaring at her.

"Yes," echoed Mame.

"Possibly; in some ways," assented Miss Dean, smiling. "But there are some rather decent devils, you know. Of course, they shouldn't make the mistake of marrying nature's noblemen. But that shows they're human."

The Grouch winced.

"Of course, I blame her," continued the lady of the cottage, "for ever marrying Mr. March. She couldn't have had good sense. It's because of that, I imagine, that I am given to understand she will not permit him to obtain a divorce."

"What?" cried Mame, leaning forward in the rocker.

"That's my understanding," said Miss Dean. "Of course, I'm sorry for you, Marigold; but that appears to be the outlook."

Mame was groaning again, and the Grouch scowled.

"Don't throw any more fits here," he warned. "I've had enough of it. You'd better clear out."

He glanced at Miss Dean. "Yes! both of you."

"You've—you've been spyin' on him," said Mame contemptuously to the cottage lady. "I believe you're a detective."

Miss Dean did not answer the accusation; she was moving toward the door.

"Spy!" hissed Mame. "Do your worst. I guess I ain't afraid of you. And—and I guess Mr. March 'll get a divorce if he wants one."

The door opened before Miss Dean reached it, and John William Higgins, much out of breath, rushed in, closely followed by Augustus J. Tilley.

"Who's—who's dead?" gasped the fisherman.

"Nobody—yet," said the Grouch significantly. "What's the row?"

"Heard there was a murder. Knock told us," panted Higgins. "He said somebody up here was yelling for help."

The Grouch threw his arms wide and swore without stint.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SHOW-DOWN.

FOR a short time there was silence in the cabin. Its five occupants spent the interval in an exchange of glances. Miss Dean, with every semblance of calm, had resumed her place near the table. Mame still occupied the rocker, her mind busied with the problem as to what measure of hope might be derived from the conjugal unhappiness of the Grouch. She could be certain of nothing, but her spirits were distinctly better.

The Grouch stood with his back to the mantel, his legs spread wide and his hands in his pockets. Higgins and Tilley were side by side, near the door, recovering breath with as much expedition as possible.

"Well, are you satisfied there hasn't been a murder?" demanded the Grouch.

"Then what's the trouble, anyhow?" asked Tilley.

"We demand to know," said Higgins.

Both gentlemen cast glances at Miss Dean that were intended to assure her of protection; but she was not looking at them.

Mame Brundage raised an angular arm and pointed unhesitatingly at the lady of the cottage.

"There's the one that's made all the trouble," she said.

Miss Dean smiled faintly, but did not avail herself of the opportunity to reply.

"She's tryin' to make us all unhappy," continued Mame bitterly. "Particularly me. But she ain't goin' to be able to carry it out. He and his wife don't get along, anyhow, and there's goin' to be a divorce."

Higgins and Tilley blinked dully.

"Whose wife? What are you talking about?" demanded the fisherman.

"Mr. March's wife," said Mame.

"Wife!" exclaimed Higgins.

"Divorce!" cried Tilley.

They stared at the Grouch, who answered with a contemptuous scowl, a part of which he also bestowed upon Miss Dean.

"You mean to tell this man is married?" said Higgins.

"Married, but not livin' with her," explained Mame. "It's all her fault. She's a devil."

Higgins eyed the Grouch with wonder and then with swiftly rising indignation.

"So you're married, eh?" he said. "Well, this is a fine state of affairs. You ought to be taken out and horsewhipped. Where's your wife? Deserted, I suppose—the poor woman.

"What are you doing up here? Hiding? I suppose there's a warrant of some kind out for you and you're dodging it. Going around posing as a single man, too."

"Have I done any posing?" demanded the Grouch sharply.

"Posing as a single man," repeated Higgins. "That's what you've been doing. Deceiving everybody. Deceiving that poor girl over there. Deceiving Miss Dean. Deceiving me. Running away from your wife. and then trying to find somebody else's heart to break."

"But his wife ought to be run away from," interrupted Mame. "It's as good as all over between them, anyhow; isn't it, Mr. March?"

"Oh, shut up!" advised the Grouch.

"You're a suspicious character," resumed Higgins, addressing himself once more to the deceiver. "I always knew there was something wrong about you. You're a fugitive; I'll bet any amount you are."

"Take you for five hundred," said the Grouch quickly.

Higgins, remembering a previous bet, flushed, but did not respond to the challenge. Miss Dean, to whom nobody was paying any attention for the moment, bit her lip as she glanced at the Grouch.

"Yes, sir; you're a *Lothario*," declared Tilley, wedging his way into the conversation.

The Grouch guffawed.

"You can't deny it," said the naturalist

warmly. "Look at all those pictures you had! And what the women wrote on them! And all the time you have a wife and children."

"Children?" echoed Mame, rising suddenly from the rocker and turning to the Grouch. "You got children, too?"

"Oh, let him rave!" said the Grouch with a careless gesture.

The introduction of a family as well as a wife was a mere inadvertence of speech on the part of Tilley. He was entirely without information on the point, but now that he had blurted the assertion it began to assume, in his own mind, great plausibility. Besides, the Grouch had not denied it.

"Who found out he was married, anyhow?" asked Higgins.

Mame pointed at Miss Dean.

"Has he got children, too?" demanded Higgins.

"My information does not cover that point," answered Miss Dean quietly.

"Well, have you?" thundered the fisherman, addressing himself to the Grouch.

The Grouch merely grinned.

"See! He doesn't deny it!" cried Tilley in triumph. "He's deserted his wife and every one of his children."

Mame stirred uneasily. "Every one" sounded sinister. If there were any children at all, she hoped they were not too numerous. The problem of being a stepmother was new and somewhat appalling.

"Honest, Mr. March, have you got a family?" she asked tremulously.

"More than I want," he growled.

"He admits it!" said the naturalist. "He leaves a wife and a lot of little girls and boys in need while he comes up here and tries his wiles on innocent and respectable people. He's an unspeakable deceiver."

"A villain and a lawbreaker," affirmed Higgins. "Look at him standing there, with a lot of starving mouths to feed, and all he does is grin."

It was true that the Grouch was grinning again and displaying every evidence of a stony heart.

"I'd hate to be a child of his," said Tilley scornfully.

Mame Brundage whirled upon the naturalist and thrust out her jaw in a truculent fashion.

"There ain't any danger," she snapped. "If you were a child of his, you'd be diff'rent from what you are — you old snoop!"

"Snoop!" repeated Tilley mechanically.

"Yes, snoop! If you had a father like him you'd be good and kind and brave, and you wouldn't be feeble-minded and run around catchin' bugs. You're always snoopin' and sneakin' and tryin' to make trouble for folks.

"You just let Mr. March alone. If he ain't happy in his family life, it ain't his fault. There's lots of people ain't.

"There's a family down to Hurleyville that's that way. Just because one hasn't made a good choice doesn't make one a wicked man, does it? He ain't to blame if his wife drove him out. He ain't to blame if there's goin' to be a divorce. So you just mind your own business, and don't come snoopin' around."

Tilley swallowed several times, quite overwhelmed by the surprise of the attack. He was also aware of the fact that the fisherman was regarding him attentively.

"You are a kind of a snoop," observed Higgins thoughtfully.

"Sir!"

"Running around with photographs of other people and things like that. There's something queer about you, all right. I noticed it from the start. You'd better keep out of this."

Mame turned a cold eye upon Higgins.

"You'd better mind your own business, too," she advised. "You're botherin' with Mr. March's affairs just as much as he is. You ain't a bit better. You always used to act sensible until *she* came up here.

"Since then you've been makin' a fool out of yourself. I ain't saying you didn't get encouragement, but that don't excuse you any. You and Mr. Tilley have both been goin' around sayin' terrible things about Mr. March. You've been sayin' he was a grouch."

The tenant of the cabin became interested.

"You're the one that called him the

Grouch first," declared Mame, still glaring at Higgins. "I just know it."

"I believe I did," assented the fisherman. "And it's true, too. He's got the worst grouch in the world. Hasn't he, Miss Dean?"

Miss Dean seemed reluctant to be drawn into the controversy, for she made no answer. The fact, however, that Higgins had mentioned her name reminded Mame that she had not completed the round of her denunciation. She now faced the lady of the cottage.

"You're a nice one to be sayin' whether anybody's got a grouch or not," she said haughtily. "Why, you're the most undignified lady I ever saw. The way you've been carryin' with Mr. Higgins and Mr. Tilley is just disgraceful.

"And you told me there's been lots of other men, too. You've just been lurin' them; that's what you've been doin'. I've seen how they do it in the pictures, and I know a vampire when I see one.

"I ain't so easy fooled as you think I am. You just kept at it until you got Mr. Higgins and Mr. Tilley to propose to you —both of 'em."

The two gentlemen in question shuffled their feet, as though they were doing a brother act, although they were far from brotherly.

"And then you had the nerve to tell me that if you wanted Mr. March you'd go and get him," added Mame. "That's exactly what you said. Those were her very words, Mr. March."

The Grouch studied Miss Dean with a peculiar look, and that lady endured the scrutiny with fortitude.

"Did she say that?" asked the Grouch.

"You just ask her!" cried Mame.

"Yes, I said it," admitted Miss Dean placidly. "Marigold is exactly right. I said I'd go and get him—*if* I wanted him."

"There! She admits I'm right."

"But since he's married, of course," added Miss Dean, "nobody *would* want to go and get him. You wouldn't want a man who was already married, would you, Marigold?"

"I can wait for my happiness," answered Mame significantly.

The Grouch at the time was choking over something.

"If Miss Dean said anything of the kind she only said it in a joke," declared Higgins, who had been listening to the conversation with great uneasiness. "She doesn't want anything to do with this man, and she did you a kindness when she warned you against him.

"Why, she wouldn't even let him pay a bet that she was entitled to collect. That shows her opinion of him."

There was a loud laugh from the Grouch.

"I've got a receipt for the check," he said.

The fisherman regarded Miss Dean with incredulity and dismay.

"You—you didn't take it?" he groaned.

She nodded.

"Oh, Miss Dean!"

"It was very improper," said Tilley in solemn disapproval.

"Ho!" exclaimed Mame, with a sour smile. "What would you expect from a vampire? They never want men's hearts. They just want what they can get out of 'em."

Higgins was wagging his head sorrowfully, and yet even this was not sufficient to shake his faith or alter his determination.

"Miss Dean," he said, "I'm still standing by you."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Higgins."

"I think just the same of you."

"You are more than kind."

"Anything that I ever said to you stands good now, and I'm ready to prove it before the world."

"You may be sure that I'm grateful, indeed," she said.

"All this fussing around and arguing," continued Higgins, with a comprehensive wave of his arm, "isn't doing any good. Come—let me take you away from it, Miss Dean—Louise. All you've got to do is to say the word and you're taken care of for life, and the rest of 'em can all go to blazes!"

Miss Dean seemed to be considering this unequivocal offer when the naturalist stepped forward a pace and held up his hand.

"Hold!" he said. "Miss Dean will go away with nobody but me."

He spoke with such solemn authority as to command instant and undivided attention.

"I notify you all that Miss Dean is under my care," he continued, "and that when she is in need of protection I will afford it."

Mame Brundage, her eyes wide with wonder, was nervously clasping her hands and whispering to herself. She was witnessing what she never dreamed could exist save on the screen at Hurleyville.

"Oh, to think of havin' them come right out in public and fight for you!" she murmured. "She must have a fatal attraction."

Higgins, momentarily silenced, now rallied.

"When did you authorize yourself to take charge of Miss Dean?" he demanded.

"I did not authorize myself," answered Tilley gravely. "I was authorized by another."

The Grouch straightened up suddenly and withdrew his hands from his pockets. Miss Dean, for the first time, was startled out of her poise. She turned quickly and wonderingly upon the naturalist.

"Who put you in charge of me?" she asked.

Tilley coughed behind his hand. He was keenly conscious of self-importance.

"I do not know that I am at liberty to disclose it," he answered.

"But I have a right to know," she said firmly. "You have made a very extraordinary statement."

"Perhaps I have said too much," he observed slowly.

"Too much or too little, Mr. Tilley. I insist on knowing."

Tilley was pondering when the voice of the Grouch interrupted.

"Go ahead and tell it, Tilley. Everybody is in on the showdown to-day. No excuses accepted."

"Yes; tell!" ordered Higgins fiercely.

But still Tilley hesitated. The Grouch advanced from the fireplace.

"See here!" he said sharply. "Don't stand there like a damned idiot. Go ahead with it! You've got a lot of explaining ahead of you—you fake naturalist!"

Tilley started.

"Yes, fake!" repeated the Grouch. "I've been looking you up—both of you. Higgins is just a common hardware dealer. But you're a fake. You're not a naturalist, at all."

Miss Dean was giving all her attention to the Grouch, and there was an expression of lively astonishment in her eyes.

"Well," said Tilley nervously, "I admit that I'm not a naturalist."

He glanced around at the company to learn the effect of this confession. It seemed to produce no overpowering surprise.

"Having said that, I may as well explain the rest of it," he added.

"Yes; go on!" commanded the Grouch in a stern voice; but he was looking at Miss Dean.

Tilley cleared his throat and wiped his forehead.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MISS DEAN TAKES CHARGE.

"I AM a special guardian, charged with the safety and welfare of Miss Louise Dean," he said.

Followed a pause, during which there was a restless movement on the part of the Grouch, who was staring at Tilley with great astonishment in his eyes.

"That is what brought me here, that is what kept me here—until recently," added Tilley in a precise tone.

Miss Dean laid her parasol on the table and moved a step closer to the man who admitted he was not a naturalist.

"This is odd," she said, "to have a guardian and to be unaware of it. Who appointed you to be my guardian, Mr. Tilley?"

"Mr. Dudley Morgan," he answered gravely.

"Mr. Morgan!" she cried.

"And who the devil is Mr. Dudley Morgan?" demanded Higgins.

Miss Dean interrupted before Tilley could answer.

"I'll explain that," she said. "Mr. Morgan is an old family lawyer and a very dear friend. He met me the day I was born. But I did not know that he had chosen a guardian for me.

"He is a very lovely old gentleman and— Hold on! I'm not so sure. I'm afraid he is a wicked old fraud! I wrote to him about Mr. Tilley, and he sent word he did not know anything about him."

"You wrote to him?" asked Tilley in surprise. "Why?"

"Because you behaved in such a peculiar manner that I was curious to know something about you."

"Nobody can find out anything about him," remarked the Grouch. "I wrote, too."

"I beg you will give me an opportunity to explain," said Tilley. "I can do it better if I am not interrupted."

"Explain then," said Higgins grimly.

"I have been known to Mr. Morgan for a long time," said the ex-naturalist. "I have served him in several capacities. I have been a member of his household. He has always had full confidence in my trustworthiness. He—"

Miss Dean gave a little cry.

"I'm beginning to remember. It's a long time ago. Weren't you the butler, Mr. Tilley?"

"Miss Dean, I was," he answered with a bow. "But I do not remember you. However, that is past. I speak now of another and later period."

"A butler!" sneered Higgins.

Tilley paid no attention.

"Mr. Morgan, a short time ago, sent for me," he continued. "He told me that a valued client of his was leaving the city upon a venture which caused him some degree of worry. She was an estimable young lady, he said, but one of strong will and occasionally of sudden impulses.

"Those were his exact words. She was going away alone, he said, and while he had no intention of attempting to interfere with her in any way, he considered it important that she should be under a watchful eye at all times. He wanted to have somebody near her who could serve as a protector and adviser, in case of need.

"He selected me for that purpose. The young lady did not know that she was to be in the care of a guardian, and she must not be made to suspect it at any time, Mr. Morgan cautioned me. He had learned where she had gone; I believe he did this by making inquiries of an express company. It appears that she did not consult him about her going."

"It's—it's a movie!" whispered Mame to herself.

"He gave me her address and her name," said Tilley. "In order that I might be sure to identify her, he showed me her picture."

"Now I understand why you said 'My goodness!' the first time we met," observed Miss Dean.

"Yes," said Tilley with a bow. "I recognized you. Well, to be brief, I came here in accordance with the instructions of Mr. Morgan. He told me that it would be necessary for me to have a plausible reason for my stay at the farm; he left that part of it to my judgment.

"So I decided that I would appear as a naturalist. I may say that this was not entirely a deception; for, while I make no claims to scientific attainments, I have always taken a more or less particular interest in insectivora. Therefore, I said I was an entomologist."

"The liar!" growled Higgins.

"In that fashion I introduced myself," continued the ex-naturalist, "and as such I have endeavored to conduct myself. Mr. Morgan had instructed me particularly to observe whether Miss Dean had the attentions of any gentlemen thrust upon her, to preserve her from such annoyance, if necessary, and, in short, to stand between her and the world. I have done my duty to the best of my abilities."

"Did Mr. Morgan suggest that you should ask me to marry you?" inquired Miss Dean.

Mr. Tilley coughed and embarked upon another speech.

"I feel that a word of explanation is due with regard to that," he said. "He did not so instruct me. But he said specifically that Miss Dean was to be protected from harmful influences.

"I discovered, immediately after my arrival, that one person was already thrusting himself upon her." He eyed Higgins coldly. "Later I had cause to suspect that another might develop similar tendencies." He eyed the Grouch. "In order to forestall any undesirable results, I deemed it necessary to pay attentions to Miss Dean myself. I sought a monopoly of her society. I endeavored in every way possible to guard her from threatening danger."

"So that's the reason you asked me to marry you!" exclaimed Miss Dean.

Tilley held up a deprecating hand.

"Only at first, Miss Dean; only at first," he said hastily. "I will admit that at the time I first offered marriage I had no serious intention except to prevent others from taking a similar course."

"Then you were an excellent actor, Mr. Tilley," she assured him.

"Having launched myself upon such a course, however, I soon found that the matter had become very serious, indeed, so far as I was personally concerned," he went on. "I came to have an extremely high regard for Miss Dean. I still have it. It is a sincere and true regard."

"Which is why, I suppose," Miss Dean remarked, "you attempted to take a photograph of me by flash-light."—

"At all times I felt that it was necessary to keep my employer fully informed as to your doings," he said sadly. "I meant no offense. I was merely faithful to my trust. I own that the result surprised me."

"It might well," said Miss Dean with a faint smile. "It happens that you did not take that picture, at all. It was taken by the photographer in the village."

Tilley breathed a great sigh. The Grouch was staring at Miss Dean with slowly widening eyes.

"You relieve much of my anxiety," said the ex-naturalist. "And yet there is something strange about it, in that case. For there was evidence that another picture had really been taken. I have never seen it."

The Grouch's eyes were anxious, but Miss Dean gave him no reassuring sign.

"I believe," continued Tilley, "that I have said all that is necessary to explain matters. While it may be that I have violated my employer's confidence, developments seemed to make it imperative.

"I have done my best, Miss Dean, to act as a faithful guardian. I have so reported to Mr. Morgan."

"The dear old man!" murmured Miss Dean.

"And now," said Tilley with an earnest gesture, "and in the presence of all this company, Miss Dean, I renew the offer of my heart and hand. I feel that the charge of caring for you, so unexpectedly thrust upon me by Mr. Morgan, has become a life-duty.

"As I have said before, I am not without modest means. I ask, madam, for the privilege of making you happy."

He paused impressively as he awaited the verdict.

"I said it was a movie!" exclaimed Mame.

The Grouch was watching Miss Dean with steady eyes, and once she met him with a long, even glance. Each seemed on the verge of speaking, yet each waited for the other.

Higgins stepped forward, and if a sturdy elbow jostled the ex-naturalist to one side he made no apology for it.

"Wait, Miss Dean," he beseeched in a tone that was also suggestive of a command. "Wait, before you consider any such proposition. Of course, you won't consider it; but wait.

"You can't have anything to do with a faker like that. He's been spying on you and deceiving everybody else. He hasn't got an honest hair in his head. Nobody would trust him after this. Don't marry him, Miss Dean!"

"You really wouldn't advise it?" she asked doubtfully.

"Good Lord, no!" shouted Higgins. "There's only one man around here you can marry—that's me!"

"The field is narrowing!" she murmured, with another glance at the Grouch, although she did not seem to be addressing him. Higgins observed the glance.

"You couldn't marry him if you wanted to!" he cried. "He's got a wife!"

"It ain't for long," Mame reminded him sharply. "There's goin' to be a divorce."

"They're both deceivers!" declared the fisherman stubbornly. "Neither one of 'em can be trusted as far as you can cast a white plug up at my lake. Just listen to me, Miss Dean: I know I'm in the hardware business, but I've got a clean and honest heart, and I'll take care of you and be good to you and do anything you ask, if you'll only marry me.

"Honest, I will! I'll take you away from both of these fakers, and if they ever try to bother you again, let 'em look out for me!"

He glowered at the fakers as he awaited her answer.

Miss Dean stood irresolute. She looked gravely at Tilley, and then with equal solemnity at Higgins. After that her glance went to the Grouch. She had watched him for but a few seconds when her lower lip began to twitch suspiciously and suggestive little wrinkles appeared at the corners of her eyes.

The Grouch became a man of words and of action. He stepped forward from his place at the mantelpiece and carefully surveyed the company with an amazingly cheerful grin.

"Tilley," he said. "And you, too, Higgins. You're a couple of dubs! You may know how to hunt bugs and fish, but what you don't know about hunting a lady would fill the Astor Library. Let me show you exactly how it ought to be done."

Mame arose expectantly from the rocker, but the Grouch did not see her. Walking directly to Miss Dean, and with the utmost assurance, he seized her in his arms and kissed her shamelessly on the lips—three times!

"Oh, you villain!" cried Miss Dean.

Higgins and Tilley sprang forward, then halted suddenly.

For while Miss Dean had called the Grouch a villain in no uncertain tone, she had made no attempt to struggle out of his arms. She was, in fact, laughing up into his face, while her dark head burrowed itself contentedly against his shoulder.

Mame Brundage folded abruptly into the rocker. She had no speech for this.

"There!" said the Grouch as he glanced over the top of Miss Dean's head and beamed upon Higgins and Tilley. "When you really want a lady, that's the way to get her. Isn't it, Louise?"

"You're a miserable old grouch!" she said stoutly.

He kissed her three times more for that and grinned again.

"G-g-good Heavens!" exclaimed Tilley in a tone of the deepest horror.

"My Lord, Miss Dean! He's married!" shouted Higgins.

She twisted her head around and smiled at them.

"You can bet anything you like, he's married!" she said. "He's married to me."

Save for an alarming series of moans that came from the rocker, there was a minute of silence in the cabin. Tilley stood moistening his dry lips, while perspiration rolled from the forehead of the honest fisherman. The Grouch was amusing himself by twisting a strand of dark hair around his fingers, which seemed eager and hungry for the touch of it.

"Married?" faltered Tilley in hollow voice.

"Entirely so," affirmed the lady whose head still rested against the Grouch's shoulder. "My name is Mrs. David March. I'll leave it to the Grouch."

"Married for five years," he said, nodding. "But I'm not a grouch."

"Oh, but you are, my dear!"

"Confound it, Louise, I'm not!"

"What? Are we starting again?" she asked, looking up at him.

"No!" he shouted. "Not in a thousand years! But I tell you I'm not a grouch. At least, not any more."

"See here, David!" she said. "If you're going to be a reformer, I won't love you. I don't want a stranger; I want my husband. I *want* you to be a grouch!"

He sighed as fondly as a youth.

"I'll be anything you say," he answered lovingly.

Mame Brundage had at last reached the point of speech. She straightened in her chair and pointed at Mr. and Mrs. David March with a trembling finger.

"False—both of you!" she cried. "Oh, that I should live to see this!"

Louise Dean March smiled at her.

"Marigold," she said, "it's excellent that you lived to see it, because it's going to do you a world of good. I feel, however, that we do owe a word of explanation to all of you. Will you explain, or shall I, David?"

"You do it," he said.

"Well, it's really quite simple," said the lady of the cottage. "We had a quarrel—a most tremendous one. We've had little ones before, of course; but this was really terrific!"

"A humdinger!" affirmed the Grouch.

"Yes—a humdinger!" she agreed. "I started it."

The Grouch shook his head.

"No, Louise; I did."

"David!"

"But I did. On the level, I did!"

"Keep still!" she sternly commanded, squeezing his arm. "What an awful grouch you are! Please let me start the quarrel!"

"Oh, all right!" he sighed. "But you're an intolerable woman!"

"When he loves me most he calls me an intolerable woman!" she explained. "I think it's beautiful. At any rate, I started the quarrel, and it went on so wonderfully that I left him and said I'd never come back. And he told me that would be just fine! Didn't you, Dave?"

"Uhuh!"

"Oh, he was so ster-r-rn!" said Mrs. March, puckering her features into the deepest frown she could summon. "He looked so grand and noble!" She glanced briefly at Marigold.

"I wanted to kiss him good-by, but I didn't dare, because then I might not have run away. After I left the house I sent him a note saying I was enclosing my wedding-ring."

"But you didn't enclose it," said the Grouch.

"I know. I changed my mind about that."

"Little devil!" he said. "Now you can go and put it on again."

She held up her left hand.

"I put it on this morning," she remarked, "as soon as I decided to take charge of things."

It was a plain little ring, but in the eyes of Mame Brundage its dull glow was monstrous and hateful.

"I sent a note to Mr. Morgan, telling him what I had done," continued Mrs. March, "and I told him I was resuming my maiden name. I didn't tell him where I was going, but Mr. Tilley has explained that. I just wanted to disappear, and when I heard this was a wonderful place to disappear in, I came up!"

"I wasn't far behind you," declared the Grouch in a tone of triumph.

She reached up and pinched his ear.

"That was the best part of all of it!" she exclaimed. "Never in all your life did you ever pay me such a compliment as that. It was splendid of you. I was so proud of it that I wanted to come up here and kiss you the minute you arrived.

"But, of course, I couldn't, because of the quarrel. I just had to keep on being Miss Dean."

"Know how I found out where you were?" demanded the Grouch.

"How?"

"You wrote the address on a piece of paper all crumpled up. It was at the bottom of the waste-basket, alongside your writing-desk."

She nodded contentedly.

"I knew you'd search the waste-basket," she said. "I put it where you'd be sure to kick it when you made your entrance into the room."

Mame Brundage arose from her chair and smoothed her skirt.

"Oh, the deceitfulness of mankind!" she said, and walked out of the cabin.

Augustus J. Tilley coughed and moved toward the door.

"I'll—I'll send my final report to Mr. Morgan to-day," he said stiffly, and followed Mame.

Only Higgins remained to contemplate the ruin of his hopes. But Higgins was game. He swallowed hard and forced a grin.

"Mrs. Grouch," he began, "I— Oh, I beg your pardon, ma'am! It slipped—honestly. Mrs. March—"

She interrupted him by clapping her hands in delight.

"Oh, don't apologize, Mr. Higgins! Say it again! I love it!"

"No, Mrs. March; I didn't mean it, truly. I just want to wish you every happiness there is to be had in life. I want you to know that all the while I've been sincere!" he said mournfully. "And, of course, any time—"

"Fat chance!" said the Grouch. "But good luck to you, anyhow, Higgins!"

"Good luck, Grouch!" and the fisherman walked heavily out of the cabin.

After the Grouch had fooled with her hair for a while, and after she had hugged his neck and boxed his ears and cried just a small bit, he suddenly remembered something.

"Louise! That photograph! The one of me and Mame!"

"I was weak and destroyed it." she said.

That contented him for a while. Then she remembered something.

"Dave! The night you were sick—did you know I was in the cabin?"

"Did I?" he exclaimed. "That's why I paid the bet."

"Which reminds me that you owe me a pair of slippers, my dear!"

"I don't really owe you a pair," he said, "but—"

She seized his arm and hugged it quite tenderly.

"Man, dear, but I love you!" she said, laughing. "Come over and look at yourself."

She dragged him before the mirror and they stood for a while contemplating their images.

"Mr. and Mrs. Grouch," she announced with a bow.

"Ah, now, let up, Louise! Never again, I tell you!"

"Dave! Dave!" she pleaded. "Please don't swear off! *Please* be a grouch, if I ask you to be one! Don't you dare go and ruin your character!

"Don't you dare be good-natured and stupid! Don't you— But what's the use of fussing about it, anyhow? You couldn't help being a grouch, if you tried a thousand years! Oh, stop, Dave! Let go! You Grouch! *Grouch!*"

"You intolerable little devil!" he barked. "Hold still! I want to kiss you behind your ear!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MAME'S DIARY.

THE story did not end to Marigold's entire satisfaction, as witness the following, which we have reprinted from the Daily News:

(Staff Correspondence.)

I think I am dieing. At any rate I am waisting away and going into a decline. It woud better be so because all life is false. I have put the cupp to my lips and when one has done that one knows what one is talking about. They are still here but I cannot speak of them. I will not be unwomanly and theirfore what can I do agenst a vampire. Nothing. I have cryed so I can cry no more. It seams the fount of tears is dryed up. Perhaps when I am gone he will understand that is if he finds out I am gone. Mr. Tilly went today not saying goodby to me or to any of them. He told Pop the insecks here were not satisfactory. But he is false like all the rest. He did not leave me any adress so I will never hear of him agen but what care I. Mr. Higgens stays at the lake all the time. His spirrit is broken like mine. I tryed to comfort him today but it was no use. He said to leave him alone. I never new untill everything came out on that awful day how romantic he is. But he is not for me. Nobody is for I have now become a reclewse. I am writing a seenario of what hapened but every word tares a drop of blood out of my hart. Still I will write it and perhaps I will play in it. Who knows. Al I ask is to live untill it is done.

It is strange how I keep on liveing but I have my work to do and I suppose that is why. Mr. Higgens never comes down from the lake any more so I have to go up there. I thought we might weap together. But he said no he did not weap ever. He is very hard to comfort. They are staying at the cabin. Today she offered me two pares of her Sunday stockens but I spirned them in her presence and his for they are both false. I found the stockens layed across the back of a chair afterward. Maybe I can ware them down to Hurleyville if I shoud live that long which I do not believe. At any rate I shall be prepared for everything. The seenario is in the third real. I am the heroine but it is hard to make him the hero after what hapened. I tryed to read it today to Mr. Higgens but he swore and for a moment I thought it was another speaking. Alas it was not for he does not come near me. Joe Gildersleeve has had his pay razed but that is nothing to one who has higher ames in life.

Well they have gone at last. Nock drove them away in the buckboard. They said goodby but all I did was to give him a look that will hawnt him to his grave. I gave her a look to and she must have known what it ment. Their was hate in it. They staid five days after it hapened both ackting very silly and calling each other names and kissing each other. I do not see how they can look each other in the face the hippocrits. After she was gone I found she had left two of her dresses and a hat. But everything will need makeing over that is if I should live long enough. I am still in a decline but it seams as if perhaps I am doomed to live and bare my sorrow. Mr. Higgens did not come down from the lake to see them go. I told him that Pop said he was catching more fish than the law allowed but he said to —— with the law he did not care what hapened to him. That shows what ruin a woman can do. I was to have finished the seenario to-night showing the deth of the vampire all in rags and poverty. But I cannot finish it to-night because Joe Gildersleeve is comeing out in his buggey and Mom says it is all right for me to go. So I must lay my sorrow aside for a little while but it will come back to me in the still hours of the night. It is almost certin to come back. Joe Gildersleeve does not want me to go down to Hurleyville this fall but I will take orders from no man. Who is he to control my actions. Nothing but a station agent althow they did raze his pay which is now good. His buggey is new. Ah how can I laugh and make believe I am happy when grief is gnawing at my sole.

Joe Gildersleeve says if I go down to Hurleyville in October he will follow me for a weak. Ah what is this fatel attraction about me. It makes me afrade of myself. The seenario is not done yet but their is lots of time. Mr. Higgens leaves next week but I showed him I was indiferent. Their is something wrong with the scales at the station where Joe weighed me because I know I am not so heavy after being in a decline. Ah well even if I do live I shall be brave. I am resolved to go to Hurleyville and if I am followed it will not be my fault. I never encourraged any man and I will not encourrage him. And yet I am helpless. What can one do agenst fate. Nothing.

(The end.)

THE OLD STORY

BY WILLIS BOYD ALLEN

SHE dropped her glove;
I knelt to lift the dainty thing,
And, as I gave it, felt the sting
Of love.

She dropped a glance
Before my stammered words of praise;
Then sought anew my ardent gaze,
Askance.

She dropped a sigh.
Who could, by eager love made bold,
The old, old story long withhold?
Not I!

She dropped a tear,
And turned her lovely face away;
Her trembling hand in mine still lay,
So dear!

Ah, can you guess
The little word she shyly dropped—
The one sweet word with kisses stopped?
'Twas "Yes!"

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

THERE is a statement that has been current for a good many centuries, and that is based on the very highest authority, to the effect that there is more joy over the return of one strayed lamb to the fold than there is in the perfect safety of the other ninety and nine. We might paraphrase this with perfect truth in the magazine publishing business and say that there is less joy over a dozen good stories from tried writers than over *one* good one from a *new* writer.

So you will understand that when we say that we are *very much pleased* to be able to introduce to you next week a new writer, it is not a mere polite form, but an actual ebullition of joy. To be sure we should be partially used to it by this time; introducing new and highly promising writers is one of the best little things we do; but at that, even to us, they do not come often enough to induce *ennui.*

The story to which we refer is the novelette for next week—

THE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ATOM

BY RAY CUMMINGS

and as a flight of pure imagination, plus a most unusual scientific knowledge, and plus again a rare power of fantasy and delicate romance, it is our firm belief that it has few equals either in modern fiction or the classics. However, that is only *our* opinion, and as a matter of fact we—and doubtless you also—are more interested in *your* verdict.

Of course if yours is the type of mind that cares only for the strictly realistic, why, then, this story is not for you; but if you like to follow the weird flights of fancy of an extraordinarily vivid imagination, then don't forget the novelette next week.

EVERY newspaper reader knows the name of Philip Gibbs, perhaps the greatest correspondent that the great war produced. Not so many know that even before the terrible struggle started Mr. Gibbs was one of the outstanding young writing men of England—a novelist, editor, essayist, and journalist of much ability.

Just before he was called to the work that made him internationally famous Mr. Gibbs finished writing a novel for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. It dealt with the truly terrible conditions under which a certain particularly unfortunate class of British labor was forced to work and live. It was too important a piece of work to offer to a world whose every thought was centered on the clash of huge armies on the western front, so it was decided to postpone its publication until the reading public had returned to its normal interests. Happily, that time has now arrived, so in next week's number we will start

MISERY MANSIONS

BY PHILIP GIBBS

a six-part serial that will rank as one of the outstanding fictional events of the year. Aside from giving the reader an unforgetable picture of the slums of London and

of the lives of the unfortunates who dwell therein, it is a romance of much power and charm. The characters are living, breathing, suffering, real men and women, and the hero, Paul Whiteleaf, the son of a wealthy manufacturer who gives up everything he holds dear to follow the dictates of his conscience, is a man who will live long in your memory. All in all, "MISERY MANSIONS" is a story that you will find well worth reading.

NOW that Achmed Abdullah has come into his own as one of the outstanding masters of the short story in America, the recognition accorded him by Edward O'Brien, when he listed "A Simple Act of Piety" among the best twenty stories published in America in 1918, does as much honor to the critical acumen of Mr. O'Brien as to the brilliant talent of Captain Abdullah, by birth and tradition an Arab, by education both French and English, by profession a soldier, and by choice an American. All ALL-STORY WEEKLY stories are good stories, but a story by Abdullah is by way of an event. Next week we offer you another Pell Street tale, which the author calls "HIMSELF, TO HIMSELF ENOUGH." This is as fine a piece of work as a little Whistler etching, and as arresting a story as you will find, if you search the whole field of fiction for the month of March.

Included in a volume of short stories which Captain Abdullah is publishing this spring, "HIMSELF, TO HIMSELF ENOUGH" is put into your hands before the book is hot from the Putnam Press. Make no mistake, no magazine in America can duplicate our record—two stories in one number of our magazine—stories of unusual distinction—by two giants of the pen put at your command several weeks in advance of the books, and at a mere fraction of their cost.

THE authentic teller of tales shares the divine prerogative of the poet. Both are born, not made. This is one reason why we think certain tales of George Gilbert will "carry on" after much of the sensational fiction of the moment has been buried with free verse and cubism. Anyhow, he has discovered a field rich in inspiration, and possessing the perennial charm that lies in real imaginative vision, and the glamour and allure of primitive people, whose primal passions and temperaments have not been inhibited by uplift movements and the complications of the stock-market. Take such a tale of Gilbert as we offer in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY, "IN WHOM THERE IS NO GUILE." Here is a perfect gem of a story strung on an Eastern string of "life is heavy, flowers are sweet, woman is deceitful, honey has a certain pleasing flavor, yet bees sting and elephants often go *must* and run *amok*." If this story fails to hold you, you cannot be held. You are beyond the reach of real fiction, and we would recommend the "Congressional Record."

FEW people not in the secret ever surmise the mountains that have been climbed or the chasms that have been crossed before the photographs, which make our Sunday supplements so deservedly popular, have been secured. Many a daring journalist's feats must go unchronicled and receive no further recognition than the spontaneous acclaim of his comrades in ink, because the public never penetrate the mysteries of the newspaper shop. Raymond S. Spears's story in next week's magazine, "WHEN A MAN'S CRAZY," gives you a peep behind the curtain of the photographic end of a great newspaper, and on this account, as well as for the sake of the story, we opine you will accord it the attention which it deserves.

REMEMBER BING HARVARD IS MARRIED

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed find forty-five cents in stamps, for which please send me the last number of "Who Am I?" and the last two numbers of "Ladyfingers." These are the only numbers of your most interesting magazine I have missed since the *Cavalier* and *All-Story* were combined. I have been a reader of your magazine for about seven years, that is to say, a reader of the *Cavalier* up to the time that it became the *All-Story Cavalier*, and since then I have read nothing but the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, with an occasional copy of *The Argosy;* but only once before have I written to you. That was about four years ago. I hope to see this letter in print before very long; but then I suppose you get so many requests of the same nature that you have only space enough to print the best ones, among which I do not fit.

The last "Night Wind" story was rather a disappointment. When I see "Night Wind" in your contents page I am all tuned up to see a little action by *Bing Harvard*, of which there was very little in the last one of this series. It was all

Lady Kate. "The Untamed" was a fine story, to which I hope to see a sequel. "After His Own Heart" was great. Wish I had *Tom Duncan's* pep. At present I am reading the February 1 number containing the first instalment of "A Shortage In Perfumes," which promises to be as good as your preceding *Janie Frete* stories.

See if you can get another *Pincher* story soon. The last one, "Pincher Puts One Over," was good, but I am not satisfied; I want more of him. I could go on mentioning stories I have enjoyed for a month if I wanted to, but suffice it to say, with few exceptions they are good. One of the exceptions is E. K. Means; he means well, of course; but his stories do not appeal to me. Where are your old *Cavalier* writers? Don't they ever get a generous spell and contribute a story? I would like to see more of the old-timers' stories, as they were the first I knew. I shall anxiously watch every mail for the numbers requested in this letter, and I hope you won't keep me waiting too long. Here's wishing you success.

EDWARD SOMMERHALDER.

Jersey City, New Jersey.

GOOD FOR ALL THE FAMILY

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed find two dollars, for which please renew my subscription for six months to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, beginning with the February 1 issue. I certainly do enjoy reading this magazine. All my life I have enjoyed reading, but now nearly all my reading is limited to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, as with my household duties I haven't time for other magazines or novels; and, in my opinion the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is the best of them all. In regard to the stories in this magazine, one thing in particular I appreciate—all the stories are clean, and I can gladly pass them on to my fourteen-year-old brother, who enjoys them also. He takes them home, and my mother reads the stories at night to all the family.

I liked "Koyala the Beautiful," but please, though, don't let poor *Peter Gross* go wandering around all alone; let us have a sequel to that, also "The Texan." Both of these are such dandy fellows it just hurts to think of them being so lonesome. Please don't publish pictures; they would take up too much room that could be used for the story. Anyway, who needs pictures when they read the stories in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY? All the characters are real people to me, and as I read I am right there in the story. Don't care much for the "different" stories, but am sure lots of people do. Am also glad nearly all the authors stay on Mother Earth for material, only notice a few find it so dull here on earth that they have to go to Mars and other planets.

I believe I enjoy the real, every-day "live happy ever after stories" of the people of our own beautiful planet best of all. Please be sure and start the renewal for the six months with the February 1 issue, as I don't want to miss a copy. Best regards to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and with good wishes for its continued success, I am,

Atlanta, Georgia. MRS. M. E. HARKINS.

GROWS BETTER ALL THE TIME

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed please find $2.50, one dollar each for subscriptions to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *The Argosy* for three months, and fifty cents for back numbers of both—the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, December 7, 1918, and January 18, 1919; of *The Argosy*, October 26, December 7, 1918, and January 18, 1919. My husband and I consider ourselves pioneers with the ALL-STORY WEEKLY as we began with No. 1 *Cavalier*. Husband read the *All-Story* at that time, but I did not care for it so much, and when they were joined, was very much disappointed. But they grew better all the time, so kept reading; so when the name of *Cavalier* was dropped did not feel so badly. We were not so steady with *The Argosy*, but since it has been made a weekly have taken it up again, and do not wish to drop it.

We like all northern stories, *Semi-Dual* stories, and Western stories. "The Joyous Trouble-Maker" and "The Girl in Khaki" were fine. The authors we like best are Edgar Rice Burroughs, Max Brand, J. U. Giesy, Junius B. Smith, Perley Poore Sheehan, George Allan England, and others. Of course there are some we do not like as well; but we read all, whether we like them or not. We will be pleased to get the back numbers, as there are stories in them that we would like to read, and to have our subscriptions begin with the February 1, 1919, number. My husband joins me in wishing the ALL-STORY WEEKLY (and *Argosy*) all the best good luck in the world; and if it keeps as good work as the present time, we know it will have. MRS. D. W. INGLES.

Chicago Heights, Illinois.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

While traveling through the devastated towns of northern France in an American box car it was my good fortune to discover an October ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

"Safe and Sane," by a certain Tod Robbins, left as profound an impression with me which will last as long as the Argonne Forest will with the dough-boy.

Here's to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and good old Tod Robbins, and wishing all the folks back home a happy New Year, I am, respectfully yours,

SERGT. CHESTER H. HAIRE.

5th A. A. M. G. Bn., Co. C.,
American Exped. Forces,
Beauchemin, France.

Have read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for years, and it is not one of the best, but *the* best. The

serials are fine, with a few exceptions. Stories of the type of "Safe and Sane" are, I presume, needed, but do not appeal to every one. One of the best serials, and the very best you have ever produced, to my idea, was "His Temporary Wife." The present serials are fine; one of the best running is "The Untamed." The complete novels are usually above the standard. Can you not give us a few sporting stories once in a while? A serial on sporting life would surely appeal to ninety per cent of your readers.

With best wishes and sincere hopes that the ALL-STORY WEEKLY will continue to be as good as ever, I beg to remain,

Yours very truly,

Sanford, Mississippi. WM. B. BALDY.

Having read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for about three years, I thought I would like to tell you that I think it sure is one great magazine. Have just finished reading "Broadway Bab," by Johnston McCulley. I think it and "The Texan" were surely great. Let us have some more by the authors of these two. I also enjoyed very much the story, "Who Wants a Green Bottle?" by Tod Robbins; as a "different" story it is more different than the most different story I have seen yet. And, by the way, I would like to see a sequel to "The Texan." You know, we left *Tex* on the desert with his pard *Bat*. It is said that man should not live alone, so I, for one, think there are great possibilities in that for a sequel. Well, I will close, as ever, a loyal ALL-STORY WEEKLY fan, C. RAYMOND SMOTHERS.

Newark, Ohio.

Have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *The Argosy* for about one year, and words are inadequate to express the pleasure that I have derived in reading them. Heading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY list is "Everyman's Land" (wonderful narrative of France rewon); knockers of the Williamsons' story show lack of appreciation. Following this I surely did enjoy "White Tigers" (Sheehan's best); "Koyala the Beautiful" (thrilling tale of the tropics); "Palos of the Dog Star Pack" (want a sequel to this); "The Pirate Woman" ((wonderfully descriptive); "Twenty-Six Clues" (the mystery of mysteries), and "The Substitute Millionaire" (delightfully entertaining). I have so many favorite authors that it is almost impossible to name them all; but here are a few of them: G. W. Ogden, the Williamsons, G. A. England, C. B. Stilson, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Achmed Abdullah, Edgar Franklin, Max Brand, C. A. Seltzer, J. U. Giesy, Isabel Ostrander, E. K. Means, H. Bedford-Jones, Stephen Chalmers, R. A. Bennet, and M. I. Taylor. With best wishes for further success, I am,

MATT MARSON.

Newark, New Jersey.

I have just finished reading "Broadway Bab," and, believe me, it sure is some story. It has every story that you published for the last month beaten a mile, and *I must have a sequel to it.* I found it far too short, and I wish I could go on reading it forever. "The Untamed" is my second favorite this week. Say, what on earth has happened to E. K. Means—I enjoy his stories so. When I get the blues I read one of his stories, and it isn't very long till I am laughing again. They are dandy little gloom-chasers. Try one! I am also reading "H. R. H., the Rider," and think it is great. It would take all the paper in the world to tell you how I enjoy your stories, so will say that I like them all. But oh, you "Broadway Bab." Another good point about your magazines is that the paper does not shine, and can be read under the poorest light without any danger to your eyes. Thanking you again for many pleasant hours,

Box 342, MISS MYRA GORDON.

Eatonville, Washington.

Have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for about six years, and think all the stories good; but my favorite writer is E. K. Means, for I was raised in Birmingham, Alabama, and know the ways of the colored people; so please tell Mr. Means to give us some more stories. They are all good, but Means's are the best. With best wishes and success to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY,

Alliance, Ohio. F. H. CONNER.