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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

A detailed illustration of a woman with fair skin and blue eyes, wearing a large, dark-colored hat with a wide, light-colored band. She is resting her chin on her hand, looking thoughtfully towards the viewer. The background is a soft, painterly wash of colors, including pinks, greens, and blues. The artist's signature 'Dresch' is visible on the left side of the illustration.

Dresch

Spark of the Flame

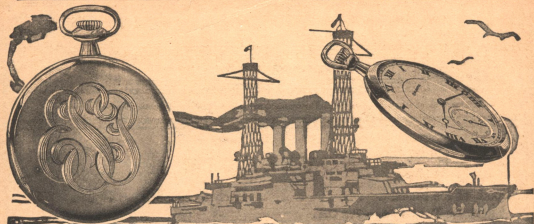
by Evelyn Campbell

Author of "Nobody's Bride," etc.

A Realistic Romance of the Real West

Missing Page

Inside front cover



8,320 *Burlingtons* in the U. S. Navy—

8,320 Burlingtons have been sold to the men aboard the U. S. battleships. Practically every vessel in the U. S. Navy has many Burlington watches aboard. Some have over 100 Burlingtons. The victory of the Burlington among the men in the U. S. Navy is testimony to Burlington superiority.

A watch has to be made of sturdy stuff in order to "make good" on a man-of-war. The constant vibration, the extreme heat in the boiler rooms, the cold salt air and the change of climate from the Arctic to the Tropical are the most severe tests on a watch. If a watch will stand up and give active service aboard a man-of-war, it will stand up anywhere.

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CIX



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

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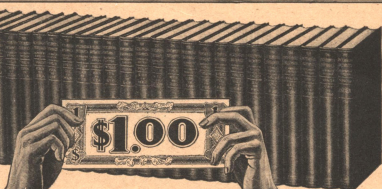
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Entered as second class matter May 17, 1915, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879



Now as Never Before You Need the Encyclopaedia Britannica

HANDY VOLUME ISSUE

War awoke this great land of ours and set the stage for a tremendous industrial, spiritual and social awakening. There probably is not a man, woman or child among the more than 100,000,000 inhabitants of the United States upon whom the past five years has not had a profound effect. Great reforms are being hastened and this will be a better and cleaner world after the ordeals of fire through which it has passed. The participation of the United States as never before in the world's affairs has brought to the people new interests not limited to the neighborhood, town or city in which they live, but interests that are world wide. A miracle has been wrought in men's minds, a miracle in which there is a tremendous thirst for knowledge, a knowledge which is absolutely necessary today, as never before. Where can people find correct, authoritative and comprehensive information on the many different subjects in which they are interested, as a consequence of this awakening? They naturally turn to the wonderful storehouse of knowledge—the world's greatest guide to correct and authoritative information—The Encyclopaedia Britannica. The Britannica furnishes practical, detailed and authoritative articles of great value to the business man, to the manufacturer, to the importer, to the worker in the industries. The Britannica will give a foundation for study of subjects which will be uppermost in our minds for years to come. It is the book for Americans today who are waking up to new thoughts, new work and new interests.

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down and studying the facts of past cases that were somewhat similar? Are you familiar with what has happened after other wars? In England after the Napoleonic campaigns; in the United States after the Civil War; to France, to Germany and to neutrals after the Franco-Prussian war?

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Woman Needs the Britannica as Never Before.

The war has changed the status of women industrially and politically. The mother must keep abreast of the great thoughts and movements that are taking place throughout the world, that are vitally affecting her. Woman today in her greater and more important place in the world needs the Encyclopaedia Britannica as never before—she needs it to teach her how to fulfill her new status as a citizen—how to make her more efficient in the business world and, as a mother, to make herself broader and a bigger woman so she can teach her children wisely and correctly.

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You've probably heard of me. My name is Pelton. Lots of people call me "The Man Who Makes Men Rich." I don't deny it. I've done it for thousands of people—lifted them up from poverty to riches. There's no sound reason why I cannot do it for you. So let's try.

Now, follow me carefully. I'm going to tell you exactly how to do it. I'm the possessor of a "secret" for which men have been searching since Time began.

There's no need to discuss the whys and the wherefores of this "secret." Suffice it to say that *It Works*. That's all we care about—*It Works*. Over 400,000 men and women the world over have proved it for themselves.

Among them are such men as Judge Ben B. Lindsay; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Governor McKelvie of Nebraska; Wu Ting Fang, ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Governor Ferris of Michigan; E. T. Meredith, Secretary of Agriculture, and thousands of others of equal prominence.

Some of the things this "secret" has done for people are astounding. I would hardly believe them if I hadn't seen them with my own

eyes. Adding ten, twenty, thirty or forty dollars a week to a man's income is a mere nothing. That's merely playing at it. Listen to this:

A young man in the East had an article for which there was a nation-wide demand. For twelve years he "puttered around" with it—barely eking out a living. Today this young man is worth \$200,000. He is building a \$25,000 home—and paying cash for it. He has three automobiles. His children go to private schools. He goes hunting, fishing, traveling whenever the mood strikes him. His income is over a thousand dollars a week.

In a little town in New York lives a man who two years ago was pitied by all who knew him. From the time he was 14 he had worked and slaved—and at sixty he was looked upon as a failure. Without work, in debt to his charitable friends, with an invalid son to support, the outlook was pitchy black.

Then he learned the "secret." In two weeks he was in business for himself. In three months his plant was working night and day to fill orders. During 1916 the profits were \$20,000. During 1917 the profits ran close to \$40,000. And this genial 64-year-young man is enjoying pleasures and comforts he little dreamed would ever be his.

I could tell you thousands of similar instances. But there's no need to do this as I'm willing to tell you the "secret" itself. Then you can

put it to work and see what it will do for you. I don't claim I can make you rich over night. Maybe I can—maybe I can't. Sometimes I have failures—everyone has. But I do claim that I can help go out of every 100 people if they will let me.

The point of it all, my friend, is that you are using only about one-tenth of that wonderful brain of yours. That's why you haven't won greater success. Throw the unused nine-tenths of your brain into action and you'll be amazed at the almost instantaneous results.

The Will is the motive power of the brain. Without a highly trained, inflexible will, a man has about as much chance of attaining success in life as a railway engine has of crossing the continent without steam. The biggest ideas have no value without will-power to "put them over." Yet the will, although heretofore entirely neglected, can be trained into wonderful power like the brain or memory and by the very same method—intelligent exercise and use.

If you held your arm in a sling for two years, it would become powerless to lift a feather, from lack of use. The same is true of the Will—it becomes useless from lack of practice. Because we don't use our Wills—because we continually bow to circumstance—we become unable to assert ourselves. What our wills need is practice.

Develop your will-power and money will flow in on you. Rich opportunities will open up for you. Driving energy you never dreamed you had will manifest itself. You will thrill with a new power—a power that nothing can resist. You'll have an influence over people that you never thought possible. Success—in whatever form you want it—will come as easy as failure came before. And those are only a few of the things the "secret" will do for you. The "secret" is fully explained in the wonderful book "Power of Will."

How You Can Prove This at My Expense

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Keep it five days. Look it over in your home. Apply some of its simple teachings. If it doesn't show you how you can increase your income many times over—just as it has for thousands of others—mail the book back. You will be out nothing.

But if you do feel that "POWER OF WILL" will do for you what it has done for over four hundred thousand others—if you feel as they do that it's the next greatest book to the Bible—send me only \$3.50 and you and I'll be square.

If you pass this offer by, I'll be out only the small profit on a three and a half-dollar sale. But you—you may easily be out the difference

between what you're making now and an income several times as great. So you see you've a lot—a whole lot—more to lose than I.

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A FEW EXAMPLES

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Mail the coupon for free examination. Don't send any money. We will ship the books (all 6 volumes) by express collect and you can have a whole week to use them as if they were your own. Give them every test you can think of. Take them to your shop. Show them to your friends and ship them back at our expense if you don't want to keep them. If you do keep the books to help you earn more, send us only \$2.50. You can send the balance of the \$1.50 price the same way—\$2.00 each month. Only 7c a day. This is your chance to double your earnings—earn two dollars in the same time it takes to get one now. The coupon is your start. MAIL IT TO-DAY.



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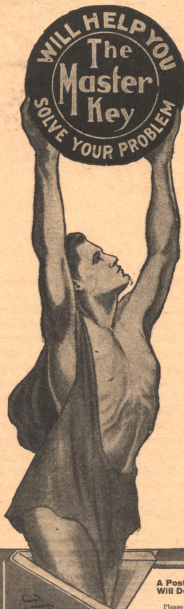
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. CIX

NUMBER 3



SATURDAY, APRIL 24, 1920



Spark of the Flame by Evelyn Campbell

CHAPTER I.

DINNER FOR TWO.

ALL day long the train had rushed through the narrow, dark red cuts, across bare spaces desolately dotted here and there with starved cactus, through miles and miles of emptiness—a solitude of glaring, gold-blue sky, and the pathetic stillness of a land too barren for even the cheapest life.

All day long, from the wonderful morning when the sun rose in spectacular nearness over the radiant, rose-colored hills, to the late afternoon, when long since the beauty had died from the day and only the stark bones remained—the heat, the sandstorms, the wretched discomfort—the girl had crouched upon her camp-stool on the observation platform, looking, as though she would never get enough of the far distances, as though her eyes beheld some loveliness in it all which was not there for other eyes to see.

For brief periods she had gone back to her berth in the third sleeper, to bathe her face or brush her wind-driven hair, or for food or water, but she had always returned quickly to her place, as though jealous of the time lost in commonplace observances.

She was a young girl, fair-haired and

white-skinned, but with strangely brave eyes, dark and clear; the kind of eyes that contradict all signs of bodily weakness that slenderness and lips too faintly colored may proclaim. She was too delicate to be pretty, and too feminine to be striking, among the throng of fashionable tourists who filled the long train with their well-cut clothes, their maids and children and chatter of Pasadena and Santa Barbara. She was so unimportant that, happily for herself, she escaped notice and almost escaped comment—though that which passed was confined to half-pitying, half-contemptuous glances from more distinguished travelers. In that part of the country delicacy is a quality that breeds suspicion, and frailty is fatal. Mothers warned their children not to go too near the young lady, who might be traveling for her health. But the young girl, absorbed in her own thoughts and the novelty of the journey, saw nothing of this. She did not know that she was ostracised.

Darkness came on with the incredible swiftness of the desert night. The sky, from a bowl of brass, became in a moment a star-gemmed, velvet canopy; the wind, sweet with a million hidden odors released by the death of the sun, bathed the dusk in a gentle peace. The long train, in rivalry with the stars, broke out in a glittering

chain of lights, and at once a sort of homelike hospitality passed like a watchword through the heterogeneous collection of passengers housed within this narrow space for days of living. White-aproned waiters began passing through the cars. Women emerged from staterooms, freshly powdered, garnering husbands or acquaintances. Dinner was on.

The girl still kept her vigil on the platform. Now it was too dark for any one to see. She was free to let her lips quiver without constraint. When a porter approached the door with his cheery call she merely drew farther into the shadow.

She was not alone upon the platform. In the opposite corner a man, hunched into a formless shadow, smoked leisurely and watched her from beneath the vizor of his cap. He had appeared in that portion of the train during the latter hours of the day. Earlier he had spent his time in the smoker, where he was friendly with any one who would listen; but for some reason his audience had melted away with irritating rapidity, until he found himself ostracised even by the young salesman who was making his first trip West and saw in every casual acquaintance a chance to enlarge his clientele. Before the chill wind of this universal disfavor, he had retreated, vanquished, to the open platform and there he found the girl, outcast like himself, but by her own choice.

When the car before them was completely empty he spoke to her carefully, cautiously, as though feeling his way in the dark across unknown ground:

"A night like this can pay for any sort of day, can't it?"

The girl started. She had known he was there, of course, but she had not expected him to speak to her. Other travelers chatted back and forth, but until now she had been left to herself. She wished, in her gentle way, that he had been as the others. Although it was perfectly dark where he sat she could still see his face as she had seen it in the early afternoon. He was a red-haired man with whitish eyebrows over pale eyes that were singularly expressionless and cold. He wore a short-cropped mustache that accentuated the looseness of his

mouth and ugly, irregular teeth. With this picture in her mind she answered quietly, thankful for the darkness which concealed her distaste.

"I have enjoyed the day. It has been beautiful to me."

Her reply gave him the excuse he wanted. Without seeking her permission, he moved to a chair beside her and leaned forward with an air of easy familiarity.

"I take it you're a stranger to our golden West," he began volubly, "but of course any one could see that. We don't breed 'em as slim an' delicate as you're made—not that I like big women myself. There's something catchy about little kids like you—" She made a startled movement, like the frightened rustling of a bird in the grass, and swiftly gaging the error of his approach, he changed his tone to a soothing friendliness.

"Don't be scared of me, miss. I never meant to say anything fresh. Why, I got three—four little sisters like you at home! You'll find all the men out here like that, sorta tender and protecting to little lonesome women like you. I was just wondering if you wasn't goin' to eat to-night."

Her voice came faintly out of the shadow.

"I—I—think not. I have to change very soon, at Tecumseh, and perhaps I shall stay there over night, if the trains don't connect. I will get something there."

The red-haired man threw back his head with a loud laugh. It brought his countenance into the light and she saw that in animation he was more repulsive than she had believed.

"Eat? At Tecumseh! That's a good one." Then he surveyed her with new attention. "You're changing there? Then you must be going in—"

"Yes. Into the desert," she finished for him, a little breathlessly, as though the words had a happy meaning for her. "I am going to live there. I—I—own part of a mine."

"You are going to live there?" he echoed her stupidly. "At what camp?"

She seemed to have overlooked or forgotten her dislike for him, or perhaps, being human, she was glad to talk after her long

silence, for now she answered readily enough.

"Oh, at no town," as though towns were a thing to be scorned. "I am going straight to the mine—it is a very great mine, I believe. Mr. Ralph Kaylor owns the most of it and, of course, I own only a little bit in proportion, but it is enough to make me feel like I *belonged*, somehow, to this country. Oh, how I have always wanted to live in some wonderful, wild place, thousands of miles from cities and big buildings—and now it has happened!" She looked up at him with bright, earnest, happy eyes that presently clouded a little as though at some fugitive thought that crossed her mind. "It sometimes makes me sad to think how I misjudged Aunt Louisa, when now I know that she was acting for my good in everything. If she had not invested that money I would probably have stayed on in St. Louis *forever*. I should never have been clever enough to find the way myself. The money would have been spent, and then there would never have been a way for me to escape."

"Did your aunt buy a mine?" asked the red-haired man curiously.

"Only some shares," she replied, with the childlike candor that was part of her charm. "It was my father's life insurance money. There was enough of it to educate me and keep me for a little while, until I learned to make money, but Aunt Louisa never believed in girls working. She told me before she died that she bought this mining stock because it would give me enough income to live on like a lady. She was so happy about it, and it made up for all the things she had refused to buy for me when I used to tease her for pretty clothes like the other girls had. She took so much trouble to find the investment. She calculated and figured for days, and this was the only mine that seemed to come out right. We had just enough money to make the income of it come to the proper amount." A new thought struck her; she added timidly: "Perhaps—perhaps you know Mr. Kaylor?"

The red-haired man drew a deep breath. He seemed slightly stunned, as though something had been told him as truth, so

wild and incredible that he could not grasp it at once. But he answered deliberately.

"Maybe I do. I'll have to think. There's so many men in this part of the West and most of them mining, that it's hard to sift 'em out sometimes. But I guess it's all right, girlie. Some of these mines pan out pretty well. But you'll have to let me look after you on the way over. It ain't an easy trip for a woman and there may be delays. You see, we call everybody 'neighbor' that lives in a hundred miles of us, and I reckon that'll include you an' me. So let's be friends right now. What's the matter with eatin' together? What say?"

She was very hard to persuade, but there was something in her face that let the man understand the temptation the invitation was to her. He was a shrewd reader of character, or he would not have been the man he was, and he concluded very soon that when Aunt Louisa made her investment and died so promptly, she had left very little behind her to keep the domestic pot boiling while her fortunate investment materialized.

He guessed very close to the truth, which was that the girl had no money to spend on expensive meals in the dining-car, but had subsisted during most of the long journey on the meager food supply she had brought with her. He regretted that he had not claimed an intimate acquaintance with Mr. Ralph Kaylor and so constituted himself her protector and provider, but it was too late for that now, and he fell back upon the hearty manner of the hospitable West, which finally prevailed over her scruples.

"I couldn't be satisfied, no way, to go off and leave you out here alone," he protested. "You see, we sort of belong to each other, us Painted Valley folks, an' if you won't eat, then I guess I won't either. But you might as well. You see, I'm liable to come visitin' at your house some time, an' I wouldn't feel at home if you won't visit with me now."

Put in this way, it sounded very much as though he laid claim to the entire Overland system, but to her it seemed rather touching and primitive. She was beginning to like him better. She was won by

the simple acceptance of herself as a part of his interesting world. They went in to dinner.

CHAPTER II.

THE END OF THE ROAD.

THEY introduced themselves over their meal, which had been delayed until they were almost the last in the dining-car. He called himself Ludlow—Deck Ludlow, of Tucson, and announced his business as claim buyer. He mentioned his name rather grandly, as though he expected it to be recognized by any one within hearing, and she timidly murmured that her name was Winifred Strange.

In the brilliantly lighted car her aversion, overcome for a few moments by loneliness, returned more strongly than before. There was something indescribably repellent about the man, which was increased by his attitude of possession once he had persuaded her to accept his hospitality. And her uneasiness was not diminished by the glances of surprise which she encountered from other passengers when she made her appearance as his companion.

When he had ordered their meal Ludlow began a category of questions, which soon left him in possession of her simple history—if he had not already guessed it. Her father's legacy, enough to keep her until she was self-supporting, had gone to pay for shares in a mine located in Painted Valley, and of which neither she nor her aunt had known more than that it had a high-sounding name, was vouched for by a dozen persons who claimed various honorable positions for themselves, and held forth Aladdin dreams of riches, according to assayers' estimates, which were given in dizzying profusion. Pressed for the actual name of this property she consulted a tiny address book and discovered it to be The Great Consolidated Verde Grande Corporation!

"Whew!" exclaimed Deck Ludlow in amazement that was not all exaggeration. "I never heard of anything around these parts that had a handle like that, and I thought I knew 'em all. An' Kaylor is the feller's name that runs it?"

"It is," she returned, with a funny little air of dignity as though protecting her unknown partner's name from traducement. "Mr. Ralph Kaylor. It isn't likely that you would know everybody, though I am sure he is a very important man. He knows ever so many bankers and people like that in the East."

"I guess I know the man you mean," acknowledged her companion, with the effect of searching his memory successfully. "You know, most everybody out here is called something else than their right names. We just call 'em something suitable an' easy an' let it go at that. You're taking the single track at Tecumseh, ain't you? An' you get off at—"

"At the end of the line," she finished. "I traced it all on the map that came with our shares. I will be met there—I sent a telegram." Then, with a little troubled air, "Please don't look so doubtful about it."

He hastened to reassure her.

"Now, don't you worry, little girl, you'll be all right-ee. I'm going to take the single track myself, and I'll look after you. I'm going to Poison Springs; some town, that! I guess you'll hear plenty about it after a while. But you just remember what I said when I first met you. We take care of women out here. If Kaylor don't send some one to meet you, somebody else will be on the spot and he ain't far away, see, little lady?" He so evidently meant himself that Winifred Strange sent up a fervent little prayer that her telegram had found its destination and would bring results.

As she rose from the table the misgivings that had visited her at recurring intervals since nightfall, returned, to remain in spite of her efforts to throw them off. As long as the day had held her in thrall she had been able to put her nameless forebodings into the background of her mind, but now with the immense void of this limitless darkness around her, she suddenly realized her smallness, her weakness. In all this new world there was only herself and these few non-caring passers, who would presently leave her, an atom in the great waste, to go on about their own affairs.

But she resolutely stifled the voice with-

in that urged her to abandon her project in the moment of its consummation. Even if she wished to do so she could not give it up now, for she had no money. The few dollars in her purse would not carry her far—to return was impossible. She had cast her die and must see it through. But searching her mind, she remembered that it was only since she met Ludlow that these misgivings had persisted so strongly.

Later in the evening the great train paused for a breathing second in its swift rush through space. Like some giant seagull it hung suspended in that vast plain of desert and sky, as lonely and illimitable as the ocean itself; and here two passengers, Ludlow and the lonely young girl, were hastily disembarked by impatient porters, contemptuously glad to be rid of inconsequent persons who dared interfere even for a second with their magnificent service "through to the coast."

The two, dropped there in the immense isolation, were left standing on the narrow platform, as unimportant as grains of sand in the desert that surrounded them. The Overland, whose wheels had barely ceased to revolve, gathered instant speed and was away—coiling into the velvet-black night like some enormous glowworm, bent upon hiding. When the glitter of lights had died away and the soft glow of the stars had replaced them, Winifred Strange, who had longed for the silence of great spaces, found that now she had her desire.

The platform where she stood constituted houses, town, people. There was absolutely nothing else, unless the water-tower, looming darkly a hundred feet away, could be counted as such. Upon one end of the platform a jumbled mass of boxes and crates were piled beside a row of immense casks, and among all this her anxious eyes finally discovered her own small, meek trunk. She had been ashamed of the little battered trunk when she began the journey, but now it looked like a friendly face. She caught her breath with a little sob, and tried to think of some of the bold, adventurous dreams which had sent her here, but now the dreams would not come back. She could feel no thrill—only the tremendous loneliness submerging her.

Ludlow had vanished for a moment in the darkness, but now he reappeared, followed by a sullen, hunched figure bearing a lantern.

"Found him sleeping under a sage brush; drunk, of course," he announced cheerfully. "This here is Injun Joe, Miss Winifred. He's supposed to 'tend this junction of nights, and this is how he does it. Now, don't you look so tormented. The train 'll be along in a couple of minutes and you'll be all right. It's hardly ever more 'n an hour late meetin' the Overland."

Injun Joe, by no means so drunk as to be unaware of what was said, suddenly flashed his lantern in Winifred's face, and she in turn had a glimpse of his own, the low-browed, snaky visage of a half-breed.

"Un new girl," he uttered to Ludlow as she shrank away. "Takum Poison Springs. Um pale, weak, ugh!"

Ludlow kicked him viciously.

"You damned fool," he snarled. "I'll rub your face in the cactus if you speak out of your turn. Get to work on that freight, double-quick. It's liable to rain and spoil it all."

The last was uttered as a sop to humor, and with the intention of diverting Winifred's attention. He smiled at her as she stood on the edge of the platform, to which she had retreated in terror. But she saw no reason to smile. She was wondering what might have happened if she had landed in this place alone. She had thought of hotels—lodging-houses where she might have remained overnight. The reality stunned her.

The half-breed picked himself up nimbly, and recovering his lantern set to work separating the boxes as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Ludlow continued to reassure Winifred.

"Don't mind that fellow," he said contemptuously. "He's drunk and crazy both. Look yonder! There comes the Desert Limited. That's what the boys call it. Ain't she a sight?"

Sure enough, from some remote distance among the cactus and sand dunes and the deep red hills, invisible by night, the remnant of a train came creeping toward them, its creaky road-bed wailing dismal protests

in the great silence. There was an ancient engine, a freight car and a single battered coach—a caricature of a train yet never was one more welcomed than this by Winifred Strange as she climbed aboard amidst its dust and antiquity. The brakeman, a booted, spurred individual, unlike any brakeman ever pictured, looked at her in open-mouthed curiosity and then at her companion, with the same look she had surprised in the half-breed's eyes. But Ludlow anticipated any inquiry the trainman may have made.

"This young lady is goin' up into the hills, Frank," he explained. "Her folks 'll meet her at the end of the line. Tell Joe Barnes to run his old he-engine sort of slow an' careful. We don't want any accidents when we got ladies aboard. I been tellin' her how nice we treat women when we got the chance."

Reassuring words, but with an effect oddly altered by the glance that passed between the two men and which Winifred caught with suspicion that would have been unknown to her a day earlier. She sunk into the dusty seat and closed her eyes to avoid further converse with Ludlow. She felt tired and beaten. It was late in the night and she had not slept well for many nights before this. Perhaps that was why she was afraid, coldly, quiveringly afraid. Doubt had entered into her heart and was pulling at the foundations of the air-castles youth and inexperience had built.

Suppose no one met her, after all! Suppose there was some mistake!

There was no one to question what had become of her. She could disappear and no one would ever ask where. She opened her eyes, driven to wakefulness by this thought, and encountered another pair of eyes fixed watchfully upon her. It did not matter if they were turned away at once; she had seen that they belonged to the half-breed, who had entered the train with the others. He was looking at her with what seemed a peculiar malevolence, as though he blamed her and not Ludlow for the kick and blow he had received. She closed her eyes, pretending to sleep, but alive and quivering in every nerve.

The night wore on. The wretched train

creaked and groaned over its ancient rails. She slept and waked and slept again. Slowly the darkness lifted and then, incredibly clear, incredibly wild and beautiful, the day was suddenly upon them.

The crazy engine stopped with a shriek that cracked and died in its birth. The loud voices of men and neighing of horses waked Winifred from the deepest sleep she had known that night. Ludlow was standing over her with his hateful air of possession, his face distorted into what was meant to be an ingratiating smile.

"Well, we've arrived at last, and no bones broke," he announced, cheerfully facetious. "We'll just take a look outside and see if your man Kaylor is waitin' up for you. Don't you worry if he ain't, for I'm going to look out for you."

Winifred tremblingly straightened her hair and veil, trying to keep her eyes from the window, and praying earnestly in her heart that the unknown Kaylor would be there to claim her the moment she set foot on the platform.

But when she finally stood there, her heart, that had been beating so wildly, became gradually so quiet that it might easily have ceased to beat at all. For it seemed that there was no one waiting for her, after all. Lifting her eyes she let them seek for a face that would answer the unspoken question in hers, but though there were faces that stared back at her with interest enough, there was not one that betrayed expectation.

Beside the narrow platform three or four huge wagons drawn by mule teams were standing, while a half dozen men were already loading them with the supplies brought by the crazy train. Some saddled horses stood dejectedly by a rack whose posts were sunk deep in the drifting sand, and their riders, hard-faced, lean men of the desert, were gathered, rather in the way of curious children, to watch the loading of the freighter's wagons. A little apart from these Winifred saw a man who alone took no interest whatever in the business of the morning or herself. His attitude was negligent, seemingly unconscious of what went on about him, but as she looked, marking the intangible points by which he

differed from the others, she saw the half-breed who had been kicked by Ludlow, approach and whisper some brief story into the ears that appeared to give no heed to what they heard. She knew by the intuition that is the surest knowledge that the Indian was speaking of herself; telling the history of the encounter at Tecumseh. Then she heard Ludlow speaking at her side.

"It's all over, little lady. We're at the end of the road, and here the new trail commences. There don't seem to be anybody here to meet you, but never mind that. I'm agreeable to look after a little lady like you till the buzzards go to roost."

"In that case you'd better be moving, hadn't you?" a cold, slow voice said, just behind him.

CHAPTER III.

"DOC" OF POISON SPRINGS.

THE man who had attracted Winifred's attention by his aloofness had approached them so silently as to be unobserved. Now he stood directly behind Ludlow in such an attitude as to make the other man seem dwarfed and immaterial. He was a man of such great height as to make the breadth of his shoulders pass unnoticed and indeed, his whole build, though superior to the men about him, was lessened by an intangible something that robbed his magnificent strength of its potency. His face shared and enhanced this impression, for while his features were cut with bold and daring strokes, it was as though some devastating storm of nature had swept his whole being, leaving his soul a bare and broken thing over which his great body slowly crumbled and died.

He was dressed in the same rough clothing as was worn by the other men and even the half-breed of the junction—a flannel shirt wide open at the neck, corduroy trousers and the high-heeled boots of the cowboy, and around his body was loosely strapped a cartridge belt and a pair of holsters which frankly disclosed the ominous length of two long revolvers. Beside Ludlow, in his smug, well-cut clothes, he was a rude and formidable presence, and

Winifred Strange, sensing the animosity in their faces as they turned to each other, watched both in frightened indecision. But if she looked to Ludlow for relief from this startling figure she was disappointed, for he greeted the stranger with a nervous and apologetic smile, cringing openly before the cold voice and colder eyes that emphasized their question.

"Why, hello, doc! Who'd thought you'd be over. Things must be runnin' straight at Poison Springs to let you off a day. Or maybe you heard we was goin' to have comp'ny and dropped over to meet us." He ended with a forced laugh that some way seemed to include Winifred, so that she looked up with a timid smile.

"Speaking of this lady?" the other inquired in a grave voice, and then Winifred saw what she had missed at first; the man was drunk; gravely, decorously, drunk; as steady on his feet as an oak-tree, choosing his words with care and precision, but drunk nevertheless. She was horribly afraid of the thought of drunken men; had never seen one in reality, and now she looked entreatingly at Ludlow, whom she despised. But he refused to meet her eyes. Her fear did not pass unnoticed, however, for when she encountered the gloomy eyes of the object of her distress, she read comprehension in their cold measurement.

"Speaking of this lady?" he said over again, and Ludlow mouthed some unintelligible reply. The other went on deliberately, as though Winifred were not there to answer for herself. "Who is she, and what does she want out here?"

Ludlow answered glibly. Came out to be with some friends and look after money she had invested. He was just being polite.

The tall man turned this over in his mind thoughtfully. "There's the Golden property," he said, "somebody said those people were stirring around lately."

Winifred broke in eagerly; her apprehensions quieted for the moment by the hope of some light on her difficulty. She remembered that Golden was a name mentioned frequently in the history of the mine which had been such romantic reading for her aunt. She told them so, but they hardly seemed to hear what she said.

"Maybe so," exclaimed Ludlow, slapping his thigh. "Say, sister, let's have that combination of titles once more—The Great United—he-haw! Say, doc, but ain't this a joke? Jim Golden putting a thing like this over?" He winked heavily at the other man, including Winifred in a bold survey that brought the blood to her cheeks. For the second time she exhibited her pitiful credentials—The Great Consolidated Verde Grande Corporation—Mr. Ralph Kaylor.

"That's the man," said doc, with a laugh that had no sound of mirth. For the first time he sent a comprehensive glance at Winifred, seeing and weighing her for the first time—a cold, appraising look in no wise swayed by her youth and pale fear. Ludlow broke in, chattering magpie fashion.

"What about taking the girl to Poison Springs with us? I told her all along she'd be looked after, and I had in mind taking her on to the camp the minute I laid eyes on her. It'll be a joke on them fellers. I reckon you'd say turn about's fair play." He chuckled loudly at some obscure jest behind his words.

Winifred moved away from him, her cramped limbs responding slowly to the effort of her will, and searching among the baggage at her feet discovered her shabby suit-case. She spoke to the tall man timidly, recognizing in him the spirit that held control of her destiny.

"I will go and find Mr. Kaylor, if I may."

He looked down into her face, small, pale, and resolute through all its gentleness. He seemed to be striving to conquer some elusive thought which at last formed itself into spoken words.

"You want to go to those people instead of—with this fellow?" He indicated Ludlow with a contemptuous gesture and the girl murmured breathlessly, "Oh, yes—oh, yes—"

"Then you shall go. I'll take you there myself."

Ludlow began to squeal and bluster.

"But, doc! She was coming with me. She was ready to do just what I said. This ain't none of your affair—"

He must have been beside himself to have said that, for as he met the cold eyes

of the other, the bluster died suddenly from his tongue and he shuffled uneasily.

"I reckon a man's got some rights," he grumbled.

"But you're a buzzard," said doc, so calmly that it seemed impossible that he could be drunk. "A buzzard! I said that before, didn't I? Get out of the way. I'm taking this girl to the Golden mines, if that's where she's started. After that it's her own affair."

The way cleared miraculously before him. Ludlow melted into insignificance. Winifred caught a glimpse of him at the end of the platform reciting his grievance to a small group of listeners. The tall man lifted her from the step with a swing of his arm. She had never dreamed that there could be such an arm—such strength.

The station here was a duplicate of the one at Tecumseh, only now communication with the world by rail ceased abruptly. The desolate train stood on the siding, awaiting the hour for the return journey. The engineer looked out of the cab window, an interested observer of the scene and borrowed a chew of tobacco from a sheep-herder. The cow ponies fastened to a line of posts were all asleep temporarily, and their riders, the uniform, nondescript riders of the red country, forgetting the loading of the wagons in this new excitement, stood about in groups of twos and threes, watching to see how the play would end. They knew that something was sure to happen.

The tall man crossed the platform to where the horses were hitched. "Going to use your pinto, Tom," he called to one of the men in the nearest group, and the answer came back readily, "Awright."

Winifred stood in the center of the platform. In close contact with this man she had realized again that he was drunk—had caught the reek of whisky on his breath. Before her lay a journey into the unknown—with him; behind her waited Ludlow, from whom she shrank even more, were that possible. She had endured so much in the day and night preceding this that having used the last ounce of strength she possessed, she now, after the manner of her kind, sought and found new reserves

within her frail body. She had been taught to believe that within every man some good can be found; she believed that in this crowd of onlookers some one waited for her call. Suddenly she cried out in a clear, piercing voice, startlingly loud in the thin air, appealing to the men who watched with amused, half-shamed faces.

"I will not go with this drunken man! Is there not one among you who will take me? Mr. Kaylor will pay you well. I will not go with this man."

CHAPTER IV.

JIM GOLDEN'S GATE.

SILENCE. With terrified eyes Winifred looked from one face to another. What had she done? Everywhere she read startled dismay, fear, astonishment. Then one by one the loungers, like lazy rattlesnakes, uncoiled themselves from their various attitudes and strolled away. No one had spoken. That was her answer. There was a cackle of laughter from behind her and she knew it came from Ludlow. He called in a shrill, passionate voice:

"That's what women think of you, Doc Satterlee. You leave that girl to me or you'll pay more for her than any woman you ever spoke to."

Satterlee turned slowly from the horses and came toward Winifred. His face was expressionless, but she saw something glowing in his eyes—a deep, ugly fire. They were no longer cold eyes.

"You get on that horse, miss," he said quietly. "Be ready to ride when I come back."

He passed her quickly. She heard a smothered yell, and then the body of Ludlow huddled in a mass of revolving legs and arms shot limply past and landed in a lump upon the tracks. She saw that the man's face struck upon a bed of loose cinders and buried itself there. It had been done as easily as one throws a ball. She stood in her place, petrified, wondering if the man had been killed. Satterlee returned.

"Why aren't you on the horse?" he demanded sternly. She cowered away from

him, but he put his hand on her slight waist and set her on the horse like a doll. "Now ride," he said.

She had never been on a horse before, and she bit her lips to keep from shrieking with terror. For now her pride was aroused. This great, masterful drunken man who made other men crawl before him should not hear her cry out. The horse lurched in a rough, jerky movement that was torture to her taut nerves. He was only single footing lazily along, but it seemed to her he was running. She heard unbelievable sounds behind her. The men on the platform were laughing—laughing at her!

Anger put sudden strength into her arms and she pulled violently on the reins so that the horse stopped. She was resolved to throw herself from the saddle to the ground and remain there until the train would take her away from this nightmare, but when she turned her head she saw that the men were laughing at Ludlow, who had picked himself up, a tumbled heap, from the sandy, cindered track. He was wiping the blood from long, ugly cuts in his face. To their rough humor he may have seemed very amusing.

"Ride on," said the stern voice in her ear, "unless you are sorry for that buzzard."

The horse began to move again and this time she relaxed a little so that the motion was less torturous. Her escort, or captor, which was more the case, rode easily beside her. His horse was superior to her own just as the rider was superior to the men left behind, and with some difficulty the pace was accommodated to the shuffling pinto which, though doubtless astonished at his strange burden, accepted the change with the philosophy of his kind.

"You never rode before," said Satterlee, viewing her dispassionately. "Don't hold your pommel, and sit easy. You couldn't fall off if you tried."

She obeyed, found it as he said, and for a time they rode in silence.

Their way lay straight across the cactus-dotted flats for many miles, and though to the casual glance it seemed a mere, trackless waste, there was a trail winding in and

out of the sparse growths that led eventually to the far hills.

The day, once it had come, developed with the rapid growth and fire of all desert days. The sun rose magically from its cave and flaunted in haughty splendor upon a sick world quick to faint beneath its power. Night which had cooled the burning sands and revived life in such poor forms as this desolation knew, had no skill to combat its age-old antagonist and soon the long period of light, when man and beast must endure dumbly if they would live at all, set in to its fullest.

Winifred drooped like a flower beneath this scorching sun. She sat her saddle quietly enough, swaying gently to and fro as the pinto ambled on. She no longer rebelled against the will that had subdued her own—nothing concerned her now, but the moment when this torment would cease. Her lips were so dry that speech was impossible; her eyeballs shriveled before the glare and soon her lids drooped inertly down, a feeble veil against the goading pain.

Her companion seemed entirely impervious to the discomfort—his long, sinewy frame renounced suffering as a thing too trivial for his hurt. He had consumed much liquor the night before, but that was no new thing for him; the leisurely ride, the still, burning heat, acted as a soporific to his drugged brain.

For a time he forgot even the girl beside him. The pinto was Tom Morton's horse and he lazily accepted the impression that Tom was riding it. He had swiftly forgotten the scene at the station and forgotten as well the blow given Ludlow.

But after a while the cloud lifted and he remembered that the other rider was a woman; one he had picked up somewhere and was taking into the mountains on some crazy expedition. He looked at her with awakening interest and saw with curious, minute deduction how white and weak she was.

"We'll be in the foot-hills soon," he said, "and then we'll make camp for half an hour."

And at last they did come to the foot-hills. Though here, as in the plain below,

there was no vegetation, no trees; still, there were the deep red cuts, the cold granite faces of mighty, tormented boulders which in their way gave shelter and relief.

He lifted her down from the horse as easily as he had put her there, and gave her a drink from his canteen as she lay helpless beneath a jutting rock; then with inconceivably quick and deft movements he built a tiny fire and made coffee and cooked bacon from materials produced from a miracle of close packing.

Winifred ate what he gave her, and the strength returned to her body. Much of her fear had passed away, and with it her resentment. Even the fact that he had been drinking when they started failed now to thrill her with horror. She had grown used to him and the shock of his condition had passed. Already the small, petty ideas and smug prejudices of her former life were leaving her, obscured like weak combatants of this rude, cruel, but tremendous land. If she had weighed the matter she would have been astonished to find that the fact of his drunkenness was inconsiderable beside the bread and coffee he had produced for her.

Almost at once they were on their way again. There was no question of further rest. The brief respite had been undertaken merely as a sop to her exhaustion, and to meet the necessity for food; further pause seemed unnecessary from his point of view.

But now her suffering was lessened immeasurably by the shelter of the hills. There was still a trail, rutted, almost impassable for any but the surest footed. Sometimes Satterlee walked, leading Winifred's horse and leaving his own to follow, which it did with well-trained obedience. At such times the girl closed her eyes, refusing to look into the abyss that yawned on one side, or at the impassable face of rock that towered on the other. She hung upon her saddle, a featherweight that any jar might have loosened, but somehow she remained there safely. She began to trust her guide; she no longer expected to meet some hideous and inevitable fate at any moment, and presently she found herself believing childishly that he would bring her

through at last. Once he said to her grimly:

"There's a better way than this, but it's longer. I didn't have time to take you around the trail."

So they traveled until the day wore on to evening. They stopped again at noon for more bread and coffee, and then he explained that they would reach the Golden claim in Painted Valley before the next meal. He did not call the name by its euphonious name, and she humbly forebore to correct him. They were still in the mountains, but in a gentler, less-desolate region, and it was late in the evening when they descended into a little valley, between the knees of two great hills, a strange valley as bare of life and greenness as the desert left behind them. But here was the first sign of life and habitation encountered that day. A makeshift cabin, half adobe, half canvas, was huddled in the dip of the valley, and flanking it was the rude suggestion of a shed shelter that covered the entrance to a tunnel.

A faint ribbon of smoke drifted from the chimney, and as the horses trotted down the trail a man came to the door and stood watching their approach. When they came near enough for recognition, they saw him lean toward the doorway of the cabin and call something to some one who stood within. One of his hands rested idly on the butt of a revolver in his holster and with the other he removed the pipe he was smoking from his mouth long enough to call a surly greeting.

"Hello, Doc Satterlee! What do you want in these parts?"

They were near enough now for Winifred to see that he was a low-browed, sullen-eyed man whose manner spoke forbidding resentment to their visit if his tone had not said it for him. But her companion ignored these signs of disfavor and rode forward until he drew rein before the cabin door.

"This young woman came in from the East on the Overland," he said, with a note of scornful derision in his voice. "She says she's headed for the Great Consolidated Some Lie or Other, and I reckon that description suits this claim to a T.

She wants to see a fellow named Kaylor. I guess he might be that partner of yours who went East last month. Anyway, I brought her here. Bad as it is, I guess it's better than Poison Springs—and you, Jim Golden, see that she's all right if ever I come ridin' this way again."

He wheeled his horse so suddenly that a shower of loose sand and gravel rattled against the cabin, and with a sweep of his long arm put Winifred on the ground. Then with the rein of the pinto hung loosely over his arm he urged his own horse into a gallop down the valley trail toward a cut-in the hills. He said no word of farewell to the girl; she might have been a stick or a stone for all the notice he took of her, and she remained there where he had put her down, looking after him in puzzled chagrin. She had meant to thank him, after all, for his grudging care of her—and now he was gone, without a word.

From the cabin door Jim Golden surveyed this visitation with blank amazement and dropped jaw. Over his shoulder a face appeared, emaciated, drawn by a thousand unvoiced woman woes; a woman's face, shut in by hanging hair that had once been brown, but was now a mixture of the burned hues of the sun and the dying yellow of peroxide. But for all that, it was a woman's face, and Winifred turned to it with a heart-throb of relief and joy.

Her face must have spoken something of what she felt, for the woman pushed past Golden and came out to meet her.

"I reckon you're all tired out," she said kindly. "You better come on in and set down while you talk."

She was tall and slender, and younger than the first glance would have computed her age, for her face was not yet barren of beauty. She was wrapped in a faded, red satin kimono, a thing horrible and incongruous in the strange environment. She held the garment together with one hand and held out the other with a protecting gesture.

"I reckon this is some of that low-down Kaylor's doin's," she went on in a tired voice. "But never mind that. You look clear beat out. To think of you makin' that trip like you did. You must have been

scared to death of that boozin' devil. It sure is the surprise of my life that he brought you here."

Winifred's lips formed a faint question, "Who is he?"

The woman laughed—a short, terrible laugh that seemed in some way to account obscurely for the red kimono and peroxide hair.

"Him?" she cried, leading the way into the house. "Why, he's Doc Satterlee! You'll hear plenty about him in this country. He runs Poison Springs, girlie, and if you'd ever put your foot in that place, your mother, wherever she is, in heaven or on earth, woulda been pickin' thorns out of her heart for time everlastin'. He's the mayor of that burg, Doc Satterlee is!"

CHAPTER V.

"THE DUMP-HOLE OF HELL."

WHEN nature, in a bitter mood, jumbled the rocks, the desert sands, the burning suns and winds, together into an unspeakable desolation, and in this waste laid mocking baits of gold and other precious metals to tempt men to their destruction, or to that bitter crucible from which they emerged changed as the treasure they brought with them, it pleased the cynical Goddess of Fortune to sprinkle just enough of her glittering bait in the most desolate spot of all—just enough to bring there souls and bodies so hardened, so far removed from the tenderer side of life that they could live and have their being without complaint in a land remote from God and His ways.

In this place there was no water, there was no shade, there was no religion. A group of mean shacks, too poor to be called houses, clustered around the central spot of infamy and dissolution like poor parasites to the fountain of their existence; and fountain it was, in truth, for in the Half-Bottle saloon and dance-hall, there was a constant flow of both liquor and physical spirits from which the shacks received the overflow.

There were men in this camp strong enough to weather the desert, strong enough

to endure the hard, raw life, yet weak enough to crawl here when the earth held no gentler place for them, and wicked enough to only thrive where evil grew uncurbed. And there were women, too, come from forgotten niches in life's plan, hiding their faces that had seen too much; smiling with lips that had withered in bitterness—such women as drift to far places like this as the sands or snows drift before a driving wind—like last year's leaves that can find no shelter. And when all this dross collected from the four winds into this uninhabitable spot that had been cursed by the earth which had created it—where there was barely enough gold sprinkled here and there to tempt them to live on, they announced themselves a community which later on developed a name of peculiar meaning.

A half mile from the saloon, which had been the first building to take form in the crazy lot that followed, was the spring from which the town gained its name. With water at a premium, brought with torturous effort over the heavy trail from the shipping point, nature had seen fit to play with her pawns, setting out for them the spring that flowed, free and bountiful, mocking those who came near and looked, but dared not touch its pestilential refreshment. It bubbled from a jumbled mass of boulders that were dyed grotesquely green from its overflow, and all about it were the bleached bones of suffering creatures who had been too weak to resist its lure.

Some weak jester had first called the collection of shacks by the name of the mocking spring and the name had stuck. Gradually its reputation filtered through other camps until its evilness was associated with the poison spring itself, and one was thought of with the same horror as the other, and the town that might have become a habitation for sane human creatures, became by this a haunted graveyard of men and women who lived beyond the pale. The town was shunned by the world outside its orbit as was the poison spew that filtered from some vindictive secret source and joined the curse that nature had laid upon the spot.

In the beginning the town had been merely a halting place for drifters who

stopped there for a little while and passed on their way, neither better nor worse for their experience. But enough remained to make necessary a few crude laws of their own; naturally a leader appeared and the others fell submissively in line.

Doc Satterlee was the man who ruled Poison Springs, and even his enemies admitted that he did it well. In ruling it he used his fists and six-shooters indiscriminately, on the principle that what one could not accomplish the other could, and through force, quickness, and a cold ruthlessness that pursued his own course regardless of opposition, he gained and maintained control of all the other wild and ruthless souls who gathered around him.

He was a strange, silent man. If drink could have killed him he would have been dead long since; if a treacherous bullet could have found him unprepared his name would soon have been forgotten, but no drink ever dulled the processes of his brain in which self-protection was the first instinct and no bullet ever failed to be anticipated. He lived, not because he bore a charmed life, but because he was bolder, bigger-brained, more cold-blooded than any man who matched him. This was the man who had ridden with Winifred Strange to the Golden claim, and this was the town he ruled over. When he returned to it the story of the girl's arrival had preceded him, but no one dared question what became of her.

He drank heavily and persistently day after day. For hours he sat alone at his table in a corner of the Half-Bottle saloon, and no one dared approach him but the voiceless Swede who tended bar and minded no curses. Speculation ran rife and all of it was far afield of the truth. Nobody could possibly imagine that while he sat there sunk in bitter reflection and in a silence that shunned even a passing word, a voice was ringing in his ear—a persistent, clear, scornful voice lifted in a childish, foolish protest:

"The man is drunk! I will not go with this drunken man!"

His hand was firm as he took up the bottle and poured another glass. He was not drunk. Yet subconsciously he knew

that it must have been evident or she would not have known—a little, white-faced innocent like that! His eyes rested for a brief second on one of the dance-hall girls and she must have seen some softening there, for she came at once with a frightened, ingratiating smile, inconceivably repellent to him. He sent her away with brutal words that brought the faint, sodden color to her poor cheeks.

It was strange that he had thought so little of the girl during the journey across the hills, yet now he thought of her constantly. Her voice of scorn, of fear, bit with insidious cruelty into some sensibility long since forgotten. Women feared him; his anger, his indifference—but not such women as she.

A buckboard drawn by a pair of winded broncos stopped with a rattle of loose tires before the saloon. The driver got down lazily and two men followed from the rear seat. They stood together on the porch, cursing feebly at the heat and dust; then went inside to the bar for a drink.

Their entrance created a faint ripple of interest and the men and women who lingered in the half-empty room stared at them curiously. They were well-dressed, prosperous, and with the air of cities about them. The one who assumed the air of sponsorship explained Poison Springs in terse, undiluted terms.

"A blot," he exclaimed, pouring his drink, "a blot on the landscape. When we get the railroad through, such eyesores will be obliterated. Towns, real towns, will spring up everywhere. Irrigation, just a little irrigation, and the desert will blossom like the rose. Scenery! Scenery! You have never seen scenery until I show you Painted Valley."

Satterlee in his corner, lifted his head, surveying the newcomers with a deep, chill look. Some word or phrase had caught his attention and now he listened openly, his keen eyes taking in every detail of the two men who stood before the bar.

The one who had spoken was portly, complacent, and in spite of the hard journey just finished and the liberal accumulation of alkali dust gathered on the way, had a smug appearance of good grooming.

His face wore a perpetual fatuous smile as though he was eternally encouraging the world to think as he did, which was to look on the bright side of everything and refuse to see the worst. It was only in the eyes that his cheerful optimism was contradicted; there was no smile there, but a mean and shifty cunning, suspicious, keenly watching for the weak spot in his antagonist. Treachery looked out of his little gray eyes as plainly as though it had been printed there.

His companion was of a franker type. He made no effort to disguise the keen rapacity that was stamped on his thin lips and iron jaw. He was the money hound, and only the scent and sight of his quarry could bring animation to his countenance that beheld everything else with indifference.

"The rest of the trip is mere child's play," continued the first speaker with optimistic gaiety. "And once you are there! Good Lord, man, what would I give for your first impressions. The majesty of the mountains, the simple, honest living! It'll put ten years on your life to spend a month there."

The second man answered with dry, biting sarcasm. "I could have all the scenery I wanted two thousand miles nearer civilization." There was a chill in his voice that killed the effusion of the other. He left his glass half empty and turned to the door.

"They've changed horses by this time," he said shortly. "If you're ready, we'll start."

"Wait a minute."

Satterlee was between them and the door; his long figure with its curious air of blighted perfection, lounged against the wall, and while he put forth no restraint, it was evident that they could not pass until he finished with them.

"What the hell do you want?"

The first man growled the inquiry with an ugly flash of his narrow, red-rimmed eyes.

"Your name's Kaylor? I thought so. You're runnin' a shebang called the Consolidated Verde Grande or something like that? Out here they call it Jim Golden's

claim—" Satterlee's voice was slow and cool, only his black eyes burned with a dull, somber flame. Kaylor nodded; the beligerence gone from his attitude with the acknowledgment of his name.

"Well, what about it?" he mumbled.

"I wanted to say that Poison Springs is a sort of clearing-house for the business that goes on in these parts," went on Satterlee. "In other words, what you do has to please Poison Springs or it won't go. And Poison Springs is me. Me, Satterlee! I've been hearing about you lately. I don't like some of your ways. Which ones, I'll leave you to guess. What I want you to remember is—don't try anything you can't march up here and tell about like a little man. This is the dump-hole of hell and we know it, but we've got our rules an' regulations, same as Congress. Understand, don't you? Your team is hitched so you can get along now. When you get to Golden's maybe you'll understand what I'm meanin' by this talk and if you find anything out there that needs straightenin' up, why you get busy and straighten it up quick, see?"

It was a long speech for Satterlee to make, and when he finished Kaylor was blustering in fury and helplessness before it. He knew about Satterlee and knew that he had to accept what was said to him with what good grace he could muster. His answer was some muttered words of acquiescence as he and his companion hurried out of the place and climbed into the buckboard that waited for them with fresh horses. Once on the way out of town both found their voices readily enough.

"Somebody 'll take a shot at that fellow some day and finish him," said Kaylor vindictively. "He's got this whole valley by the nose and a finger in everybody's business. It would be a lot healthier place if he was put out of the way."

The other man moved his thin lips in the semblance of a smile. He thought Kaylor a fool, and his expression betrayed his thoughts.

"What did he mean by warning you that your ways didn't please him? What will we find has happened at the mine, that's what I want to know," he ruminated, speaking his thoughts aloud.

The object of this speculation stood in the door of the saloon looking after the buckboard as it clattered down the street and out of sight around some shacks. As he stood, he reeled a little. He had taken more liquor than even his iron frame could endure.

"Drunk, sure enough drunk," he muttered, turning back to his table. "What would she say if she could see me now."

CHAPTER VI.

HARD-WINTER OF THE HILLS.

WINIFRED STRANGE stood on a high butte that overlooked the valley where she had lived for three weeks with Jim Golden and the woman who was known as his wife. From where she stood she could see the shack and the thin ribbon of smoke that warned her of the approaching supper hour. She saw it with a little homekeeping thrill, as though the barren valley below and the crazy shack that was made of odds and ends belonged to her in some queer way and she to it.

She had not been unhappy. It was singular that this was so, for she was fastidious, dainty, Puritan in her tastes and beliefs, and surely none of these qualities had room for growth in her new environment.

But for some reason she found herself looking inward and beyond the limitations of her blameless existence, into something bigger, broader and crude, that, strangely enough, gave no shock to her sensibilities. She was not repelled, but only curious and interested in her new life. Poverty and deprivation had a different meaning out here from what she had seen in her previous experience. Thinking of these things as she looked over the valley and on to other isolated peaks standing lonely against the evening sky, her mind opened to a faint solution of this infinite mystery.

It was impossible to cherish narrowness or small, cramped beliefs before this majesty, this silence! Her heart expanded. Already her frail body seemed to have taken on some of the strength of the bold landscape and the free wind that came from

the tall peaks at nightfall, bringing with it the smell of the desert, miraculously cooled.

The Golden had accepted her simply, philosophically. They had known nothing of her coming but they received her without question. When she attempted to explain, faltering over the recital of her hopes and plans that in the face of what she had found seemed so pitiable and mistaken, they only answered her with uncomprehensive stares. It was something she would have to settle with Kaylor when he returned.

Winifred was far from stupid; looking back, she knew that from the time she left the overland train she had been prepared for disappointment, but the realization of her collapsed day-dreams was so much more overwhelming than anything she could have imagined, she was left dazed with the completeness of it.

She knew nothing of mines, of course, but even her ignorance and credulity could not visualize wealth in the ragged hole in the side of the hill that was the visible claim of the Great Consolidated Verde Grande to existence. When she spoke of this to Jim Golden he looked at her stupidly and grinned. In his own language he knew that she had been "stung," but the matter did not concern him. His share in the deal was to pose as the original owner of the mine, his responsibility ended there.

Mabel Golden had a better understanding of the situation. She possessed a spurious knowledge of the world beyond Painted Valley, and quickly gaged something like the true status of affairs.

"That Kaylor is one of them phony promoters," she said to Winifred. "He's caught a lot of suckers with his flamin' advertisements and you're one of them. I want to see his face when he comes in and finds you here. It'll be a show. I'll bet he has some story ready to smooth you down, though; he's just the kind to crawl out of any hole he gets into. But take it from me, girlie, the best thing you can do it to forget you ever had that money and get busy tryin' to make some more. You never get anything but the worst of it from the Kaylor sort of breed."

Winifred was divided between dread and longing for the absent Kaylor's return. A

vein of stubbornness that belonged to the down-East Yankee side of her was prepared to demand her rights, but the part that was the simple girl shrunk from the unpleasantness sure to follow. That she was without money and would have to depend upon reimbursement from Kaylor for even her traveling expenses, helped to rob her of self-confidence. There were but few of her waking hours when she did not ask herself the question—what would become of her if the man refused to return her money?

At first she had hard work to conceal her virginal distaste for Mabel Golden, but now that feeling had disappeared with her fastidious shrinking from the rude make-shifts of her daily life. Mabel had been a dance-hall girl—that much was evident from her hair alone, the waxy pallor of her skin, lifeless from the use of cosmetics, and her clothes—pitiful bedizened remnants of a shabby glory; she mentioned her old profession in half-daring defiance of the younger girl's disapproval, but she missed this because of Winifred's hazy ideas of dance-halls. She was not especially shocked except at Mabel's red satin kimono, which never lost its effect upon her. And it was but a short time before Mabel's manner became subdued, even humble, before her young guest, and she would listen to suggestions from her with the mild submission of a child whose cramped intellect was unfolding in contact with a sane mind.

Winifred had heard Satterlee spoken of often in the three weeks of her stay with the Goldens; sometimes voluntarily in the course of conversation, and at other times brought forth by her own timid inquiries—for she had not forgotten him.

When she was alone she sometimes tried to analyze the hold this man had upon her imagination. She shuddered when she thought of him, recalling his brutality, his drunkenness, his fierce lack of tenderness to herself, but with all these reasons why she should despise him, there was within her the faint thrill of an emotion that had no name. She did not wish to see him again. The stories recounted by the Goldens filled her with horror and dismay, but the sound of his name had a power that forced her always to stop and listen.

The afternoon was passing. She was a long way from the cabin, and, with a sigh of regret, she began the journey down the trail. It was the most beautiful hour of the day—the sunset. She wanted to be where she could fill her soul with its loveliness, but the timidity of civilization that still clung to her, caused her to dread the loneliness of the trail when day was no longer there to guide her. She had gone but a few steps when a sound, the most unexpected, yet most ordinary in the universe, brought her to an instant stop—a voice.

"Hated tuh come down to yearth, didn't ye, gal? I reckon it does look right pretty up hyer tuh folks that lives down on the flats. I ben watchin' yuh some time, and I 'low you got the same sort of eyesight as myself."

A man was standing on the ledge that stopped the first steep descent. He had been watching her as he said, with gentle, quizzical eyes that were like two shiny bits of pale-blue flint. He was an old man, but aged with the hard, indestructible, gnarled age of a stanch, virile little tree that perennially rises to bravely face each cycle of time, so that in some way he gave the impression of wizen youth. He was a prospector, for his burro and pack were close behind him, and the sands of the desert and the toil of the hills had stripped his body of flesh down to the bone and sinew, and life had pounded and pummeled him into the shell of a man so bare of non-essentials that even hair and eyebrows had gone with the rest. His mouth, a mere slit in his weathered face, was closed over almost toothless gums, but in its unpromising line there was still a glint of quiet, courageous humor. To Winifred's air of indecision he introduced himself gravely.

"Name H. W. Davis, miss, an' my cabin's on the second level. I reckon you'd seen it if you looked close as you come up. They call me Hard-Winter Davis around these parts; maybe you've heard some speech of me?"

He watched her closely out of his hard, little, bright eyes, like some curious old child, looking for praise. When she shook her head he was plainly disappointed.

"Thought everybody knew me—old Hard-Winter," he grumbled.

When she would have passed, he turned his burro and loquaciously accompanied her.

"Reckon I'll piece ye for a spell, miss. You don't step just sure and steady accordin' to my notion. You the gal that's stayin' over to Jim Golden's claim, hey? You any of their folks?"

Her disclaimer pleased and puzzled him.

"Didn't think so. You ain't the same cut. I knowed it when I seen ye on the butte. Then how comes it you're livin' there?"

She told him. For some reason there was a relief in telling him far stronger than her confidence in Ludlow or her forced explanation to Satterlee had been. This little, dry, old man looked as though he had seen so much, knew so much, not of the surfaces of life, but of its depths. He listened, and when she had finished seemed to be turning the matter over in his mind.

"Jim Golden's folks air queer people, and Kaylor, he's queer," he mused. "Ef ye don't mind my sayin' it, gal, ye ain't in exactly the right place. Now a nice, modest little gal like you oughta be home with her ma, or so it seems to me. This hyer minin' business is fitten for men-folk. Why don't you light out, gal, on the next stage?"

Why didn't she? But she could not tell him that. Instead, she said, with a brave little smile:

"Oh, don't forget I'm a business woman. I couldn't go away without seeing Mr. Kaylor about my investment after coming away out here. Of course he will make everything right if I am not satisfied; he promised my aunt. No doubt the mines will open to full capacity, and everything will be booming at once."

He stared at her mildly. If she had spoken in some unknown tongue his interest would have been as unattached. He seemed to be thinking of something in the valley below.

"Maybe so—maybe so. Them fellers in the East are quick at fixin' things, but I ain't heered of any mine being worked with anything but a pick and shovel in

these hills. I reckon, accordin' to Mr. Kaylor, this here Painted Valley 'll be lappin' Chicago pretty soon and mines a spoutin' gold. But me, I've lived around here for fifty years. I've friz in the hills and roasted in the desert. I've weathered hell and lived to tell about it, but I never yet seen gallivantin' fortune made to a man's hand.

"You can't wave no wand over these mountains and tell 'em to grow gold no more 'n they'd grow beans. Jim Golden has got some property down there, and old Hard-Winter Davis has got some up here. I done looked his over before I staked my own, and I-vow, if me and Pedro ain't ready to light out to-morrow mornin', 'count of kinder hankerin' to see pay-dirt. Maybe yore friend Kaylor is all right; maybe not."

But it was not Winifred's desire to defend Kaylor; she was more than inclined to believe her new friend right in his conjectures, but she only smiled and said good-by to him when they reached the fork of the trail. A deep grounded integrity forced her into an attitude of tacit defense. She was eating the bread of these people—she could not condemn them until she knew beyond doubt that she had been defrauded.

She was nearly at the foot of the trail when her glance, traveling across the valley, encountered a light wagon drawn by a wearied pair of mustangs. Even at this great distance she could see that the passengers in the rear seat were strangers. One of them was pointing, looking eagerly toward the mine-shaft.

She continued her way with a rapidly beating heart that, in spite of her emotion, was heavy in her breast. She did not need to be told who the strangers were. Kaylor, the master of her destiny, had arrived.

CHAPTER VII.

MISGIVINGS AND PREMONITIONS.

"AND you came out here expecting to find—"

"What your letters and prospectuses promised," finished Winifred with spirit. "I had a right to believe that—"

that the property was partially developed, at least. Why, you promised dividends long before this." There was the hint of a tremble in her voice that made her listener give her a keen glance.

"But my dear young lady—" he temporized, and paused to moisten his lips, which had become dry in the last few minutes of listening to this dissatisfied investor, and wondering how the deuce he was going to get out of the mess.

It was after supper, and Kaylor and Winifred had walked together a little way from the cabin where they could have their talk in private. Kaylor had been in a silent white rage from the moment Jim Golden told him of the girl's arrival, and after he had seen her, pale and resolute, waiting to take him to task for his statements so plainly false. He privately cursed all women, and resolved to let them alone in future, though their money was so temptingly easy to get. They were such bad losers that it always cost more in the end than it was worth. He knew all the various ways of placating women investors, but Winifred was a new type, and he was uncertain in placing her.

"Well, my dear young lady," he soothed again, "you must admit that your coming out was a foolish step to take without consulting us. I would have made everything plain in a letter and saved you all this. Now, tell me just what you want me to do."

"I want my money back," said Winifred flatly. "Everything you have said is false. You told of the town and its opportunities—the mine and its developments—all untrue. I don't believe anything you say. What I want is my money, just as you promised my aunt, if I was dissatisfied."

The promoter turned livid, and for once his optimistic attitude deserted him. He seemed to fear that his friend, Hallworth, who was strolling near, would overhear.

"But that is impossible," he answered impatiently, turning to leave her. "It isn't done. You took your risk, and you'll have to stand it. The mine is all right if we have time to raise capital enough to work it."

"You claimed to have the capital already," cried Winifred, following him.

"My shares were the last you had for sale, you said. I will not accept such an excuse."

"Then what will you do?" he asked with an ugly sneer.

"I shall file a complaint of fraud with the district-attorney," replied the girl, undaunted. "If there is any law to cover this, I shall ask its aid to recover my money."

Later, Kaylor had a few words with Golden, and repeated some of the conversation with Winifred to him.

"The girl means mischief," he said in a worried tone. "If she goes to a lawyer about this it may make trouble for us and spoil everything. I'd have every stockholder down on me like hornets. If I'm let alone I'll clean up a nice bunch of money for all of us out of this. But let her start something—"

"How can she start it if she can't get out?" said Golden, grinning. "She hasn't got a dollar. Told Mabel so. She can't get to any lawyer unless you give her the money to get there."

Kaylor looked incredulous. "You don't mean she used all the money she had to come here with? I always said women were fools. But if that is true, it makes everything easy."

"It's true enough," returned Golden. "If she likes it so well, let her stay here with my woman a spell. I don't mind her being around."

This was the best news that Kaylor could have heard, and he went on his way joyfully. The girl might as well be buried alive as to be where she was without funds, and his play was to keep her satisfied with promises until his own deals were completed, then let her look out for herself. It was easy.

When he talked to Winifred again, he appeared to fall in with all she said, and promised meekly to do what she asked. He stipulated, however, for a slight delay. He would have to raise the money by a sacrifice, and that would take a week or two to complete. Winifred, relieved that he seemed so reasonable, gladly agreed to everything he suggested, and prepared herself to wait as contentedly as possible until

he could keep his word. After all, Kaylor found her as easy to deceive as any other woman.

Hallworth, the man who had arrived with Kaylor, was of a different type, though from the first it was plainly evident that he was equally unscrupulous. In the long conferences held by the three men, he would listen with a supercilious smile on his grim visage while Kaylor, so accustomed to deceit that he even tried to deceive himself, would enlarge upon the glowing future of Painted Valley. While Hallworth was willing to share in the illegal gains of the company, he did not disguise his contempt for the man who had originated it.

He took no notice of Winifred, seldom spoke to her, and she might have believed him unconscious of her position but that now and then she would find him watching her with expressionless hard, gray eyes.

The three men were away from the cabin most of the time; Winifred understood that they were riding around through the valley taking options on claims—options that might be bought for a drink of whisky. From the quantity of mail that arrived by the semi-weekly delivery, she knew that there were many others who, like herself, had fallen victims to the glittering lure of their prospectuses. There was talk of Hallworth returning to Denver; he was in charge of the company offices in that city.

Winifred, in the long tramps she took every day, saw the old prospector frequently, and the friendship born of their first meeting grew into a companionship cherished by both. He ceased to question her as to her life at the Goldens' cabin; it was their mutual love for the hills that united them, and the old man, with strange delicacy, respected her reserve. He was always ready with his cheery, flinty smile and with lectures upon what and what not a "gal" should do, but he asked her no questions of her own concerns. He was waiting until she saw fit to confide in him of her own accord.

Another friendship, pitiful and tender upon Winifred's part, had developed between herself and Mabel Golden. This woman, young in years, old in a sorrow that

her darkened mind could not encompass, touched upon the womanly chords in the young girl's heart. She felt toward her that warm protectiveness that is not confined to age or experience, but rises from the strength of the nature that bestows it.

She knew that the woman suffered dumbly, and she was helpless to lighten a burden that loomed ominously near. Golden, under the stimulus or irritation of Kaylor's presence, began to replace sullen indifference with actual cruelty to the poor creature whose existence seemed to depend on his favor, and more than once Winifred had taken hurried flight to the refuge of the foot-hills to avoid witnessing scenes that aroused in her a storm of feeling she had not dreamed that she possessed.

But Mabel Golden did not complain. She was humble and meek before her master as the women of benighted races bow before their tyrants. She seldom answered his blows or curses, and then only with pitiful promises to do his will. At last Winifred discovered the secret of his brutality; Golden was drinking heavily, and Kaylor, doubtless from a natural reversion fostered by the isolation of their life, was beginning to join him.

"Jim rides over and joins the pack-train half-way to Poison Springs," Mabel explained. "There's always plenty of whisky to be had—more of it than anything else—and as long as he's got a sack of dust he can get drunk." Her tone was resigned, as though she hoped for no redress of her situation. But Winifred blazed with indignation.

"How hideous! Why should men make brutes of themselves because they live in isolation. To go a step further, they might become criminals because they live out of the law's path. Are people naturally so low-principled and vicious that they can not live alone with nature without violating her laws?"

But this was Greek to Mabel.

"Jim's good enough when he's let alone," she defended plaintively. "If he'd never taken up with Kaylor, he'd have done well enough." Her lip began to tremble. "You know he's full of the idea of goin' to Denver to live. He thinks he'll have a swell time

there on this money they're goin' to make, an' what 'll become of me and—"

It was an ever-increasing miracle that these people, in the midst of the vast country which so thrilled her, should live solely for their own petty passions, their mean desires; giving vent to their rages, their spasms of brutality, without shame or concealment. The thought of Satterlee, even of Ludlow, now grown a dim memory, returned now and then to remind her that the poison extended beyond her narrow environment. She shuddered when she thought of these two men and what they represented, and believing both to have passed from her life, she was doubly shocked one day to find Deck Ludlow seated at the supper-table when she came in from her ramble in the foot-hills. He was talking to Golden—the other men were absent—and as Winifred entered he looked up with the same odious, familiar smile that she remembered so well.

"So the little lady got here all right," he exclaimed cordially. "Traveled with Doc Satterlee a day and half a night, and came through as good as new. I'm proud to see you again, Miss Winnie, I sure am. We don't forget a pretty girl the day after we meet her out here. But you made a mistake not comin' with me. You an' me would 've been good friends by this time."

Jim Golden opened his mouth in a roar of coarse laughter.

"You sure would," he shouted. "I reckon there's more 'n you would have been glad to brung her over, only doc cured 'em of wantin' things when he slapped you into the cinder track."

Ludlow's face darkened in a scowl.

"I ain't begun to get even for that yet," he muttered. "You wait till I'm through with Satterlee. I'll have him crawlin' on his hands and knees clear into Tuscon—or hell—before I'm through."

Winifred passed into her little curtained alcove without greeting him, except with a slight nod. She hated and feared this man unaccountably, and his presence poisoned the air she breathed, but she almost forgot him in the sudden fluttering of her heart that had begun when she heard Satterlee's name mentioned again. She sat down on

the edge of her bed and tried to think what it all meant. What was Ludlow doing here when he had pretended to know little or nothing of the mine, even denying having heard of the men who owned it?

The men in the outer room continued their conversation with unlowered voices, and she could not help hearing all they said.

"We're due to make a clean-up in this valley," Golden was saying. "This here Kaylor knows how to get the money, and Hallworth fakes the reports. We got everything fixed so the law can't touch us. We're gettin' enough acreage so it looks like we own the whole earth. Once we start after the money it 'll come in a flood." It was easy to distinguish Kaylor's boasting behind this poor imitation, but when he continued his mind began to stray to his own affairs. "Soon as I get my slice I'm goin' to light out, Deck. I'm goin' to see somethin' outside of these old red hills. I'm goin' to Noo Yaork. I'm goin' to git me an autumobile—"

"You're a fool," broke in Ludlow harshly. "Precious little you'll get outa these fellows. They'll trim you like they trim every one else. What chance have you got against 'em? You handle any of their money? Well, I guess not! What that kind touches always sticks to their fingers; you'll see. They'll be cuttin' each other's throats before they're through. But that ain't the only reason you're goin' to lose out, Jim. It's because somebody else is playin' in this little game besides them two. I'm settin' in—me, Deck Ludlow—an' I got the cards stacked." He stopped suddenly, as though afraid of having said too much, and Winifred could hear Jim Golden's heavy breathing as he listened for more.

But having dropped this hint, Ludlow forebore to follow it up, contenting himself with an obscure promise.

"You stick to me, Jim, and I'll play square with you. I reckon you an' me can make a satisfact'ry trade. We're the same sort, plain, ord'nary folks, an' we got no truck with them money-sharks." There was a subtle note of mockery in his voice which had its key in something he had said, which Golden at least understood,

for the two broke into a simultaneous laugh which ended as they went out of the cabin into the growing darkness, strolling side by side toward the corral, where secure from any listeners they continued their low-voiced conversation.

In her corner behind the curtain Winifred sat thinking of what she had heard. Her mind was filled with misgivings. She reproached herself for not having pressed the matter of repayment upon Kaylor, and resolved to lose no time in reminding him of his promise. Now that Ludlow had reappeared upon the scene her pleasure in the free life of the hills was gone. She would live in the fear of meeting him again where even the slight protection of Golden's presence would be removed. But although she told herself that Kaylor would surely keep his word, the heaviness of her heart persisted. A premonition that she would not leave the valley so easily came to her with such certainty that it was long before she slept that night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ETERNAL QUEST.

LUDLOW was gone next morning, having ridden silently away in the night, and Kaylor being still absent, Winifred decided to pay a visit to her old friend, whom she had not seen for several days. The Golden's began a quarrel before she left that had its origin in the man's boasting of the night before.

"I'll have no wimmin draggin' after me when I cut loose from here," he said fiercely to the draggled creature, who wistfully tried to please him with such means as were at her hands. "When I go you kin get your job back in the dance-hall." He burst into loud laughter. "You'd cut a pretty figger, wouldn't you? I reckon doc 'd be tickled to death to hev you back."

She shrunk beneath the shame and sting of his words.

"Oh, don't say that, Jim. I never would go back. You don't mean that; now, Jim."

But whether he meant it or not, he seemed to take a peculiar pleasure in torturing his helpless victim, and the expres-

sion of his little evil eyes was so cruel that Winifred, knowing interference to be futile, was glad to escape.

She had reached the level just beneath the well-hidden shack of the old prospector when she discovered by the cascading of a tiny rivulet of gravel that she was not alone upon the trail. Some one was on the ledge above, either waiting for her to come or beginning the descent. Her thoughts flew at once to Ludlow and she trembled, thinking that he may have planned to waylay her here, acting upon a hint from Golden, who knew her habits.

She was too far from the valley to risk retreat, so decided to advance, however distasteful the encounter might prove. But when she rounded the next curve of the trail she found that her surmise had been an error, for it was not Ludlow, but Satterlee who came to meet her.

"You!" she cried, stopping short.

He was much as she had seen him last—the same look of wrecked power, misused strength. Only his eyes were changed; an awakened interest, an inquiry that had not been in them when she saw him last. He stood aside, not offering to intercept her in any way, but oddly enough she found herself standing still in the path.

"I heard that Ludlow had come back," he said simply. "I wondered if he had followed you over here."

An unreasonable feeling of annoyance flashed over Winifred. She suddenly resented the idea of being watched—by him. So far as she knew he had no right to place himself as mentor over Ludlow or any other man, but her anger rose from the subtle air of proprietorship he seemed to have assumed in regard to herself. The man had a strange power of arousing her deepest feelings, and she struggled vainly against this, refusing to acknowledge it even to herself.

"He has been here, but that does not concern me," she answered shortly, and her manner said, "Neither do you need to concern yourself about me."

But he paid scant attention to her discourteous manner. With a hesitation that sat rather strangely upon him he said slowly:

"You're mixed up with some strange people, Miss Strange. I don't know what your business is, or why you stay, but I want to tell you that you'd better go back to your home, wherever it is. Those people aren't your kind." A sudden embarrassment overwhelmed him, but he forced himself to continue. "If there's any reason why you're staying—if there's trouble about getting away, I wish you'd tell me, or let me help you out. I'd like to see you safe at Tecumseh."

Standing before him in the narrow trail, the realization of her position forced itself upon Winifred. She had tried to shut her eyes to it, but here it was, ominous, overwhelming. She was at the mercy of these unscrupulous men. Penniless and alone, she would have to take assistance where she could get it. But from this man whose name was opprobrious even to people like the Goldens, it was impossible. What she knew of him was worse than what she knew of the others. She could not take help from him. Her thoughts flew desperately to Kaylor and Hallworth. They were at least civilized men, though rascals. They must help her out of this; surely they would let no actual danger befall her. Her face betrayed these thoughts so clearly that Satterlee could not mistake them. He drew back, a dull red flush rising to his dark cheek.

"You're right," he said heavily. "I'm not fit to be trusted. I've lost my claim to that." And before she could speak, even had she wished to, he was going swiftly down the trail, his light tread sending showers of loose shale before him.

Winifred watched him disappear with strange emotions. She was almost savagely glad that she had hurt him, in payment for the humiliation put upon her when he forced her to mount the horse before the group of loafers on the station platform, but in the next breath she wished that she had said something gracious. He had brought her safely to the Goldens, as he had promised, and she could have thanked him for that. Her heart misgave her for injustice, though she told herself with prim determination that she could accept no favors from such a man.

But when she reached the old prospector's cabin, she had cause to forget Satterlee entirely; then later to remember him with a change of view-point hard to define.

Hard-Winter Davis, looking more than ever like a well-seasoned, withered nut, was stretched upon his narrow bunk, and when he remained there without moving she saw at once that something had happened to him.

"Jus' peppered a little with some flyin' rock," he explained easily, as she bent over him. "Nothin' to make a fuss about, gal. Shucks, I wouldn't pay no attention to it if it wasn't for doc. He wouldn't listen to sense. Made me hold still while he done me up like a babby. But I'll be out an' around in a day or two."

But she saw from the twisted smile on his face that his injuries were more serious than he claimed, and she listened attentively to the story that presently emerged from the rambling assurances of the old man that he was not really hurt; it was only to please Satterlee that he was laid up in his bunk when he should be out doing an honest man's work.

When he told his story a crafty expression crept over his face, and he slipped his hand under his calico-covered pillow and held something while he talked to her. She could see that it was some small specimens of ore, but she was more interested in what he was saying than in what he was about to show her.

In the last few days he had been trying out a new location he told her—a remote cañon, so far overlooked or only casually explored. He was in a hurry; he was getting too old for the laborious methods he used to use and had put in some dynamite. One of the blasts had got him, that was all. And Doc Satterlee had found him—well, maybe twenty-four hours after it happened, and everybody knew how doc was. Couldn't a coyote break its leg, but doc must chase it down and cure it, if only to shoot it as soon as it was able to bark again.

Fact. He never could let anything be broke without mending, if he had his say. People said he never winged a man in a fair fight without waiting on him like a

woman afterward. Well, nothing would do but he must tie the old man up in a bundle of rags and put him to bed. Wouldn't be surprised if he rode over from Poison Springs most every day to see if he minded orders. Questioned as to how he reached his own cabin he answered blankly that he came strapped on a pack-horse; how else?

Winifred had to think against her will. There must be some good in the man, after all, if he could do these things—bind up wounds and things like that. She was surprised and touched. It was the last thing she would have expected of him. But her old friend was not through. He had to show her what he held in his hand.

"If I tell ye, ye won't go talkin' down at the cabin?" he warned her, with his bright, eager old eyes full of excitement. "You got to be mum, gal, with me here on my back. I got the claim located, but the papers ain't filed yet; anything could happen." He opened his hand as tenderly as though he held some fragile, live thing there, but it was only two or three small uneven bits of quartz which his eyes never ceased to gloat upon. "Do you see that, gal? Lissen! It's gold, *gold*." His voice rose to a high excitement. "Forty year I've been trampin' these hills and starvin' in the sands below, waitin' for it to come to me, an' now it's come. Right in a place I've known all along—right under my eye. Riches—money—all I could ever spend, right under my eyes."

Even a few weeks had taught Winifred what this meant, and taught her the danger of such speech. She leaned over him quickly and put her hand across his lips.

"Hush! Hush!" she whispered. "Suppose some one heard you. Don't say it, even to me. You know there are men in the valley who would stop at nothing." It was the first time she had allowed her secret thought to come to speech, and now she stopped, appalled. But he looked at her understandingly.

"You're right," he murmured, trying to still his excitement. "I mustn't talk; but little gal, you don't know. It's come after all this time, and now there's nobody—"

When she went down from the shack

much later her thoughts were saddened by the glimpses of the wasted life she had gathered from his half-fevered mutterings. What an experience, and what a price to pay for money. How could it ever make up to the old, old man for what he had missed. She was so young that she had not discovered the truth of life—that it is the eternal quest that keeps the spirit young, and not accomplishment.

CHAPTER IX.

A CALL FOR SATTERLEE.

KAYLOR and Hallworth were quarreling in the lean-to room. Their voices, heavy with rage and recrimination of male animals at war, filled the cabin with disturbance. Jim Golden smoked his pipe sullenly in the doorway and took no part in the controversy.

Winifred had retreated to her tiny privacy. She had intended to ask Kaylor for her money that night, but now she felt her courage deserting her at the prospect. She could not brave men who talked like that. There was a quality in Kaylor's voice, shrill, high—the ineffective voice that betrays the ineffectual man in times of stress which warned her this was no hour for her timid demand.

Hallworth was drawing out of the deal. For days it had been plain that discord existed between the three men. The engineer, who was also a geologist, had withdrawn to himself, spending his days in unexplained excursions about the hills, refusing company and refusing curtly as well to say where he had been. Only Winifred knew, and in trembling silence she kept the secret. Several times she had come upon him at Davis's cabin in close conversation with the old prospector, the subject of which was undoubtedly the specimens in which Hallworth seemed to share the intense interest of the discoverer. The old man had explained the situation to Winifred.

"He's a right smart feller, gal. Crooked, of course, like the most of 'em, but I reckon I kin keep track of him. I had to take somebody in with me that had

money or could get money, and this feller'll do as well as the next. He's smart enough to know that there's more money to be got out of a straight deal than a crooked one, an' when I showed him this rock he went plum daffy. He's ready to throw the other bunch and play straight. I guess he's seen enough of 'em to know that settin' in with such is sure to be a losin' game for somebody, an' he didn't want to be that party."

Winifred remembered what she had heard Ludlow say about the promoters cutting each other's throats. It must have been true, for here was Hallworth ready to quit his companions at the promise of something better from another source. But far from giving her relief it only added to her worry, for it promised to put her own settlement farther into the future. She had never betrayed her knowledge of Hallworth's double dealing by look or word, but some way Kaylor seemed to have become aware of it from the nature of his bitter reproaches.

"You're a quitter, a yellow quitter," he shouted, his voice ringing through the whole place. "I depended on you, and now you want to throw me down. We'd have the whole valley tied up if you'd play square and clean up a million a piece. Now you want to jeopardize the whole deal by your dirty treachery."

"If we made a million it would mean jail for us all," returned Hallworth calmly. "The time for that sort of thing is gone, Kaylor. You can't buck the law like you did a dozen years ago and get away with it. I'll take easy money as soon as the next man, but if I can get it without a string tied to it, I'm going to do it. Take my advice, cut out the old methods, for you can't get by with 'em. If you want to mine, do it on the level. There's plenty of good stuff to be had if the profits don't come as quick and easy as faking stocks."

But Kaylor met the placating suggestion with rage that approached fury. His shrill voice trembled.

"You were ready enough to fake yourself when you came out," he shouted. "Now you're tying my hands with your dam' squeamishness just as things are ready. You made promises you haven't

kept, and I depended on them. Now you want to quit—quit—and you think I'll let you do it? You weasel! You dam' weasel! Do you think I don't know your game? You're in cahoots with that lying old hypocrite up in the hills—old Davis, the desert rat, who'll run his nose into a trap before he knows it—and you're going in with him if you can crawl out of your bargain with me. But you can't do it, you can't! If you try to raise money to float any other deal I'll fix you; by the gods, I will!"

Hallworth did not raise his voice.

"Will you? Maybe you'll be fixed yourself before that. How about salting this hole in the ground outside? And don't forget there's somebody else who knows a lot about our affairs—that girl!"

Winifred's heart stood still. The cold indifference of the man's voice when he mentioned her name sent a thrill of fear through her body. It was like holding her up, a helpless pawn for Kaylor's rage and revenge, showing him that to let her escape would be fatal. But when Hallworth continued some of her terror left her. He was not wholly bad, after all.

"I'm going to send her out," he said, in his cool, jeering voice, "and keep her where she'll be a safe witness against you if you try to queer any deal of mine. I've got something good, and I'm not going to run the chance of losing it for such cattle as you, Kaylor. Just remember that."

Heavy silence followed. Hallworth tramped about the narrow quarters gathering his belongings into his bag. Kaylor's breathing could be heard throughout the cabin. The woman, Mabel, clung like a frightened shadow to the farther wall, and Jim Golden left his seat and went to the door of the shack. Some mysterious intelligence flashed like a wireline between him and Kaylor, and was answered by a frightened bleat from the promoter.

"No, Golden! No, no!"

Daring everything, Golden's wife trembled to his side.

"Jim, Jim! Let the dirty quitter go. Don't hurt your hands with him. Don't! Come away with me, honey."

He silenced her with a snarl. "You!"

Hallworth went on leisurely with his preparations.

"No. Don't try any gunman stuff. Even in Painted Valley you can't get away with it—quite. Get out of my way, Golden. I'm going into the hills from here."

At the door he paused. His eyes searched for and found Winifred, crouching behind her sleazy curtains, and with a gesture he called her out.

"Have your things ready in the morning, Miss Strange. I'm sending you out as soon as I can get a team from Poison Springs. I'm going there to-night; if I had another horse I'd take you, but to-morrow I'll send a man for you, sure."

He was gone. A few minutes later they heard the clatter of his horse's hoofs galloping down the trail toward the town.

The two men stood staring at one another in silence, but a look of meaning passed between them, and Golden made a step toward the door. Quick as lightning Mabel, running in front of him, barred his egress.

"You ain't going out to-night, Jim," she begged with more than entreaty in her haggard eyes. "Let him go. What do you care?"

"Get out of the way!" Golden ordered with a threatening movement, and Kaylor urged him on.

"Don't let the fool woman stop you. Bring him back. He's got to talk sense. He'll ruin us."

But Mabel kept on crying. "You sha'n't go! You sha'n't go!"

Winifred had never seen the brute side of humanity, but suddenly she read something in Golden's eyes that sent her to the side of the poor draggled creature who had dared to put herself between him and the freedom he desired.

"Don't dare to strike her!" she cried.

Golden drew back, his lifted hand fell to his side. He was so thoroughly masculine as to be momentarily charmed by defiance in another woman of what merited a blow to his wife. There was no weakening in the face Winifred showed to him, and he relaxed, bursting into one of his rude fits of laughter.

"Why, lissen to the little runt," he

chucked. "Standin' up tuh me like a turkey-cock, I'll swear."

But Kaylor was unmoved by this demonstration from Winifred, and coldly brushed her aside.

"Don't listen to these women," he cried impatiently. "Come on outside."

"But you'll listen to me," said Winifred steadily. The unexpected support of Hallworth and the prospect of escape on the next day had given her courage and boldness. Suddenly she saw what a poor thing Kaylor was behind his bluff and bravado, and she wondered why she had ever feared him. "Mr. Hallworth is going to help me to get away, but that does not relieve you of your promise to repay me. You will have to give me some of the money to-night."

He looked at her with an expression that chilled her like a cold wind. For the first time she realized that beneath his suave exterior he was as evil, perhaps more so, than the other men whom she had dreaded.

"There'll be plenty of time for that," he said slowly. "You're not going away to-morrow."

"Not going? You won't dare try to stop me!"

"It wouldn't be wise to let you go off with a man like Hallworth," continued Kaylor, with an air of mocking consideration. "I couldn't think of it. I'll take you out myself when the right time comes."

Golden uttered his raucous laugh again. "The little lady wants to go, just when she's got a nice beau all waitin' to set up to her," he chuckled.

This was the signal for poor, foolish Mabel to interfere again, and she dared to do so, clinging to her husband's arm.

"Please let her go, Jim. Make him give her her money. It ain't right to take it from a little thing like her. You know what 'll happen if she stays here. You heard what Deck Ludlow said the other night. You can't do it! You can't do it!"

The poor woman made a despairing gesture of entreaty toward her husband and Kaylor that somehow included Winifred as its object. She was only the weak wraith of her sex, an object to pity and succor, yet with brutality that had no

parallel, Golden lifted his heavy boot and kicked her.

She fell at Winifred's feet. The girl stood paralyzed with horror for a moment, then sprung at Golden like some light, swift thing that had the spirit if not the power to destroy.

"If I could I would kill you!" she screamed.

The man stumbled awkwardly out of her way. "By God, I believe you would!" he stammered in amazement that was half admiration. "Look out, you she-cat, I don't want to hurt you, too."

But now Kaylor interfered. He had the strong distaste for physical cruelty that is common among men who work evil through their brains. He was shocked by Golden's action, not through pity for its victim, but because it jarred on the smoothness of his plan for defense to both Winifred and Hallworth. He helped Winifred lift the woman, who kept up a stupid moaning, and cursed Golden volubly while he did so. They put her on a bunk, and, while Winifred hung distressfully over her, the two men left the room.

"What do you expect to get by that?" Kaylor demanded angrily when they were outside. "Let the woman alone, can't you? We've got more serious things to talk about—and do."

"Curse the wimmin," snarled Golden viciously. "I wish I'd never seen one. As for that sassy little devil"—his eyes narrowed to slits—"I reckon she'll meet up with something like that herself—one of these days."

"Maybe so," agreed Kaylor indifferently. They went to the corral, where two horses were nosing some hay, and with expert rapidity Golden began to saddle them both. In two minutes the men were riding down the trail in the direction Hallworth had taken. When they had ridden for a mile or two they came to a fork that was hardly more than a footpath among the scattered boulders. Golden led the way into this.

"It cuts off nearly six miles," he said.

Day was breaking when the two men rode into the corral again and silently

began the unsaddling of the horses, which stood with blown nostrils and heaving flanks, showing long and hard riding. The men themselves looked gaunt and tired, and the ragged stubble that stood out on Kaylor's sunken cheeks changed him unbelievably from the smug business man to something not unlike Golden himself. They seemed to have nothing to say to each other, being merely concerned in the task that occupied them. But as Golden loosened a strap he looked up and muttered half to himself:

"I wonder what the girl wants?"

Winifred was standing in the door of the cabin, and when she saw them in the corral, came swiftly out and joined them. She, too, looked tired and worn, and her hair hung loosely around her distressed face. When she came to them she began to stammer, half in tears.

"She is badly hurt; she is dying, I think. You must get a doctor."

Golden turned a sickly color under his leathery skin. It is a serious matter to kill a woman even in Painted Valley.

"What d'ye mean? Nothin's th' matter with her. I just give her a little push."

"I—I waited all night for you to come back," said Winifred, beginning to wring her hands. "I tell you she is dying. You must get some one."

"A doctor? Where'd we get one, I'd like to know? Maybe it ain't so bad. The woman was always one to holler."

Winifred grasped his arm fiercely. "She's dying. Why do you stare at me like that? Why don't you do something? Saddle that horse and ride—somewhere—for help."

Golden looked bewildered. Coming after the night he had spent, and when the whole matter had been erased from his mind by more serious happenings, her words seemed merely hysterical ravings.

"Ride where?" he echoed stupidly. "There ain't any doctors in these parts—not in the valley."

"Then in the town—in Poison Springs," cried Winifred urgently. "Go there! It's barely thirty miles. Go—go; you must!"

"Poison Springs." Golden echoed the name with a laugh which even Kaylor joined. "Poison Springs! A healthy loca-

tion that 'd be for a bone-doctor. The nearest thing to one is Doc Satterlee, an' I reckon he's smashed more bones than he's mended."

Satterlee! And yet—

"Somebody said he was a saw-bones wunst," said Golden jocularly. "But me, he's got a grudge on me, an' I wouldn't like to ask favors of him. But maybe if you ast him, little lady, he wouldn't refuse."

She looked into their faces, devoid of mercy and human sympathy, and saw that no help was to be had from such a source. Then she turned in swift decision to the house. "Maybe he wouldn't," she called back over her shoulder.

Mabel Golden lay moaning in her bunk. She was decently covered with a blanket, and in her gray face anguish had already wiped away the remnant of beauty that remained from her battle with life. She turned her mournful eyes to the young girl who bent over her with comforting words, but closed them wearily when she saw that the man responsible for her pain did not follow.

"Listen," said Winifred in a tense voice that carried to the rapidly fading senses of the sick woman, "I am going for help for you—myself. You must not be afraid. I will not be long. I will ride fast."

While she uttered this promise she prayed fiercely that her words might come true. The woman opened her eyes and whispered: "Don't come back. Stay, stay where you are going."

Winifred was putting water near the bunk, tucking in the blankets and getting herself ready all at one time. She answered in a strained voice: "But I can't stay in Poison Springs."

"Poison Springs!" The woman raised herself on her elbow with a sort of super-human strength. "What help are you going to get from there?"

The girl flung back the name as she vanished through the door:

"Satterlee."

The two men had left the corral and were standing near the mine-shaft in low-voiced conversation. They gave her no heed as she passed them on her way to the corral, but when ten minutes later she

galloped past on Golden's bay horse, they were startled out of their absorption.

"By God! she'll bring the whole town down on us," exclaimed Kaylor, with whitening lips.

"Well, I'll swear," cried the nonplused owner of the horse, "she's got my mare and gone. If she ain't killed afore she gits to the Springs it 'll be because the devil's saving her."

"Maybe she'll never come back," suggested Kaylor, with an evil meaning in his voice. "There's plenty can happen between that town and this camp."

Golden stopped irresolutely. They were near the cabin, and a sound from there sent a sick pallor over his face.

"Look here, Kaylor," he argued, "you an' me better get out of this. What if she come back bringin' that black devil with her? Maybe we better ride up in the hills for a day or two till this thing blows over."

But Kaylor put a restraining hand on his arm.

"We can't do that. We've got to stay here and put a white man's face on it." A dark menace that hinted of some unspoken thing made itself felt in his voice. "It wouldn't look right for us to disappear right now."

Golden yielded sullenly. The morning was advancing. They had not slept or eaten, and were dog-tired, but they did not go nearer the cabin, though the door stood open, and there was food and blankets inside to be had for the taking.

CHAPTER X.

A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM.

DOC SATTERLEE was "running" his town. That is, it had been brought home to the inhabitants of Poison Springs that discretion lay along the path of absence, and the main portion of them had vanished to the hills and to their shacks, where surreptitious games of poker whiled away the hours of players who waited with what patience they possessed for doc to have his fling, after which life would flow back into its usual channels.

Doc was very drunk. The town which

thought it knew what he could do along that line, did not know how drunk he was. The orgy had been coming on for weeks; in fact, with brief interludes, when his intelligence struggled to the surface for a breathing spell, the boss of Poison Springs had not known sobriety since the day he rubbed Deck Ludlow's face in the cinders.

Ludlow was in town, but he kept away from the Half-Bottle Saloon where Satterlee made his headquarters. It happened that he and Satterlee had not met. This was owing to Ludlow's careful avoidance of an encounter, but he watched with secret glee and from safe distance the inroads made by dissipation upon his enemy. In the last week there had been a quiet exodus from Poison Springs which had taken with it the men who had always been unfriendly to Satterlee's rule; they had gone supplied with money given them by Ludlow, and though no hint of the real meaning of this had leaked out, there was an undercurrent of uneasiness and suspense that bred sullen resentment toward the man who had constituted himself their leader.

It was any man's right to drink long and hearty, but when there was that on foot which might concern the whole camp he should have been there to deal with the trouble. Among men such as these it was recognized that the incident at the station between Satterlee and Ludlow would not pass unavenged. In his way Ludlow was a man of importance; he had money, and money always commands respect and power, no matter what hands may disburse it. If Ludlow would not fight his own battles he was able to hire men to fight them for him, and there was a feeling in the air that any moment might see the hidden volcano burst into open action.

Satterlee was in the barroom of the Half-Bottle. He was alone there, and in his present condition that was a wise thing. He sat at his usual table, and his head rested on his breast. Something was troubling Satterlee. He had been letting things slip. He had been going off into the hills alone to hold communion with that mysterious personality that was locked in his heart, and which he had believed silenced forever.

Shame had awakened in the depths of his being—a deep, furious shame that had its beginning in the trivial cause of a woman's fear of him. She was a good woman; something that had passed out of his life for many a day, and that was what bit and stung and tore at his vitals so that he tried to strangle and drown it with the very weapon which had brought it about.

When he was as drunk as this his brain was extraordinarily clear, so that old scenes and faces, even old dead and gone conversations rose with tantalizing distinctness to torment and harass him. The road he had traveled to this point was as startlingly clear as though drawn with ink upon a clean white paper. His distorted mind, forced by some secret process of his brain, went shuddering over the ground until he had traversed it all, step by step up to the present degradation—or down to it. It was when memory reached this point that his head sunk as though it would never rise again.

Hours before he had driven his associates like a pack of mongrels from his vicinity. He could not endure the sight of them, yet in their way they were no more reprehensible than himself—perhaps less so. He despised himself in them, and for that reason refused to look upon himself in their likeness.

The clatter of a horse's feet sounded in the street, which in its short length had known so much of the dregs of life. A rider had come in over the trail from Painted Valley. Cautious heads peered from one or two of the shacks, and after the first look sheer curiosity brought further emergence.

The rider was a woman, and the horse she rode was blowing and covered white with alkali dust, ghostlike in the sunshine. She was a strange woman, and not one of their kind, as could be seen with half an eye; but she rode boldly among them, as fearlessly as though Poison Springs had been made by saints and not by sinners. She drew rein in a jerky and inexperienced manner, and paralyzed the first man she saw by asking for Satterlee.

He stared at her in astonishment that melted into a slow grin. To his dull and

evil mind it seemed a stupendous joke to direct this strange woman to the Half-Bottle Saloon, where no man in the camp had dared to go that day. Then he went back to his friends and told them, and they waited for the anticlimax of this piece of wit.

Winifred rode to the saloon, got down stiffly, and tied her horse to the hitching-rack. Distaste for her errand was minimized by anxiety for the sick woman in Painted Valley, and, like all quiet, timid persons, she was not one to falter when she put her shoulder to the wheel. She entered the saloon by the front door, which stood half open, and when she saw Satterlee at his table, went over and stood before him.

"Will you come with me to help some one who is dying?" she asked in her clear, gentle voice.

He looked up at her with glazed, drink-sodden eyes. He thought she was some fantastic vision roused by the treadmill of his tortured mind, but when she spoke and moved this fancy was dispelled, and he moistened his dry lips trying to find words that eluded him.

"Come with you—where?" he asked at last.

She moved impatiently. After her incredible effort it was intolerable that she should be hampered by delays and explanations at this point. There was a bottle and glass on the table, and she seized them and put them beyond his reach with the same gesture she might have used to an obstreperous child.

His condition disgusted her, but it was in no way surprising, for she was used to thinking of him so.

He witnessed this movement without protest. His hands, long and well-shaped, in spite of their abuse, lay half closed upon the table, but he made no motion to restrain her.

"There is no one else to help," said Winifred in a quavering voice. "Won't you come with me?"

With a violent effort he brought himself to comprehend what she was saying. She wanted help of some kind; she who had insulted him when he offered her his protection. He tried to recall his customary

attitude of disdain to all goodness and mercy. He got up, reeling a little, and faced her.

"Who sent you here? Who told you that I was—could help anybody? It is a lie—a joke somebody has played on you. Go back and tell them what I say."

"I won't go back—without you."

"But, you little fool, you don't know where you are. I told you to keep away from this place. Go; don't stand there looking at me."

But she did not yield an inch.

"They call you doc because you were a doctor once," she persisted. "A name like that clings. I saw what you did for the old man up in the hills, and I *know*. And if you have the simplest knowledge you must come with me. A woman is dying."

Slow thought began to filter through his brain; terrible memories, and an instinct as clear and true as the light. But he tried to escape from this as a swimmer fights against the tide.

"Go!" he told her beseeching face. "Go out of this town. Whoever sent you here was crazy. This is hell. You can't stay here even an hour without some of its mud clinging to your feet. And it's mud that won't come off. Never—never; and it drags a woman further down than a man. Look at me! See what it can do." He laughed; a sound unlike anything she had ever heard.

She returned his look speechlessly. The strain of the long ride; the suspense, the emotion of the effort, broke the nerve of her tender body. She had not known that life could be so hard or men so cruel. Suddenly she collapsed in the chair he had vacated and huddled there in his place, sobbing helplessly.

Her face being hidden, she could not see the breaking down of his resolution. He stared at her fair bent head with the innocent tendrils curling about her brow and neck with the fresh softness of a child's hair, and at her slender body trembling and given way beneath its assumed burdens. Something that had been dead or sleeping began to struggle through the cloud of his obscured vision. He wanted to put his

hand on the girl's head, to reassure her, but his will was not strong enough to compel the action.

"I can't go; I'm not fit. Find some one else."

Suddenly she ceased to cry and looked up at him with an expression strange to her eyes. The fear and shrinking he had seen in them was gone. It was as though her spirit recognized the rebirth of something new in him and rose to meet it with open hands. She spoke as though the words were impelled from her by an inward

force which sent them unrehearsed to her lips.

"I do not believe you are as wicked as you say. It is because they do not know you that they say such things. Underneath—in your heart—it must be there—the little spark of good that is in all men. You will come with me?"

He returned her look, fascinated. She came to him and put her hand on his arm, and he trembled beneath her touch.

"You cannot deny me," she whispered—"Poor Mabel—and her little baby."

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.



THE VOICES OF THE HILLS

BY J. HUIE

BY misty glen and babbling rill,
In solemn chant, that ceaseth never,
The lonely voices of the hill
The solitudes with music fill—
That swells and falls and swells forever.

To-day, the same as yesterday,
Where woodlands gloom and waters glisten;
To-night, as weird and sweet the lay
As heard a thousand years away,
The silent hills alone to listen.

Low, when the winds are still, they sing;
By sunlit brooks the mountains under;
By starry lake and glimmering spring,
When fairies dance in shadowy ring,
And moonlit peals fantastic fling
Their shadows in a land of wonder.

Lo! when the winds are loud, they rise
From rocky woods and gusty hollows;
From craggy deeps, where darkness lies,
Along the moorlands to the skies,
Wild chorus echoing chorus follows.

Man's little din of work and war,
Man's fury and tumultuous fever
Die on the bounding slopes afar
In silent air, and never mar
The song that heavenward goes forever.

Blackmail

by Hulbert Footner

Author of "On Swan River," "The Owl Taxi," "The Substitute Millionaire," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

ONE day while Evan Weir, a young and unsuccessful New York artist, was passing a second-hand clothing-store on a down-town street, he saw an old man come out wearing a suit that evidently he had just bought. When this old man became involved in a passionate argument with a fruit-vender over a penny change a crowd gathered, and, recognizing him as Simeon Deaves, a millionaire miser, grew threatening. Evan rescued Deaves and took him to the pretentious home of George Deaves, his son. This led to Evan's engagement as a companion to the old man in his walks about town.

When Evan returned to his room on Washington Square he was followed by a young man who had been watching him since the affair at the fruit-stall, but when he accused the young fellow of following him the latter denied any such intention. When he reached his room his friend, Charley Straiker, told him that a music-teacher had moved into the room on the first floor, and later in the evening Evan met her—and lost his heart. But after he had gone the girl cried, "I will not give in to him—and spoil everything."

Next day, when Evan appeared at the Deaves's residence he was accused of being implicated in a blackmail plot. A letter signed, "The Ikunahkatsi," had been received, threatening to send the story of the fruit-stall affair to the papers, unless five one-thousand-dollar bills were left in a copy of Fessenden's "History of the Turko-Russian War" in the public library that morning. Evan had been told by Alfred, the second man, the day before, that it was easy to make money on the side in the Deaves house. He cleared himself without trouble, and advised that the amount be paid. In this he was backed up by Mrs. George Deaves, a society woman, who threatened to leave the house if the story became public.

"Pay them," said Evan, "and then let me see if I can't get it back again—and get them, too."

CHAPTER VI.

THE LITTLE FELLOW IN GREEN.

IT transpired that George Deaves could lay his hands on the money, though perhaps it was not easy for him to do so. George's principal fortune consisted in being the son of his father; he could get almost unlimited credit on the strength of that connection.

When Simeon Deaves saw that he was determined to pay the money to the blackmailers, he urged him hard to accept Evan's offer to run them down, and in the end, notwithstanding his terror of Maud Deaves, George gave in, simply because he was unable to resist pressure. Father and son who had begun the day by accusing Evan of the crime were soon both depending on his resourcefulness and determination to a

greater extent than they would have cared to admit.

At ten o'clock George Deaves and Evan set out for the bank. It was not far and they proceeded on foot down the avenue. Evan kept his eyes open about him, and before they had gone more than a block or two he spotted the well-remembered little figure in the gray suit still dogging their footsteps.

Drawing George Deaves up to a shop window as if to show something inside, he called his attention to the stripling with the pale and watchful face. Deaves shivered. "Do you suppose he means us personal harm?" he said.

Evan smiled to himself, seeing the size of their enemy. "Well, I hardly think so," he said. "At least not as long as we seem disposed to pay up."

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for April 17.

Deaves was received at the bank with extreme deference. He was not obliged to apply at the teller's window like a common customer but was shown directly into the manager's office, which looked on the pavement on the avenue. A fine-meshed screen protected the occupants of the room from the vulgar gaze of the populace, but those inside could see out, and as soon as they entered the room Evan discovered the youth in the gray suit hanging about the door of the bank, unaware of the nearness of his victims.

Deaves introduced Evan to the manager as "my father's secretary." "I'm coming up in the world," thought Evan. Five crisp one-thousand-dollar bills were produced, and Evan perceived strong curiosity in the bank manager's eye. It had been agreed between Evan and Deaves that this man was to be taken partly into their confidence, but Deaves now seemed disposed to balk at it, and Evan ventured to take matters into his own hands.

"You were going to tell this gentleman what the money was for."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Deaves nervously. "You will of course appreciate the necessity of absolute secrecy, sir."

"That is part of my business," said the manager.

But Deaves still boggled at the horrid word, but it was Evan who said: "Somebody is trying to blackmail Mr. Deaves."

"Good gracious!" cried the horrified manager. "Mr. Simeon Deaves, or Mr. George Deaves."

"Either," said Evan dryly. "They don't care as long as they get the money."

"Have you notified the police?"

"Not yet. We're going to take a try first at catching them ourselves. There is one of them outside, the thin youth in the gray suit."

The manager half rose from his chair. "What! So close! Perhaps he's armed!"

"He can't see us."

The other sank back, only partly reassured. "Can I be of any assistance?" he asked.

"Yes," said Evan. "I want to mark these bills in your presence." Deaves handed them over, and the manager sup-

plied a blue pencil. "See! a tiny dot following the serial number in each case. In case they get the money, and get away in spite of me, will you please see that all the banks in town are supplied with the numbers of these bills, and are instructed to have any one arrested who presents them to be changed."

"I certainly will," said the manager, making a note of the numbers.

They left a much-startled banker peering through his window screen.

The Library was but a few blocks more from the bank. George Deaves wished to take a taxicab, but Evan advised against it. Their little gray shadow followed them to the door of the great building but did not enter. Having satisfied themselves of this, they got in touch with one of the assistant librarians, an honest scholar, and put their case up to him.

The magic name of Deaves acted like a talisman. The plan was carefully laid. George Deaves proceeded to the reading-room and calling for Fessendeu's History of the Turko-Russian War, retired to a corner and placed the bills between the leaves as specified.

The books were then returned to the desk, and Deaves, with the connivance of the librarian, was spirited out of the building by the delivery entrance. This was to prevent the watcher outside from remarking that whereas two entered, only one came out. When neither returned he would naturally suppose that both had slipped past him.

Meanwhile Evan waited in the librarian's private office, arrangements having been made to notify him by phone when the books were called for again. They would delay delivering them long enough to allow him to reach the reading-room.

It was a long wait. The librarian offered him books, but he could not apply his mind. "You're sure there's no chance of a slip-up among so many clerks?" he said anxiously. "One may forget."

"We're not trusting to their memories. The librarian in charge of delivery is a friend of mine. Fessendeu's History is in his desk, and in its place on the shelf is pinned a ticket, 'Apply to the librarian.'"

At last the message came over the phone: "Fessenden's History of the Turko-Russian War called for from seat 433."

Evan's heart accelerated its pace a little. "Whereabouts in the room is that seat?"

"The last table in the south end, on the right-hand side."

"Ha! he wants to get in the corner! Can I get there without marching down the whole length of the room?"

"Yes, you can approach from the other side through the American History room."

Hastening through various corridors of the vast building they found themselves among the American History collections gathered in the smaller room adjoining the great hall on the south. This room was completely lined with books, and lighted by a skylight. It communicated with the main reading-room by an arched opening.

Taking care not to show themselves in this opening, the librarian indicated to Evan the exact location of seat 433 outside, and pointed out a spot in the room where they stood, where Evan could command a view of seat 433 through the archway.

Evan proceeded to the spot, and taking down a book at random, affected to be lost in studying its pages. Then half turning and letting his eyes rise carelessly he glanced into the great room.

It took him an instant or two to focus his eyes. The line of tables seemed endless, the hundreds of figures reading, scribbling or snoozing, seemed indistinguishable from one another. Then Evan remembered that the librarian had said: "Seat 433 is the fourth seat from the passageway between the tables; the person sitting there will have his back to you."

Evan's eyes found the spot: he saw a familiar pair of thin, high shoulders under a gray coat.

His first feeling was one of surprise. Somehow he had not expected one so young and insignificant to be given so important a part in the game. For a moment he wondered if the strange-eyed, wary little youth could be their sole antagonist.

That would indeed be a humorous situation. But he did not believe it possible. Certainly the letter had been written by one older and more experienced.

Evan remained where he was, making believe to be absorbed in his book, and letting his eyes rise from time to time as if in contemplation. He was about sixty feet from the youth, in an oblique line. Once the little fellow looked around, but Evan saw the beginning of the movement and was deep in study in plenty of time.

The sober background of filled bookshelves afforded Evan good protective coloring. Across the smaller room the librarian was likewise affecting to be reading, while he nervously watched Evan and awaited the outcome.

Finally Evan perceived the library attendant coming down the long room bearing the two big volumes in their faded purple calf binding. He speculated whimsically on what a sensation would be caused should he drop one and a thousand-dollar bill flutter out. But library attendants know better than to drop books.

He laid the books on the table beside the youth, and went back. The gray-clad one with another casual, sharp glance around him, took up volume one, the thicker of the two, and slouching down in his chair, stood the tall, open book on his lap in such a way that no one could see exactly what he was doing.

"Not badly managed," thought Evan. He could only guess that the youth was turning to the specified pages and slipping out the bills. There was one action that Evan recognized from the movement of the shoulders. He had slipped his hand in his inner breast pocket.

"He's got them now," thought Evan.

Sure enough, the youth presently let the book fall on the table and wiped his face with his handkerchief.

"I bet his little heart is beating," thought Evan. Evan's was.

The youth wasted no further time in making believe to read his books. Letting them lie on the table he got up and started to walk out at a leisurely pace.

Evan followed him, knowing of course that the first time the youth turned his head he must discover him, but it did not matter much now. Their footsteps fell noiselessly on the thick rubber matting of the reading-room.

Half-way down the great room, the youth did turn, and saw Evan behind him. A spasm passed over the thin little face and his teeth showed momentarily. One could fancy how sharply he caught his breath.

He increased his pace a little, but by no means ran out of the room. He had his nerves under pretty good control. Evan made no effort to overtake him in the reading-room. He hated to make an uproar there.

The youth went soberly down the two flights of the great stairway with Evan as soberly at his heels. He did not look around again. To have refrained from doing so indicated no little strength of will. Crossing the entrance hall they passed out the main entrance and down the sweeping steps to Fifth Avenue.

"He'll make a break to escape in the crowd," thought Evan.

On the little esplanade between the two flights of steps Evan sprang across the space that separated them and laid a heavy hand on the youth's shoulder.

He shrank away with a terrified gasp. "What do you want?" he demanded.

"You come with me," said Evan sternly.

"I won't! You have no right to lay hands on me!"

"You come along," said Evan. "Or I'll call the policeman yonder."

He marched him down the remaining steps. The boy offered no resistance. For that matter he would have stood but a small chance against the muscular Evan. The passers-by began to stop and glare and shove and ask what was the matter.

Evan greatly desired to avoid a street disturbance. Steering his captive across the pavement to the curb, he hailed the first passing taxicab, and bundled the unresisting youth inside. In low tones he ordered the chauffeur to drive to the nearest police station.

It was all over in half a minute. They left the curiosity seekers goggling from the pavement.

During the drive the two exchanged no word. The youth shrunk back in his corner, staring straight ahead of him out of his pale and impenetrable mask. Occa-

sionally he moistened his lips. Clearly he was terrified, but a determined spirit held him to the line he had chosen.

Evan made no attempt to search him for the money, for he wished to have a witness present when the marked bills were taken from him. But he watched him throughout with lynx eyes, prepared to forestall any attempt to make away with the bills.

Arriving at the station-house the chauffeur, full of curiosity, was for helping Evan take his prisoner in. But Evan paid him off and told him he needn't wait. But the man lingered, joining the little crowd that always hangs around the station-house when a prisoner is brought in.

By this time the youth seemed to have recovered from the worst of his fears. He went up the steps quite willingly before Evan. Within, a bored and lordly police lieutenant sat enthroned at his high desk. Evan, who had been holding himself in all this time, burst out:

"This man is a blackmailer. I want you to search him. You'll find the money he extorted in the inside breast pocket of his coat. The bills are marked."

The lieutenant declined to become excited. Such dramatic entrances were part of his daily routine.

"Hold on a minute," he said, opening his book. "Proceed in order." He addressed the prisoner: "What is your name?"

"I decline to give it," said the youth—his voice was breathless and determined still. "I have done nothing wrong. This man suddenly seized me on the street. I think he's crazy. Search me. If you find anything, then let him make a charge."

The lieutenant spoke to a patrolman across the room: "Ratigan, search him."

The youth spread his arms wide to facilitate the search. Evan, taken back by his assurance, waited the result anxiously. The patrolman thrust his hand in his breast-pocket.

"Nothing here," he said indifferently.

Evan's heart sunk. "Are you sure?" he said.

"Look for yourself, if you want."

"Search him thoroughly," commanded the lieutenant.

But Evan already guessed that he had been tricked.

No money was found except a dollar bill and some change.

"Is this it?" asked the patrolman solemnly.

The youth smiled.

Evan waved it away.

"Well, what are the circumstances?" asked the lieutenant. "Will you make a charge?"

"I've been fooled!" Evan said bitterly. Suddenly a light broke on him; he struck his forehead. "I see it now! This man's job was simply to lead me away while another came and got the money!"

"Well, will you make a charge?"

Evan quickly reflected. There was not much use airing the case in court if the principal evidence was gone. "Let him go," he said. "He's not the one I want."

Without more ado Evan hastened out. The youth presumably was allowed to follow. The taxicab was at the curb. Evan flung himself in.

Back to the Library!" he ordered.

He sought out his friend the librarian. A hasty investigation showed that Fessenden's History had been collected in due course from the table and returned to the shelves. It had not been called for since. The money was gone, of course.

"His confederate was waiting there in the reading-room, perhaps at the same table," Evan said gloomily. "As soon as I was out of the way he got the money. What a fool I was!"

"But how could you have foreseen that?" said the librarian.

Evan then had the pleasant task of returning to the Deaves's house and telling them what had happened. Father and son were waiting for him in the library. They instantly saw by his face that things had not gone well, and each snarled according to his nature. When he heard that the money was gone the old man broke into piteous lamentations.

"Five thousand dollars! Five thousand dollars! All that money! Flung to the rats of the city to gnaw!"

"What's the matter with you?" snapped his son. "It was my money!"

"I earned it, didn't I? You have nothing but what I gave you!"

"We may get them yet—through the banks," suggested Evan.

"Yah! we'll never get 'em now!"

However they might quarrel with each other, father and son were united in blaming Evan.

"Look at him, so quiet and watchful!" cried the old man, beside himself. "He knows where the money's gone! Of course he didn't catch them. I believe he engineered the whole thing!"

"Be quiet, papa," said George Deaves in a panic. He turned to Evan with an anxiety almost obsequious. "Don't mind him," he said. "He's excited. You'd better go now. But I'll see you later."

Evan was not deceived. It was clear that George, no less than his father, believed that he was a party to the crime, but was afraid to say so outright.

"I live at 45A South Washington Square," Evan said curtly. "You'll find me there any time you want me."

CHAPTER VII.

PLATONIC FRIENDSHIP.

CHARLEY STRAIKER came in to dinner in a highly effervescent state. This was not at all unusual.

"Listen, Ev!" he cried. "I've seen her! Oh, a peach! a little queen! Her name is Corinna Playfair. Isn't that galuptious? Corinna Playfair! Corinna Playfair! Like honey on the tongue!"

"Listen, when I came in a while ago I heard a woman's voice talking to Carmen in her room on the ground floor. So I went back, making out I wanted to see Carmen. And there she was! Bowled me over completely. Red hair, you old misogynist! Piles and piles of it like autumn foliage. It's the color of a horse chestnut fresh out of the burr—and her skin's like inside of the burr, you know—creamy! Oh, ye gods!"

"Well, she was telling old Carmen this and that; her blinds wouldn't work, and the gas-jet in the dressing-room was out of order, and your Uncle Dudley sees his

chance to speak up. 'I'll fix the gas-jet and the blinds,' says I.

"There was nothing free and easy about her, though. Made her eyebrows go up like two little crescent moons. Looked at me as much as to say: 'What is this that the cat has brought in?' 'Oh, thank you very much,' says she in a voice as friendly as a marble headstone. 'I couldn't think of troubling you. Miss Sisson will attend to it.'

"But of course old Carmen wasn't going to miss the chance of getting her odd jobs done for nothing. She took my part. 'Mr. Straiker—Miss Playfair,' says she, grinning like a cat who's turned over the gold-fish bowl. 'He will fix you up, I'm sure. I wouldn't be able to get a man in before next week.'

"Well, to make a long story short, I fixed the blinds so's they'd roll up, and cleaned out the gas burners. She didn't unbend any. Discouraged all my efforts to make conversation. Thanked me all over the place, and gave me to understand that I needn't build on it, you know. But I swear I'll make her thaw out.

"I've thought of a scheme. I tried all her burners—to gain time, you understand, and the one she mostly uses whistles like a peanut stand. So I'm going out to get her a swell gas-mantle to-night, and say Carmen see it—see? Trust lil Charley to find a way!"

Evan of course had his own ideas as to entertaining Miss Playfair this evening. "How about the life class at the League?" he suggested casually—too casually.

This was a sore subject with Charley. Evan had him there.

"Oh, blow the class!" he said scowling. "A fellow doesn't get a chance like this once in a lifetime." He boiled over again. "I say, I didn't mention her eyes, did I? Lord! They're like immense brown stars! Oh, that's rotten! I mean velvety, glowing—oh, words fail me! You'll have to take her eyes on trust!"

Evan refused to be diverted. "You cut the class last time," he said. "What do you expect to get out of it?"

"Lord! one would think you wanted to get me out of the way so you could make

up to her yourself!" said Charley, frowning.

Evan glanced at him sharply. This, however, was but a random hit. Charley was quite unsuspecting.

"Only I know you're a hermit-crab, a woman-hater!" he went on.

"It's only last week you were chasing after a blonde," Evan persisted remorselessly. "When she threw you down you swore you'd go to work."

"Oh, well, I'll go to the old class," muttered Charley. "I'll get the gas-mantle to-morrow."

Evan breathed freely again.

When Charley was safely out of the way Evan made haste to array himself in the best that their joint wardrobes afforded. They shared everything. His conscience troubled him a little over his treatment of Charley, but he salved it with the thought: "Well, anyway, I saw her first. I quarreled with her before he even laid eyes on her."

Evan gave anxious thought to the matching of ties and socks, and spent many minutes in vigorously brushing out a slight tendency to curl in his hair. He despised curly hair in a man.

But when he was all ready a sudden fit of indecision attacked him, and he flung himself into the old chair, glooming. She had all but driven him out of her room the night before—well, if he presented himself at the door now, it would be simply inviting her to insult him.

Evan thought she didn't mean it, even though she might want him to come—Evan had that possibility in mind, though his ideas as to the psychology of girls were chaotic—how could he give her the chance to put it all over him? Surely she would despise him. On the other hand he could hardly expect her to make the first overtures. Evan sighed in perplexity.

It was not that he liked her any the worse for being so difficult; on the contrary. But he had to think out the best thing to do under the circumstances, and the trouble was he wanted to go down so badly, he couldn't think at all.

He made up his mind he wouldn't go down—not that night anyway. He lighted

his pipe in defiance of the whole sex. But somehow he couldn't keep it going. He only smoked matches. Nor keep his legs from twitching; nor his brain from suggesting vain pretexts to knock at her door.

He might go out and buy her a gas-mantle—but that *would* be a low trick on Charley. He flung down the pipe, he walked up and down, he looked out of the window; a score of times he swore to himself that he would not go down, yet his perambulations left him ever nearer the door.

Finally, with a great effort of the will, he closed it. But almost instantly he flew to open it again, bent his head to listen, then threw it back with a note of deep laughter.

He commenced to run down-stairs. She was singing, the witch! She *had* made the first overture. Let her make believe as much as she liked, she must have calculated that the song would bring him.

Outside her door—it was closed to-night—he pulled himself up short. "Easy! Easy!" he said to himself. "If you're in such a rush to come when you're called, she'll have the laugh on you anyhow. Let her sing for awhile, the darling! You won't miss anything here."

It was a jolly little song, full of enchanting runs and changes; old English, he guessed:

"Oh, the pretty, pretty creature;
When I next do meet her,
No more like a clown will I face her frown
But gallantly will I treat her."

"A hint for me," thought Evan, smiling delightedly.

When she came to the end of the song, Evan, fearful that she might open the door and find him there, hastened on down-stairs. Miss Sisson was in her room at the back with the door open, and Evan stepped in for a chat, flattering the lady not a little thereby, for Mr. Weir was the most standoffish of her gentleman roomers—and the comeliest.

But it is to be feared she didn't get much profit out of this conversation, for Mr. Weir was strangely absent-minded. His thoughts were in the room overhead where the heart-disquieting mezzo-soprano

was now singing a wistfuller song and no less sweet:

"Phyllis has such charming graces
I must love her or I die."

Miss Sisson remarked in her most elegant and acid tones: "It's such an annoyance to have a singer in the house. I already regret that I yielded to her importunities."

"You fool!" thought Evan. "She makes a paradise of your old rookery!"

At the end of the second song he was sure he heard the singer's light footsteps travel to the door overhead, linger there, then return more slowly. The heart in his breast waxed big with gladness. "You blessed little darling!" he thought. "If it's true you want me, God knows you can have me for a gift!"

Yet he let her sing another song before he stirred. He bade Miss Sisson good-night and went deliberately up-stairs. She had stopped singing now. He knocked on the door.

She took her time about opening it. "Oh, it's you," she said.

"Good evening," said Evan.

"Good evening," she returned with a rising inflection that suggested: "Well, what do you want?"

Evan was a bit dashed. His instinct told him, though, that he must put his fate to the test. In other words he must find out for sure whether she detested him, or was simply being maidenly. She had not thrown the door open to its fullest extent, but Evan, gaging the space, figured that he could just slip in without actually pushing her out of the way. He did so.

She faced about in high indignation. "Well! You might at least wait until you are invited!" she said.

Evan had no wish to anger her too far. "Oh, I'm sorry," he said innocently. "I thought you meant me to come in." He turned toward the door again.

"Oh, well, so long as you're here I'm not going to turn you out," she said casually. "But your manners aren't much." She closed the door.

"It's all right!" thought Evan happily.

"I heard you singing," he said, by way of opening the conversation.

"Yes, I have to sing every night for practice," she said quickly. She wished him to understand clearly that she had not been singing to bring him.

She sat on the piano bench, with her back to the piano and her hands in her lap. Her expression was not encouraging. Evan sat on the sofa.

"Please go on," he said. "Don't mind me."

"No," she said, with her funny little downright way. "I shan't sing any more."

"But why?"

"You have provoked me. I can't sing when I am provoked."

"What have I done?"

"The mere sight of you provokes me," she said with more frankness, probably, than she intended.

"I'm sorry," said Evan. "You're so different, so unusual, I don't know how to handle you."

The first part of this pleased her, the last outraged her afresh. "Handle me!" she cried. "I like that!"

Evan saw his mistake. "That's not the word," he said quickly. "I mean I study how to please you, and only seem to get in wrong."

"Don't 'study,'" she said with a superior air. "Just be yourself."

"But I am myself, and it only provokes you."

The brown eyes flashed. "Oh, you're too conceited for words!"

This was a new thought to Evan. He considered it.

"No," he said at last, "I don't think I am. At least not offensively conceited. But it seems to me that you are so accustomed to having men bow down before you that the mildest independence in a man strikes you as something outrageous."

This was near enough the truth to be an added cause for offense. She received it in an untraded dignified silence.

"I'd like to bow down before you, too," Evan went on, smiling. "But something tells me if I did it would be the end of me. You would despise me."

Her mood changed abruptly. "I feel better now," she said. "One really cannot take you seriously. I'll sing."

Her hands drifted over the keys, and she dropped into the ever-moving lullaby: "Mighty lak' a Rose." The air was admirably suited to the deeper notes of her voice. The listener's heart was drawn right out of his breast; he forgot at once his fear of being mastered, and his great desire to master her.

When she came to the end he murmured, deeply moved: "I can't say anything."

She could have asked no finer tribute. "You needn't," she murmured.

The pleasure she took in his applause was evidenced in the warmth she imparted to the next song, another simple melody almost intolerably plaintive: "Just a Wearyin' for You."

Evan held his breath in delight. "If the words were true!" he thought. But though she sang with abandon, she never looked at him. He was artist enough to know better than to take an artistic performance literally.

Nothing more was said for a long time. She passed from one song to another, singing from memory; dreamily improvising on the piano between. She chose only simple songs in English which pleased Evan well—could she read his heart?—the "Shoogy-Shoo," "Little Boy Blue," "The Sands o' Dee," "Love Unexpressed."

Evan was incapable of criticising her voice. Some might have objected that it lacked that bell-like clearness so much to be desired; that it had a dusky quality; but Evan was not quarreling because it was the voice of a woman instead of an angel. One thing she had beyond preadventure, temperament; her heart was in her singing, and so it played on his heartstrings as she willed.

While he listened enraptured, he saw the moon peek over the buildings in the next street. He softly got up and turned off the impertinent gas. Beyond a startled glance over her shoulder she made no objection. He was utterly fascinated by the movements of the bright head, now raised, now lowered, now turned toward the window in the changing moods of the song.

Moonlight completed the working of the spell that was laid upon him. For the moment, he ceased to be a rational being.

He was exalted by emotion far out of himself. He experienced the sweetness of losing his own identity.

It was as if a great wind had snatched him up into the universal ether, a region of warmth and color and perfume. But he was conscious of a pull on him like that of the magnet for the iron, a pull that was neither to be questioned nor resisted.

At the last she turned around on the bench again, and her hands dropped in her lap. "That is all. I'm tired," she said like a child.

With a single movement the rapt youth was at her feet, weaving his arms about her waist. Unpremeditated words poured from him in a torrent; words out of deeps in him of which up to that moment he was unconscious.

"Oh, you woman! You are the first in the world for me! I know you now! I feel your dreadful power! I am glad of it! I have waited for you.

"I looked for you in so many girls' faces only to find emptiness. I began to doubt. The power of love was just a poetic fancy, I thought. But I have found it now and it is very real. I longed to lose myself. Let me love you, and forget myself in you!"

She was not surprised, nor angry. She gently tried to detach his arms.

"Oh, hush! hush!" she murmured. "It is not me! It is just the music!"

"It is you! It is you!" he protested. "I knew it when I saw you. You or none!"

"But how silly!" she said in a warm, low voice. "You have seen me twice."

"What difference does that make?" he said impatiently. "One cannot be mistaken about a thing like this. I love you with all my heart. It only takes a second to happen, but it can never be undone while I live.

"You have entered into me and taken possession. If you abandoned me I should be no more than the shell of a man!"

"Ah, but be sensible!" she begged him. He thought he felt her finger-tips brush his hair. "Try to be sensible. Think of me."

"I wish to think only of you. What do you want me to do?"

"Get up and sit beside me. Let us talk."

He sat beside her on the bench. He did not offer to touch her again. The moonlight was in her face; the lifted, shadowy oval seemed angelic to him, he was full of awe.

"You're so beautiful!" he groaned, "so beautiful it hurts me!"

"Hush!" she said, "you mustn't talk like that."

"Is it wrong?"

"Yes—no! I don't know. I can't bear it!"

"You can do what you like with me."

"You don't mean that really."

"I do. I have longed to be able to give myself up wholly."

"Then be my brother, my dear brother."

Evan frowned. "You mean—"

"Be my brother," she repeated. "I need your help."

"But—how can I?" said Evan. "I am only a man."

"The other thing only frightens me," she said quickly. "I like you—but I cannot return that. This is not just the feeling of a moment. It will never change. I know myself.

"But be my friend. Take what I can give you. Do not force me to be on my guard. I wish to let myself go with you."

"That is what I wish," he said quickly. Poor Evan felt hollow inside; hollow and a little dazed. The cloud-piercing tower of his happiness had collapsed. A sure instinct told him that what she proposed was impossible, and what was more, absurd. But he clutched at straws.

The idea of giving her up altogether was unthinkable. Moreover, he was incapable of resisting her at that moment. It was by no means difficult to silence that inner voice.

"Angel of purity and innocence, she's right, of course!" he said to himself. "She shall be holy to me! She points out the better way that I would be incapable of following without her help."

He said nothing aloud, but merely raised her hand to his lips.

"Swear it," she murmured.

"You dictate the oath."

"Swear that you will be my friend, and nothing but my friend."

"I swear it."

Suddenly leaning forward she kissed his cheek as a sister might have done—but the spot glowed long afterward. Then she jumped up.

"You must go now."

"Not quite yet," he pleaded, "Corinna."

"Oh!" she rebuked him.

"But you're my sister now."

"Very well, you may call me Corinna, but you must go. What will the landlady say?"

"But you said you needed my help. How can I rest, not knowing—"

"But that's too long a story to begin now. There's no immediate danger threatening me. There will be other nights."

"How can I wait twenty-four hours?"

"How would you like to get up early and go walking in the country before the day's work?"

"I'd like it above all things."

"Then call for me at eight. We'll have breakfast at the French pastry shop. My first lesson's at eleven."

"Great!"

"Now go."

"Say 'Good-night, Evan.'"

"I will when I am more accustomed to you."

"But try it just for an experiment."

"Well—good-night, Evan."

His name was so sweet on her tongue it required all his self-control to remember his oath. He turned away with a groan.

"Good-night, Corinna."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECOND CALL.

HE dreamed of her all night—but not as a sister, it is to be feared. In his dream she was running through the springtime woods with the glorious hair flying, and he was running after her, an endless race without his ever drawing nearer. While the sun shone and the little young leaves twinkled as if in laughter.

He was awake at six and sprang out of the bed to see what kind of day it was.

The sun was already high over the tops of the buildings of the east, the sky was fleckless, and the empty park was beaming.

His anxiety was relieved. He dressed as slowly as possible in order to kill time, taking care to make no sound that might awaken Charley in the next room. He was not prepared to make explanations just then.

Notwithstanding all his care he was ready a whole hour too soon, an hour that promised to be endless, for he was completely at a loss what to do with himself; couldn't apply his mind to anything; couldn't sit still. Finally he stole down-stairs, sending his love silently through her door as he passed, and started circumnavigating the park, which was his custom when his thoughts pressed upon him.

He was subconsciously aware of the splendor of the morning, but saw little of what actually met his eyes. He was too busy with the happenings of the night before.

A nasty little doubt tormented him. He knew he was slightly insane; it was not that; he gloried in his state and pitied the dull clods who had not fire in their breasts to drive them mad. But here was the rub; would not these same clods have laughed at him had they known of the oath he had taken—would not he have laughed himself yesterday?

It was carried on inside him like an argument; on the one hand the enamored young man who insisted that the relationship between brother and sister was a holy and beautiful one, on the other hand the matter-of-fact one who said it was all damn nonsense; that a man and woman, free, unattached, and not bound by the ties of consanguinity, were not intended to be brother and sister.

Such arguments have no end. The thought of Charley troubled him most; he had always taken a slightly superior attitude towards Charley's sentimentality. What a chance for Charley to get back at him if he learned of this!

At five minutes to eight, having looked at his watch fifty times or so, he ventured back into the house, and tapped at Corinna's door. "She's bound to be late anyhow,"

he thought. "No harm to hurry her up a little."

But no, she was hatted, gloved and waiting just inside the door. This little fact won his gratitude surprisingly; a man does not expect it of a woman.

In the sunlight they took in each other anew. What Corinna thought did not appear, but Evan was freshly delighted. She was an out-of-doors girl, it appeared; the morning became her like a shining garment. He forgot the argument; it was sufficient to be with her, to laugh with her, to be ravished by the dusky, velvety tones of her voice.

Of the hours that followed it is unnecessary to speak in detail. It was one long rhapsody, and rhapsodies are apt to be a little tiresome to those other than the rhapsodists. Everybody has known such hours for themselves—or if they have not they are unfortunate.

They breakfasted frugally—there is a delicious intimacy in breakfast that no other meal knows, and then decided on Staten Island. Half an hour later they were voyaging down the Bay, and in an hour were in the woods.

Corinna was inexorable on the question of eleven o'clock, and to Evan it seemed as if they had not sooner got there than they had to turn back again. Evan got sore—they always do, and the pleasure of the return journey was a little dimmed, though there is a kind of sweetness in these little tiffs, too. Anybody seeing their eyes on each other, Corinna's as well as Evan's, would have immediately known they were no brother and sister, but they still kept up the fiction.

As they neared home she said: "Do you mind if I go in alone?"

"Are you ashamed to be seen with me?" demanded Evan, scowling.

"Silly! Didn't I propose this trip? The reason is very simple. Your ridiculous landlady looks on every man in the house as her property. I don't want to excite her ill-will, that's all."

Evan could not deny the truth of this characterization of Carmen. "Go on ahead," he said. "I'll hang around in the park a while. See you to-night."

She stopped, and gave him an inscrutable look. "Oh, I'm sorry, I shan't be home to-night."

With this the ugly head of Corinna's mystery popped up again. It had been tormenting Evan all morning, but with a lover's pride he would not question her, and she volunteered no information.

"Oh!" said Evan flatly, and waited for her to say more.

But she seemed not to be aware that anything more was required and his brow darkened. "If it was me," he thought, "how eager I would be to explain what was taking me away from her, but she is mum!"

"Come to-morrow night," she said.

He bowed stiffly.

She hesitated a moment as if about to explain, then thought better of it, and hurried away, leaving Evan inwardly fuming.

He plumped down on a bench across the square from the house and, thrusting his hands deep in his pockets, stretched out his legs and scowled at the pavement. A "platonic friendship" had no charm for him then.

"I'm a fool!" he said to himself. "Her brother!"—a harsh note of laughter escaped him—"when I'm out of my mind with wanting her! What a fool I was to stand for it! She's just playing the regular girl's game—no blame to her, of course, it's their instinct to keep a man at arm's length as long as they can. It pleases them to have us on the grill. And I fell for it!"

"I'm on the way to make a precious fool of myself. If I can't find out where she's going to-night, I'll be clean off my nut before morning. But I wouldn't ask her! And if she's going out with another man—Lord! which is worse—to know or not to know?"

When he let himself in the door of the house, Miss Sisson, according to her custom, poked her head out into the hall to see who it was. She came out.

"Oh, Mr. Weir," she said importantly, "where have you been?"

"Out," said Evan stiffly.

She was too much excited to perceive the snub. "There's been a man here for you half a dozen times, I guess."

"What did he want?"

"I don't know. Says it's most important."

"Who was he?"

"Wouldn't give his name. Acted most mysterious."

"What sort of looking man?"

"A young fellow about your age, but scarcely a friend of yours, I should say. A meanlike face."

This meant nothing to Evan. He looked blank.

"The last time he was here he said he'd wait," Miss Sisson went on, "but I said there was no place inside, because I didn't like his looks, so he said he'd wait in the square and—"

The sound of the door-bell interrupted her.

"Here he is now!"

Evan opened the door and discovered Alfred, the Deaves's second man, on the step. Alfred smiled insinuatingly, but with a difference from their first meeting, more warily. Miss Sisson pressed forward to hear what he had to say.

"Can I see you a moment?" he said to Evan meaningly.

Evan looked at Miss Sisson, who forthwith retired with a chagrined frown of her skirts.

"They sent me for you," said Alfred.

Evan's eyebrows went up. "What do they want?" he asked coolly.

"Search me!" said Alfred, shrugging.

"They're in a way about something."

"Anything new?"

"Uhuh. Hilton says they got another letter from the blackmailers."

Evan, being human, could not but feel certain stirrings of curiosity. "Very well, I'll come with you," he said.

They left a furiously unsatisfied Miss Sisson behind them.

Evan and Alfred rode up-town together on the bus. Alfred was no less silky and insinuating than in the beginning, but whereas at first he had been genuinely candid, he now only made believe to be.

"He's been warned off me," thought Evan.

The conversation on Alfred's side consisted of a subtle attempt to elicit from Evan what had happened the day before,

and on Evan's side a determination to balk his curiosity without appearing to be aware of what he was after.

The Deaveses, father and son, were in the library. Before he was well inside the room the latter flung out at him:

"Where have you been all morning?"

Evan instantly felt his collar tighten. His jaw stuck out. "I don't know as that is anybody's business but my own," he said.

They both opened up on him then. Evan could not make out what it was all about. But his conscience was easy. He could afford to smile at the racket. Finally George Deaves got the floor.

"Will you or will you not describe your movements this morning?" he demanded.

"I will not," said Evan coolly.

"What did I tell you? What did I tell you?" burst out the old man. "Send for the police!"

Evan's temper had already been put to a strain that morning. It gave way now.

"Yes, send for the police!" he cried.

"I'm sick of these silly accusations. I owe you nothing, neither of you. My life is as open as a book.

"I make a few dollars a week by honest work, and that's every cent I possess in the world. Satisfy yourselves of that, and then let me alone!"

"Papa, be quiet!" said George Deaves, "I will handle this." To Evan he said soothingly: "There's no need for you to excite yourself. I've no intention of sending for the police—yet."

"Well, if you don't, I will!" said Evan. "I'll tell them the whole story and insist on an investigation!"

George Deaves wilted at the threat of publicity. Evan, in the midst of his anger thought: "Lord! if I *were* guilty this is exactly the way I would talk! But how easy it would be to bluff them!"

George Deaves said: "I hope you won't do anything so foolish as that."

"Well, it's a bit too much to be dragged all the way up-town just to listen to a rehash of yesterday's row," said Evan.

"The situation is entirely changed," said George Deaves, mysteriously.

"Well, I don't know anything about that!"

Deaves shoved a letter across his desk toward Evan. Evan read:

MRS. GEORGE DEAVES:

Dear Madam:

I beg to return herewith the \$5,000 in marked bills that your husband left for us yesterday. We are too old birds to be caught with such chaff. The story, a copy of which I sent Mr. Deaves yesterday, goes to the *Clarion* at 11 A.M. to-day for publication in this evening's edition. If you wish to stop it you must persuade Mr. Deaves to find a similar sum in clean straight money before that hour. These bills must be put in an envelope and addressed to Mr. Carlton Hassell at the Barbizon Club, Fifth Avenue. Your messenger must simply hand it in at the door and leave. If there is any departure from these instructions the money will not be touched, and the story goes through.

With best wishes,

Yours most sincerely,

THE IKUNAHKATSI.

"Good Heavens!" cried Evan, amazed. "Do you mean to say the money was returned?"

George Deaves nodded.

"And addressed to your wife? What a colossal nerve! What have you done? You haven't sent fresh bills?"

Another nod answered him, a somewhat sheepish nod.

"Maud made him," snarled the old man. "Insisted on taking the money down herself, and sent it in by the chauffeur."

"But you've communicated with Mr. Hassell?"

"Do you know him?" demanded George Deaves sharply.

"Why, of course, as everybody knows him. The most famous landscape painter in America—or at least the most popular. His pictures bring thousands!"

"What good to communicate with him?" said Deaves sullenly. "I might better have him arrested."

"But don't you see," urged Evan, "Hassell couldn't have had anything to do with this—not with the money he makes and his reputation. Not unless he were crazy, and he's the sanest of men."

"It's as clear as day. They're just using his name. Easy money for somebody else to get the letter at the club."

"Is this a trick?" muttered George Deaves, scowling.

Evan laughed in exasperation. "Why, sure! If you want it that way. It's nothing to me one way or the other." He turned to go.

"Wait a minute," said Deaves. "Why wouldn't it be better to call up the club?"

Evan shook his head. "A man's club is his castle. Club servants are always instructed not to give out information, particularly over the telephone."

"Telephone Hassell. You should have telephoned him before sending the money. Or, better-still, go to him. It's his interest to get to the bottom of this."

"Will you go with me?" asked Deaves, stabbing his blotter.

Evan smiled. "A minute ago you implied that I was behind the scheme."

"I might have been mistaken. Anyway, if you had nothing to do with it, you ought to be glad to help me clear the matter up."

"I'll go with you," said Evan, "not because I'll feel any necessity for clearing myself, but because it's the most interesting game I've ever been up against!"

"Interesting!" shrilled the old man indignantly. "*Interesting!* If you were being bled white, you wouldn't find it so interesting! I'll go, too."

"You'll stay right here, papa," commanded George Deaves. "And don't you go out until I come back! You've brought trouble enough on me!"

"Well, you needn't bite off my head!" grumbled the old man.

CHAPTER IX.

EVAN IS REENGAGED.

THE Deaves limousine was available, and a few minutes later George Deaves and Evan were being shown into the reception-room of a magnificent duplex apartment on art's most fashionable street.

George Deaves was visibly impressed by the magnificence. It perhaps was rather an unusual hour to pay a call, but the Deaves name was an open sesame. A millionaire and a potential picture-buyer! the great man himself came hurrying to greet them. He was a handsome man of middle age with

a lionlike head, and the affable, assured manner of a citizen of the world.

He showed them into the studio, a superb apartment, but severe and workmanlike according to the best modern usage. Before they were well seated, a servitor, knowing his duty well, began to pull out canvases.

"I—I didn't come to talk to you about pictures," stammered George Deaves.

At a sign from his master the man left the room. Mr. Hassell waited politely to be enlightened.

Poor George Deaves floundered about. "It's such a delicate matter—I'm sure I don't know what you will think—I scarcely know how to tell you—"

Hassell looked alarmed. He said: "Mr. Deaves, I beg you will be plain with me."

Deaves turned helplessly to Evan. "You tell him."

"Better show him the letter," said Evan.

"The letter?" said Deaves in a panic.

"What letter? I don't understand you."

"We came to tell him," said Evan.

"We've either got to tell him or go."

Deaves wiped his face. "Mr. Hassell, I hope I can rely on your discretion. You will receive what I am about to tell you in absolute confidence."

"My dear sir," returned the painter, a little testily, "you come to me in this state of agitation about I don't know what. Whatever it is, I hope I will comport myself like a man of honor!"

George Deaves handed over the letter in a hand that trembled. Hassell's face was a study as he read it.

"This is blackmail!" he cried. "And in my name!"

"That's why we came to you," said Deaves—a little unnecessarily, it might be thought.

"You surely don't suspect—"

"Certainly not," said Evan quickly—there was no knowing what break Deaves might make. "But you can help us."

"Of course! This letter names eleven o'clock as the hour." Hassell glanced at his watch. "It's nearly twelve now. Why didn't you come to me earlier—or phone?"

"Well, I didn't know—it didn't occur to me," began Deaves, and stopped with an appealing glance at Evan.

Evan said bluntly: "Mr. Deaves was not acquainted with your name and your work until I told him."

The great painter looked a little astonished at such ignorance. "Has the money been sent to the club?" he asked.

Deaves nodded shamefacedly.

Mr. Hassell immediately got busy. "I'll taxi down there at once. I might say that I rarely use the Barbizon Club nowadays. Haven't been there in a month."

"Shall we go with you?" asked Deaves.

"No. They may have spies who would see you, even if you remained in the cab. If you'll be good enough to wait here, I'll be back inside half an hour."

Even in his bustle he did not neglect business. As soon as he had gone the servant appeared again, and began to show his pictures. Deaves goggled at them indifferently, but Evan was keenly interested. He studied them with the mixture of scorn and envy that is characteristic of the attitude of poor young artists towards rich old ones.

Within a few minutes of his half hour Hassell was back again. "Not much to report," he said deprecatingly. "The envelope addressed to me was delivered just before eleven o'clock, and put in the H box of the letter rack."

"It was gone when I looked, of course, but who took it remains to be discovered. About thirty members had gone in and out. Practically everybody stops at the letter rack. I have a list of those who passed in and out as well as the doorkeeper could make it out from memory."

"How about the doorkeeper?" asked Deaves.

"Above suspicion, I should say. Has been with the club for twenty years. A simple soul, hardly capable of acting a part. He would hardly have told me that he put my letter in the rack himself."

"Other servants, then?"

"There were several boys on duty in the hall, but they are not supposed to go to the letter-rack without orders. If one of them had looked over the letters it could scarcely have escaped notice."

"No, unpleasant as it is to think so, I am afraid it was one of the members—some one who was counting on the fact that I never

appear at the club except for an important meeting or a dinner. I looked over the members in the clubhouse, honest-looking men—but who can tell?"

"No doubt the one who got the money left immediately," suggested Evan.

Hassell said to Deaves: "With your permission I should like to take the matter up with the board of governors."

"No, no, if you please," said Deaves nervously. "No publicity."

"Then allow me to put this list in the hands of a first-class detective agency. Those fellows are secret enough."

"Let me attend to it, if you please."

Hassell handed over the list with manifest reluctance. "If any one uses my name again I trust you will let me know promptly."

"You may depend on it," said Deaves, making for the door.

"By the way, how did you like my pictures?"

"Very pretty, very pretty," said Deaves uneasily. "I don't know anything about such things. My wife buys everything for the home."

"Ah!" said Hassell with ironical eyebrows.

"I will tell her about them."

"Thank you," said Hassell, bowing them out.

George Deaves didn't say much on the way home, but Evan was aware that his attitude had changed. There were no more accusations. Clearly, Deaves had been impressed by the fact that the interview with Hassell had turned out exactly as Evan had foretold.

Simeon Deaves was still shuffling around the library in his slippers. "Well?" he demanded.

The son briefly told him what had occurred.

The old man was in a very bad temper. "Yah! let him pull wool over your eyes!" he cried. "All a pack of thieves together! Artists never have any money! And this one knows more than he lets on. He's too smart by half! You mark my words!"

"Please go outside," the much-trying George said to Evan. "Wait in the hall."

Evan obeyed with a shrug. Outside the

softly stepping Alfred was loitering suspiciously. He approached Evan.

"Something doing to-day, eh?" he said with his obsequious, impudent leer.

"Where did you two go?"

Evan's gorge rose. He saw nothing to be gained now by hiding his feelings.

"You damn sneak!" he said quietly.

"Keep away from me, or I'll hurt you!"

Alfred, with a scared and venomous look, slunk down-stairs. Evan felt better.

Presently George Deaves called him back into the library. At what had taken place between father and son he could only guess. The old man's attitude had changed; he was disposed to be friendly. Divided between their fears and their suspicions, father and son were continually making these face-about.

George Deaves said in his pompous way: "My father has reconsidered his decision not to employ you further. He will be glad to have you stay according to the original arrangement."

"That's right," added the old man. "I just spoke a little hasty. I always said you were a good boy."

Evan's face hardened. "I'm not sure that I want the job," he said.

"Forty dollars a week's a fine salary," said Simeon Deaves.

"I'll stay for fifty," replied Evan coolly.

They both gasped. "Are you trying to hold us up?" cried George Deaves.

"If that's what you want to call it," said Evan. "You force me to. If I appear anxious for the job, you will soon be accusing me again of being in the gang. As a matter of fact, I don't care whether I stay or not."

"Well, I'll pay it," said George Deaves, with a sour face, "provided you'll agree to investigate the list Hassell gave us in your spare time."

"I'll do it," said Evan. "I'm interested. You'd better discharge Alfred, who is certainly a spy, and get a detective in his place to keep a watch on the other servants."

"Those fellows cost ten dollars a day!" cried Simeon Deaves.

"The blackmailers are getting five thousand out of you every fortnight," retorted Evan.

"I do not see the necessity for a detective," said George Deaves loftily. "As long as I'm paying you all this money, you can look out for that side of the case as well."

"Just as you like," said Evan smiling. It was hopeless to try to argue with these people.

Alfred entered, and giving Evan a wide berth, laid a long envelope on George Deaves's desk. "Brought by messenger," he said. "No answer." He left the room.

Deaves paled as his eyes fell on the superscription. "The same handwriting!" he murmured.

He nervously tore open the envelope. It contained some typewritten sheets and a slip of paper with writing upon it. George Deaves read the latter with a perplexed expression and handed it over to Evan.

"What do you make of that?" he asked. Evan read:

Received of George Deaves the sum of five thousand dollars in full payment of the story entitled "Simeon Deaves Goes Shopping," including all rights. All existing copies of the manuscript enclosed. Many thanks.

THE IKUNAHKATSI.

"Same old 'impudence!'" said Evan, smiling grimly. "This crook is something of a character; it seems. Affects a kind of honesty in his dealings."

"Oh, he's kept a copy of the story," said George Deaves.

"Possibly. But why should he go to the trouble of making believe that he has not—and send a receipt? Criminal psychology is queer. This is something out of the common that we are up against!"

CHAPTER X.

A RIVAL.

EVAN spent the afternoon walking about with Simeon Deaves. The old man was an indefatigable pedestrian. He had no object in his wanderings, but loved to poke into the oddest and most out-of-the-way corners of the town.

They were not followed to-day, so far as Evan could tell. At first Simeon Deaves was uneasy and suspicious of his bodyguard,

but finding that Evan took everything calmly for granted, he unbent and became loquacious. All his talk was on the same subject: how to get along in the world, *i. e.*, how to make money.

Evan having taken him home at last, sank into the seat of a bus with relief. "Anyhow, it will be good for my health," he thought.

Before going home he called at the studio of a friend, a member of the Barbizon Club; and without taking him entirely into his confidence, enlisted his aid in investigating the actions and habits of the men on Hassell's list. It may be said here that nothing came of this.

Evan and Charley met for the evening meal. The irrepressible Charley was still singing about the red-haired girl. In spite of his boasts it appeared that his advances has consistently been turned down.

Evan took a little comfort from this. Sullenness was unknown to the gay Charley, and he was not a whit less optimistic because of his set-backs.

"You don't want a girl to be too come-on-ish," he said. "A hoity-toity manner adds zest to the game. They don't expect to be taken seriously when they turn you down, bless your heart, no!"

"Why, if I let that girl drop now, she'd despise me for my faint-heartedness. Sure, and be as disappointed as anything!"

Evan was not in much of a humor to laugh at him. Indeed, he foresaw that an impossible situation would presently develop between Charley and him unless he said something. With an elaborately casual manner he began at last:

"I say, Charl, you and I have always played fair with each other."

"Well, I should rather fancy, as Lord Percy said. What's on your chest, boy? Unload! Unload!"

"It's only fair to tell you that I have become acquainted with the young lady in question."

Charley stared. "The deuce you say! You, the scorner of the sex! Since when?"

"Two nights ago."

"And you never said a word about it. You let me shoot off my mouth all this time and never—"

"What was there to say?"

"You packed me off to the life-class last night so you could—"

"That was for your own good!"

"Come off! Come off! Have I such a trusting eye? On the level, why didn't you tell me before?"

What was Evan to say? He began an explanation that was no explanation. Charley's sharp eyes bored him through and through.

"By the Lord!" cried the latter at last, "Old Stonyheart has melted! St. Anthony has fallen for the caloric tresses. Touched where he lives, by gad! Brought low and humbled in the dust!"

Evan grinned painfully. "Don't be a fool!" he muttered.

"How does it feel?" asked Charley with mock solicitude; "a dull ache in the epigastrium or a fluttering sensation in the pericardium; some lay stress on the characteristic feeling of heaviness behind the occiput?"

"You wheeze like a vaudeville performer on small time," growled Evan.

Charley roared. He did not often get his partner on the grill like this. It was generally the other way about. But in the midst of his outrageous joshing it suddenly struck the warm-hearted Charley that under his game grin Evan was suffering very pretty torments. Charley jumped up and for the briefest of seconds laid his hand on his partner's shoulder.

"Look here," he said abruptly, "you know what I think of you really, or if you don't you'll have to take it for granted, for I'll never tell you. I haven't the words, but only a line of cheap cackle, as you say.

"Understand, from this time on it's a clear field for you, see? Me for the movies, to-night."

Evan was touched, but of course he couldn't show Charley his feelings. For that matter, Charley did not require it. "You needn't go out on my account," he grumbled. "I don't expect to see her to-night. She has a date."

Such was the bitterness with which he said it, that Charley could not help but laugh again. "Cheer up!" he cried. "It has been known to happen. Fellows like

you take it too hard. Hard wood is slow to catch, eh; but, Lor'! what a heat she throws out!"

"Don't jolly me," muttered Evan. "I can't take it right."

Charley's face softened again for an instant. "C'mon with me," he said. "Mildred Macy, in 'Spawn of Infamy,' is at the Nonpareil. Milly is some vamp, I hear."

"Couldn't sit through a picture," said Evan. "You go."

Nevertheless when the dishes were washed up the prospect of spending the evening alone in the little room was too ghastly. As Charley got up Evan said sheepishly:

"Believe I will go."

"Bully!" said Charley. "Get your hat."

As they passed her door Evan's ears were long. No sounds came from within, no crack of light showed beneath. He had been hoping against hope that she might be there.

Where was she? The picture of a little restaurant rushed before his mind's eye. Corinna and a man on opposite sides of the table, their smiling faces drawing close over the cloth. He suffered as much as if he had actually beheld them. That's the worst of having a vivid imagination.

"Spawn of Infamy" proved to be what Charley termed "high-life for low-lifers," and they were home shortly after nine. As they mounted the first flight Evan perceived a crack of light under Corinna's door and his heart rose. She was home early—she had not had a good time, then.

But as they rounded the landing he heard her voice inside. She had a visitor—alone in there with her! A horrible spasm of pain contracted his breast. He had much ado to restrain himself from beating with his fists on the door.

He followed Charley up-stairs, grinding his teeth. He had never suspected that such raging devils lay dormant in his blood.

When they got up-stairs it was quite impossible for Evan to remain there. For a moment or two he walked up and down like something caged; he could not pretend to hide the feelings that were tearing him. Charley, glancing at his wonderingly out of

the tail of his eye, bustled about, talking foolishly.

Finally Evan said thickly: "It's stuffy up here. I'm going down to walk around the park a while."

Charley's eyes followed him compassionately. Charley's time to experience this sort of thing had not arrived.

When he started Evan honestly intended to go down into the park and calm himself with the exercise of walking. But, unfortunately he had to pass her door. In spite of himself he stopped there, and despising himself, listened. He heard her say: "I won't sing to-night. I'm not in the humor." Then he heard a man's voice low and urgent, and he saw red. He knocked.

She came promptly and opened the door, opened it wide. She did not quail when she saw his lowering face.

"Good evening," she said, with the upward inflection meaning: "What do you want?"

Her tone flatly denied their intimacy of the night before. This aspect of a woman's nature was new to Evan; he was astonished and hotly indignant.

"May I come in?" he asked stiffly.

"Certainly," she said, promptly and indifferently, and threw the door wide.

Evan stepped in, and his eyes flew to find his rival. The latter was sitting between the piano and the window. He was younger than Evan, not much more than a lad, in fact, but a resolute, comely lad; one of whom Evan could be jealous.

"Mr. Weir, Mr. Anyway," said Corinna, impassively.

They nodded, eying each other like strange dogs. A factitious calm descended on Evan. He could even smile, but there were ugly lines around his mouth. His voice was harsh.

"Aren't we going to have some music?" he said.

By this he meant to convey to the other man that he was accustomed to be entertained in that room. The point was not lost. The younger man whitened about the lips.

The girl gave no sign at all. Even in his anger Evan commended her pluck. She kept her chin up; her eyes were scornful.

"I'll play," she said, going toward the piano.

"I like your singing better," said Evan.

"I am not in the humor," she said in a tone that finally disposed of the question.

She played—what she played Evan never knew. It is doubtful if any of them heard a note. Evan sat affecting to listen with a smile like a grimace. The other man kept his eyes down.

Whatever Corinna may have been feeling, it did not interfere with the technical excellence of her performance; her fingers danced like fairies over the keys, but to-night there was no magic in the sounds they evoked.

Corinna's part was the easiest because she had something to do and somewhere to look. She went from one piece to another without a word being spoken. Evan went on smiling until his face was cracking; the other never looked up.

Finally the sounds began to get on Evan's nerves. "Don't tire yourself," he said, with bitter politeness.

She stopped and, turning around on the bench, waited for him to say something more. Her attitude said plainer than words: "You provoked this situation; very well, it's up to you to save it."

This cool defiance in a mere girl, a little one at that, angered Evan past all bearing. He smiled the more, and addressed the other man:

"Fond of music, Mr. Anyway?"

"Very," said the other without looking at him.

"What is your favorite piece in Miss Playfair's repertoire—I mean among the songs."

"I have no favorite."

"But don't you think she sings 'Just a Wearyin' for You' and 'Love Unexpressed' with wonderful expression?"

Anyway did not answer. Corinna yawned delicately. "You'll have to excuse me," she said. "I have to go to Ridgewood early to-morrow to give lessons."

Anyway, better-mannered than Evan—or better-trained—immediately rose. Evan sat tight, smiling mockingly at Corinna. "No, you don't!" the smile said.

His conduct was inexcusable, of course, but he was beyond caring for that. She

had denied him and defied him to his face; let her take the consequences. Anyway, seeing that Evan wasn't going, sat down again, flushing.

"Don't wait for me," said Evan. "I only have to go up-stairs."

Anyway bit his lip. He was not deficient in pluck, but he lacked Evan's self-possession. The two or three years difference in age put him at a cruel disadvantage. Finally he looked at the girl.

"May I stay a little longer, Corinna?" he asked.

The Christian name stabbed Evan. He sneered. "Nice, well-mannered little boy!" his expression said.

"You must both go," said Corinna calmly.

Evan smiled at her again, but she refused to meet his glance. However, he stood up now, for he wished to start the other man on his way. Anyway picked up his hat and gloves. Then all three stood there, avoiding each other's glances.

Neither man would be the first to say good-night, nor would Corinna address one before the other. It was a sufficiently absurd situation, but it had all the potentialities of a violent one. Finally Corinna cut the knot by saying:

"Good-night, both of you." She opened the door.

The two young men glared at each other. Anyway was the weaker spirit and he had to go first. But he lingered outside the door to make sure that Evan was coming, too.

Evan whispered to Corinna: "I'm coming back."

"Indeed, you're not!" she retorted, glancing significantly at the key in the door.

"Then I won't go," said Evan, coolly turning back into the room.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COMPACT IS SMASHED.

CORINNA bit her lip. Clearly, Evan offered her a new set of problems in the management of men. Anyway sought to enter again, but she stopped him.

"Please go, Leonard," she murmured. "This is too absurd!"

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The whispered colloquy was perfectly audible to Evan.

Anyway said: "But I don't like to leave you alone with—"

She laughed slightly. "Nonsense! I can take care of myself!"

"But, Corinna, if I go he'll think I'm—"

"I will put him straight as to that."

"Corinna"—this low and thick—"what is this man to you?"

"No more than you—or any of my friends."

"But, Corinna—"

"Go!"

He went, step by step, with heavy feet on the stairs.

Corinna came into the room, leaving the door open. Her eyes were bright with anger.

"Well, you won your pitiful little victory over the boy," she said scornfully. "I hope you're pleased with yourself!"

The blood began to pound in Evan's temples. "Don't speak to me like that!" he said thickly. "I am no tame thing!"

"You may go," she said.

He smiled. "Not so easily!"

"Then I will."

"Where will you go?"

"To Miss Sisson's room."

Evan laughed. He had not much fear of that.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded.

For a brief instant he seemed to catch a glimpse inside himself and was aghast at what was stewing there. "God knows!" he said helplessly.

Corinna took heart at this evidence of weakness. "Then go away until you come to your senses," she said imperiously.

Evan flushed darkly. "I will not go," he said.

They stared at each other.

Finally words began to come to Evan, at first haltingly: "Last night—you sang to me. Love songs—that drew the very heart out of me—"

She made an indignant movement.

"Oh, I know what you're going to say, they were just songs that you might sing to anybody. But you sang them to me—in a warm and tender voice, knowing that my

ears were hungry for the sounds. You sang down all my defenses. You sang to me until I was soft and helpless. You sang me to your feet.

"I offered you myself—all there is of me, body and soul. And you took me! Oh, I know you made conditions; what did I care? I scarcely heard them. What do words matter at such moments?"

"I offered you my love, and you took it, I felt from that moment that I was yours, and you mine.

"To-night when I came I found another man here—another man you were accustomed to sing to—how many of them are there?—the same songs, oh, God! Another man who looked at you with sick eyes of longing!

"And you denied me when I came! You looked at me with the eyes of a stranger because he was here! And now you ask me what is the matter with me. Am I a toy spaniel to be petted and turned out of the room by turn?"

She found her voice at last. "You have no right to speak to me like that! You promised me—"

"Oh, damn such promises! That's all nonsense! You're a woman and I'm a man! Have all the little brothers you want, but count me out. I will be your lover or nothing!"

"How dare you!" she gasped. "You brute!"

"Yes, I'm a brute!" he said. "I'm glad of it! Brutal things need to be said to clear the air. There's been too much sickly nonsense.

"You despise men, don't you? You like to see them crawling? You need a lesson! You shall be mine, and mine only, and you shall respect me!"

Corinna was well-nigh speechless now. "I hate you! I hate you!" she gasped. "Leave my room!"

"Not till we come to an understanding."

She darted for the door. It was a mistake in tactics. A joyous flame leaped up in his eyes and he seized her.

She fought him like a little tigress, but he only laughed deep inside of him, and drawing her close kissed her pulsing throat.

She ceased to struggle. The hands that

had been beating his face stole around his neck. Her lips sought his of their own accord.

"I love you!" she murmured. "I can't help myself! I love you! What will happen to me now!"

At breakfast next morning Evan was in the highest spirits. His piercing, inaccurate whistling of "Mighty Lak' a Rose" got Charley out of bed a good half hour before his time.

Charley looked at him rather sourly, not too well pleased to have his rôle of little sunshine usurped by another. A scratch which Charley did not overlook, decorated one of Evan's cheeks.

"What have you been in?" he asked sarcastically.

"Cut myself shaving," replied Evan with a casual air.

"You must have shaved early. It's dry."

Evan's only reply was another cadenza.

"Here's a change of tune!" commented Charley. "Last night it was the 'Dead March' from 'Saul.'"

"Come on, slug! Breakfast's on the table."

It was impossible for Charley to be ill-tempered for long. Presently he began to grin: "Pleasant walking in the square last night?" he asked dryly.

Evan couldn't quite confide in him, but he was not unwilling that Charley should guess how matters stood. "Out o' sight!" he cried.

"Want to borrow some money?" said Charley carelessly. "I'm flush."

Evan stared. "How did you guess that?"

"They generally do," said Charley airily.

"I'll be paid by the old man at the end of the week."

"That's all right. Here's five, son. I can recommend the one on the avenue just below Fourteenth."

"The one what?" asked Evan innocently.

"Florist."

Evan blushed.

On his way down-stairs Evan tapped on her door with beating heart. There was no answer. With a sigh he went on. Carmen,

who missed little, had heard him stop and, coming out, volunteered the information that Miss Playfair had gone out real early. Evan thanked her and hurried on, dreading to face the sharp-eyed spinster.

All morning, in a dream, he walked the streets with Simeon Deaves. In the middle of the day he made an excuse to avoid luncheon at the Deaves's and rushed home, stopping en route to buy a small-sized cart-wheel of violets.

He let himself in softly and managed to get on the stairs without attracting Carmen's attention. The violets were hidden under his coat. Corinna's door stood open now, and his heart began to beat.

"Will she recognize my step?" he thought. "I would know hers on my flight."

He stood in her doorway and the heart slowly froze in his breast. The room was empty, dreadfully empty. She was gone. The empty mantle, the empty floor, the empty place where the piano had stood seemed to mock at him.

He turned a little sick, and put his hand out behind him on the door frame for support. "There is some mistake," he told himself, but he knew in his heart there was no mistake. This was the natural outcome of the tormenting mystery in which Corinna enveloped herself.

He looked stupidly down at the violets in his hand. In a spasm of pain he threw them on the floor and ground them under his heel. Their fragrance filled the room.

Then the violence passed and he felt dead inside. He looked inside the little dressing-room—not that he expected to find her there, but it was a place to look. It was empty, of course.

When he issued out again the sight of the bruised flowers caused him a fresh wrench. Lying there they were like a public advertisement of his betrayed heart. He picked them up and thrust them as far as he could reach up the chimney flue.

In the midst of Evan's pain a voice seemed to whisper to him: "It was to be expected. Such happiness is not for mortals!"

Later he thought: "There will be a letter for me up-stairs," and ran up the two

flights, knowing there would be no letter. Yet he searched even in the unlikely places. There was no letter. To his relief Charley was out.

He thought of Carmen. Dreadful as it was to face her prying eyes, it was still more dreadful not to know what had happened. He went down-stairs again. On the final flight the unhappy wretch started to whistle, hoping by that to attract her to her door that he might not have to ask for information.

The ruse was successful. She came out into the hall. Evan found himself curiously studying the odd bumps that the curling pins made under her frowsy boudoir cap. She required no lead to make her talk.

"Miss Playfair has gone!" she cried.

"So I see," said Evan. He listened carefully to the sound of his own voice. It did not shake. He kept his back to the light from the front door.

"What do you know about that! I never did like her. One of these flibbertigibbets! You never can trust a red-haired woman! And such a display of hair, as if it was beautiful, indeed! That showed her character.

"But I should worry! Paid me a month's rent in advance when he came. Wanted part of it back this morning. But I said: 'Oh, no, my dear! That's the landlady's propensity—I mean perquisite.'"

Evan wondered if the sick disgust he felt of the woman showed in his face. As a matter of fact, his face was simply wooden. Carmen rattled on unsuspiciously:

"That's enough for me. I don't care if I never rent the rooms. No more women in my house. They lower the tone. A man, of course, can do anything and it doesn't matter, but a woman in the house is a cause for suspicion even if she doesn't do anything."

Evan was not interested in Miss Sisson's ideas. He wanted information. "What reason did she give for leaving?" he asked carelessly.

"Said she had an important musical offer from out of town. But do you believe that? I don't."

"She didn't lose much time in moving her things," suggested Evan.

"No, indeed. Looks very suspicious if you ask me.

Evan was obliged to put his question in more direct form. "Who moved her things?"

"Just an ordinary truck without any name on it. I looked particularly. The piano people came for the piano. Rented. It was a Stannerer."

Fearing that the next question could not but betray him, Evan was nevertheless obliged to ask it: "Did she leave any forwarding address?"

Miss Sisson's gimlet eyes bored him through before she replied: "Yes, I asked her. She said she didn't expect anything to come here, but if it did I could forward it care her friend Miss Evans, 133 West Ninth Street. Did she owe you any money?"

This was too much. "No, indeed," said Evan, and hurried away.

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.

He walked blindly across the square, conscious only that Carmen probably was watching him through the narrow pane beside the door. How well he knew her expression of mean inquisitiveness!

He was marching into blackness. He was incapable of thinking consecutively. What was left of his faculties was concentrated to the sole end of concealing his hurt.

But he still had two clues. He automatically turned down Ninth Street, looking for 133, only to find, what everybody knows, that West Ninth Street ends at Sixth Avenue and there are consequently no numbers beyond 100.

He went to the Stannerer piano warehouses to ask if they had the new address of Miss Corinna Playfair on their books. He was told that Miss Playfair had returned her piano that morning, saying that she was leaving town and would require it no longer.



by Homer Eon Flint

A "DIFFERENT" STORY

"DR. SCOTT telephoned a few minutes ago," volunteered the nurse, as soon as the three of us were inside, "and asked me to tell you that he would be delayed."

"Delayed!" Avery looked annoyed. "How will that affect your patient, I wonder?"

"Mr. Carter seems to expect a delay, Mr. Avery. I heard him say that the doctor is always late."

"And we must remain in this room until he arrives? Why can't we go in, and see Mr. Carter now?"

"Very sorry; I am under the doctor's orders. Moreover, it was Mr. Carter's wish that he see you all together."

Avery settled back into his chair with what patience he could summon. Whitney, unlike the minister, had the take-things-as-they-come philosophy of the professional politician. He glanced at his

watch, smiled wryly, and then calmly lit a cigar.

"Suits me all right," he commented. "If I'm any judge of Carter, he's got something up his sleeve that's well worth our waiting."

I was of the same opinion. I felt sure that a man like Carter would not ask us to waste our time; this, although I did not know him very intimately.

"Carter is one of your parishioners, isn't he, Avery?"

"Rather, he was"—regretfully. "He stopped attending some five years ago."

Whitney said that he could make a good guess as to the reason. "Didn't he say to you, 'I don't believe in the authority of the church any longer; from now on I do all my own thinking'?" The politician smiled grimly at Avery's discomfited look. "Carter wouldn't mince matters!"

The minister quietly changed the subject.

"Carter doesn't interest me as much, just this minute, as Dr. Scott does. Have you fellows any theory as to what has come over him lately?"

For my part, I shook my head. The doctor's behavior during the past year had been entirely beyond me, and I said so. "He is an entirely different man since his fiancée died."

"Different!" echoed Whitney, derisively. "Why, Scott isn't half the man he used to be!"

"He's almost inhuman! There's times when, if it were not for old times' sake, I'd refuse to speak to him!"

"Not that he would care a particle," Avery put in, with spirit. "Scott doesn't seem to care whether he holds his friends or not."

I was glad they had said it. "The only things he seems to value are money and pleasure. I have become almost disgusted with the man."

"If that's all you've noticed about him," offered Whitney, studying the tip of his cigar, "then I guess you've overlooked the one thing that signifies."

"Have you noticed"—painstakingly—"that Scott is mighty careful of his life, nowadays?"

"Careful of his life?" repeated Avery. "What do you mean?"

"Just that. Hadn't you noticed?" Neither of us could say that we had; Whitney went on: "If anything happens to Dr. Scott, it won't be his fault. He's taking better care of himself than he takes with any patient."

"Ever hear of his actions during the flu epidemic?" I had heard a little, but said nothing. "Scott, as soon as Miss Harmon died—she was one of the first victims, remember—left town and wasn't heard from for eight months. It was given out that he had undertaken some obscure research work for the government; but I happen to know," with a quiet certainty, "that Scott spent the whole time on a yacht, cruising the South Seas!"

"You are sure of this?" inquired Avery, reluctantly.

"Yes! And when the flu finally penetrated to that part of the world—Scott came home!"

"By that time the epidemic had run its course here. Scott escaped without even the slightest touch. And since that time, I've learned, he's been doing surgical work almost altogether; he simply will not handle a case of any kind unless it's absolutely safe to do so. Why, I learned that he'd even turned down a diphtheria case, a child of seven, his own cousin's daughter!"

"Perhaps," suggested the minister, gently, "Scott's constitution is much weaker than we think. He may be fully aware that he couldn't stand any disease; and you'll have to admit, Whitney, that the world can hardly afford to lose his surgical ability."

"He specializes on brain operations, doesn't he?" I asked, simply to confirm my recollection.

Whitney said it was true. "And it proves, to my way of thinking, that there's nothing the matter with his constitution. It's the most delicate work imaginable. He wouldn't undertake it if his system wasn't in perfect order."

"Besides, the physical director at the Y. told me that Scott keeps in the pink of condition. He takes regular, though not violent, exercise, goes in swimming every

day, and—I heard this from a life insurance agent who was trying to get me to take out another policy—Scott carries ninety thousand on the endowment plan, in one company, alone!”

“You seem to have made a regular study of the man,” I remarked.

Whitney was not at all abashed. “He’s worth the trouble, certainly! What’s more, he deserves it!”

“Why in thunder should he be taking such precious care of his own skin? I suppose”—glancing at me—“I suppose you’ve heard how he came to lose the little finger of his left hand?”

“I didn’t even notice that he’d lost it”—in surprise. Avery said the same.

“Well,” resumed the politician, “it won’t do any harm to let this go no further. I haven’t repeated it to any one else, and wouldn’t tell you two if I didn’t know that you were Scott’s best friends, before he—well, changed so much.

“He was called out in the country, it seems, to attend a man who had had his foot nearly cut off by a reaper. When Scott got there he found the man suffering from lockjaw; tetanus had set in, and it looked like good-night for the farmer, for a while.

“But Scott at first flatly refused to have anything to do with it. I don’t know what excuse he made; but I do know that if the man’s wife hadn’t gone to the door and put her back against it, he’d have left the house, and sent some one else to do the work.

“So he tackled the job, you might say, under compulsion. When he got through, he discovered that there had been a tiny scratch under the nail of the little finger of his left hand.

“Well, the point is,” and Whitney’s voice became curiously strained, “instead of dopping the scratch with any one of the several powerful disinfectants he had in his grip—instead of that, Scott went out into the woodshed, laid his finger on the chopping-block, and with his own right hand deliberately cut his finger off!”

Avery shuddered. “That’s going pretty far,” he admitted, “in the name of caution. Scott needs every finger in his work.”

“There is something decidedly queer about it all,” I declared. “I don’t know anything about the case you mention, Whitney; but I have noticed that Scott has become almost another ‘*Mr. Hyde*.’

“Not only has he deliberately cut me dead several times, but he has dropped nearly all his old ways. At one time he was almost abstemious in his habits; to-day, he is fast becoming notorious for his actions. He is—a libertine!”

“You don’t mean to say”—incredulously, from Avery—“that Scott has gone in for that kind of pleasure!”

“There is no doubt at all. He seems to have lost all sense of right and wrong. Hardly a week passes but that I hear his name linked up with some sort of domestic scandal.”

“All of which,” Whitney pointed out, “doesn’t seem to hold together. Why should Scott be doing all he can, apparently, to live to the very limit, and at the same time be going directly contrary to what he knows is right and wise about women?”

It was beyond me. Avery put forward the guess that the man had been so distracted by Miss Lydia Harmon’s death that he had become slightly unbalanced; and, through some monstrous freak of the mind, was actually dishonoring her memory, in his madness. “Wouldn’t that account for his actions?”

“Not all of them,” returned the politician, vigorously. “It doesn’t explain his extraordinary care for that precious hide of his. That, at least, isn’t madness.

“No; I think there’s some deliberate purpose behind it all!”

Avery considered the politician very gravely. “What is your theory?”

Whitney threw away his cigar, and leaned closer. His voice was very sober as he began: “Briefly, it’s this: Dr. Scott has—”

There was a step in the hall. Next instant the nurse passed through the room, and before Whitney could finish, Dr. Scott was striding into our group.

“How do you do, Avery,” nodding coolly to the minister.

“Hello, Whitney.” He barely nodded

to me, and did not offer his hand to any one. "Sorry to keep you waiting"—perfunctorily.

"Where did you telephone from?" asked Whitney, abruptly.

"From the home of a patient on Santa Clara Avenue."

"On Santa Clara Avenue! And it took you all this time to drive a mile and a half?"

For some reason the surgeon resented neither Whitney's question nor his impertinent manner. "I never hurry," said he calmly, at the same time drawing off his gloves with a deliberation which proved his words. "Hurrying is bad for the nerves."

Whitney gave me a significant glance. Scott's remark certainly bore out the idea that he was intensely careful about his body's welfare. And Whitney was determined to follow up the lead.

"I hear," suddenly changing the subject, "I hear, Scott, that there has been an outbreak of some kind of plague in the southern part of the State. What does it amount to?"

"Something very serious." But he spoke indifferently. "The disease has not yet been identified; but it is highly contagious and very deadly, like Asiatic cholera."

"Are you going to take a hand in the work?"—like a shot.

Scott laughed, a well-bred, amused sort of a laugh. He turned and strolled toward the door to Carter's room. "No, thanks, Whitney! Any time I want to commit suicide, I shall do it with a scalpel—not that way!"

And before Whitney could retort, Scott's professional manner came back to him in a flash. He gave us all a piercing look as he stood there, door-knob in hand; and there was something distinctly imperious in his tones as he cautioned:

"Kindly bear in mind, gentlemen, that you are not to show any gloom or sorrow in Carter's presence. Above everything else, avoid saying anything intended to make it easier for him.

"The fact is, he wants to die!" There was a slight note of pity in Scott's voice.

"Do you quite understand, gentlemen? He considers himself to be the luckiest man in existence, to be facing what he calls 'the great adventure.'"

"You don't mean to say," protested the minister, "that he is actually cheerful about it, Scott!"

"Cheerful! Why, he is positively joyous! Even when the pain comes—every hour or so—he fairly welcomes it as proof that the end is not far off. I never saw such a chap." It was clear that Carter had severely tried Scott's sense of reasonableness.

"Perhaps," offered the politician, "perhaps we can put a different spirit into him. I've heard that, once you make a man really want to live, the battle's half won."

Scott nodded, but there was a helpless look in his eyes. "The disease has gone too far. Carter deliberately postponed calling me in, until it was too late. I tell you, he *wants* to die!"

The minister's face was shot with anxiety. "That isn't a healthy feeling, Scott. Are you sure he is sane?"

"Yes." But there was no finality in his tone. "That is, he talks rationally enough on all other subjects.

"However"—about to turn the knob—"there is no denying that the whole matter is strictly his own business. We will please him best if we take his view-point quite for granted. I don't mean that we should laugh and joke, but neither should we act even the least bit gloomy or downhearted."

"Just behave as we did the last time we five were together?"—from Whitney carelessly.

"Precisely!" The doctor did not seem to remember that this "last time" had been almost a year before, and that it had been wholly on his account that our little affairs had come to an end. "Precisely. It will be the very best way."

He opened the door. We started forward to enter the room, then stopped as we saw that its occupant, seated in an invalid's chair of peculiar construction, and wheeled by his nurse, was coming out to greet us.

"Glad to see you," said Carter, in a

hoarse, shaky voice. "It was very good of you—to come."

II

ONE glance at the ghastly face of the man in the wheeled chair told me that the surgeon was right; "the great adventure" was not far off, for John Carter. He did not have many days to live.

But another glance, this time at the bright, deep-set gray eyes in that face, told me Scott was also right in saying that the man was anything but sorry. There was neither fear nor regret in his gaze. There was nothing but—I almost said, enthusiasm.

"Mighty good of you fellows to come," repeated Carter, his voice sinking almost to a whisper. The doctor did not tell us till afterward that every breath had cost his patient a pain, or we would not have let Carter talk as much as he did. But he had made Scott promise not to tell. He even smiled, a shaky, dreadful sort of a smile, as he went on: "Mighty good. In a day or two I sha'n't be strong enough to see any one; thank God!"

What could we say to that? The minister, accustomed as he was to offering comfort and cheer, could find no words to fit this case. As for myself—I am more at home writing my thoughts than speaking them. Only the politician could manage a reply:

"Glad to come, old chap. Sort of a going-away party, eh?"

"That's the idea!" The sick man gave a throaty chuckle. "I knew you fellows—would understand!"

The nurse had gone out. The rest of us were all seated; that is, all except Dr. Scott. He remained on his feet, occasionally shooting a sharp glance toward his patient. I remember that Whitney had located the most comfortable chair, a Morris, over one arm of which he draped his legs as though quite at home.

Avery had a rocker, in which he swayed back and forth ever so gently and ponderously, while I sat in a stiff-backed chair, tipped against the wall. Carter looked us over and smiled as though satisfied.

"I had a special reason—in asking you to come," he began, presently, speaking with a great deal of care. He had to avoid any extra strain on his throat—his trouble was some obscure affection of the spine—and for that reason we kept as still as possible, in order to hear clearly. "A very special reason.

"Needless to say, I haven't much money—to leave behind. So that's not why—I've asked Whitney here," smiling again as the politician, who was also a lawyer, looked up. "Neither have I any sins—to confess to Avery. What's more, I don't care particularly, F., whether you see fit to write this up. Use your own judgment. I asked you for another purpose.

"My idea—concerns Dr. Scott, here."

The doctor turned with a start, and we all stared at him pretty curiously. The sick man lay back in his chair, panting, and for a minute or two kept us wondering. Shortly he felt strong enough to go on:

"I'm going to tell you fellows—something about Scott—that I don't think you know. You'd never think it—to look at him; he seems quite—intelligent, for an M.D."

Carter could still poke a little fun. The rest of us smiled despite ourselves. The politician even said:

"There's times, Carter, when I've suspected that Scott is capable—mind you, all I claim is 'capable'—capable of becoming, in the course of plenty of time, more or less intelligent. Yes; it is just barely possible. Looks are so deceiving."

"Your judgment," commented the surgeon, with heavy sarcasm, "would be of more value to me, Whitney, if your brain was of any consequence whatsoever."

The sick man chuckled deeply. This seemed to be just the atmosphere he had desired; he immediately came to the point:

"What I want—you fellows to know, is—Dr. Scott is an—infidel!"

"Infidel!" from the minister, in pained surprise.

"Yes! He doesn't believe—in life hereafter! He thinks that—when his time comes to die—it will be—the end of him!"

Three of us looked at each other mean-

ingly. So this was the situation! Scott had lost faith in a future life; hence, he had been doing his utmost to prolong his stay on earth! What was more, despairing of any happiness in another world, he had deliberately resolved to get all the pleasure he could while in this!

Scott returned our stares with entire equanimity, almost with insolence. If I am not mistaken, he actually enjoyed the distinction thus thrust upon him.

"It is true," he admitted, with mocking defiance. "There is no such thing as life after death!"

The minister looked utterly miserable. He started to rise to his feet, then remembered the invalid and thought it better to remain seated. He somehow contrived to conceal his very natural anxiety—for the doctor was a member of his church—and nearly succeeded in being nonchalant as he protested:

"What on earth ever caused you to change your mind, Scott? You once took communion and repeated the creed, if I am not mistaken."

"So I did. I also once believed that there was such a thing as a fire-and-brimstone hell. I don't, now." The surgeon took no pains to avoid hurting the other's feelings. "I have merely grown up, mentally; that is all.

"The whole sum and substance of what I have learned, through science, in the past few years, is that life is absolutely dependent upon such bodily conditions as we know. I repeat, there is no such thing as life after the body has died!"

"You know, of course, that most of the world believes to the contrary. I hope you have the strongest of reasons for disputing a faith with so many adherents?"

"I have! A host of them. The chief one you have already mentioned, Avery: the proposition is purely and simply a matter of faith, instead of knowledge."

"Oh, not entirely," spoke up Whitney, energetically. "I look at the thing from another standpoint. So far as I'm concerned, the question of life in the next world doesn't have to be solved at all. I'm content to consider the proposition in a practical way.

"In other words, is this faith, this belief in a future life, worth while? Does it pay?" He glanced around at us. "I'll say it does, boys!"

"I do not agree," from Scott, coldly.

"No? All you've got to do, doc, is think just a little. Where would you be, I'd like to know—you, with all your education and training—where'd you be, anyhow, if it weren't for the influence of the church?"

Scott was not perturbed. "I will admit your point, Whitney. The church has had an immense influence upon civilization, especially upon education. Nevertheless, it is one thing to acknowledge this influence, and quite another to maintain that the church is infallible."

"I don't claim that it's infallible," retorted Whitney. "I do claim, though, that there must be something fundamentally right about a belief which has done so much good!"

This struck me as being a pretty strong argument. It ought to appeal, I thought, to a man like Scott, whose profession was built upon far more of experience than theory. But I was wrong.

"You might say the same thing," he countered, at once, "about the ancient belief that the world was flat. As a belief, it did a great deal of good. So long as people were convinced that the world was flat, they moved about upon it in perfect security and thereby settled half the globe. Had those ancients thought the world to be round, they would not have dared to stir from their tracks!"

We couldn't help but grin a little; Scott had a way of catching your mind unawares. At the same time it was clear enough to me that he had the best of the argument, so far. I decided to say something.

"Scott, some day when you're in an inquiring mood, and not feeling too infernally skeptical, I wish you'd come with me to see a certain spiritualistic medium I happen to know.

"Oh, go ahead and sneer. You're thinking that she's a fake. You've probably heard, haven't you, that nine-tenths of these mediums are fakes? Haven't you?"

"Of course! And it is a fact!"

"Then, if nine-tenths are fakes, the remaining tenth must be genuine!" He was silent. "And this little lady belongs to the one-tenth. She's not a professional; she doesn't work for money at all.

"And I tell you, Scott, that any man who investigates with an open mind and sees what I've seen will have to admit that there's such a thing as life after death!"

He was absolutely untouched. Instead, he came over to my chair and pinched my arm, as though estimating my blood-pressure. And he said:

"F., every bit of this spiritualistic stuff can be explained in other ways. If the phenomena is no fraud, if it is really genuine, then it can always be traced to psychology."

He mentioned a case or two of simple mental telepathy which had come under his professional notice. "Cases like these prove that there is such a thing as a subliminal mind, and granting this much, then spirit-rapping, messages from the supposed spirits of the departed, and the like, become as clear as day.

"You understand," he added, not unkindly, "that I am not trying to undermine your own faith. You may believe anything you like, so far as I am concerned.

"Only, I must reserve the right to demand the same consideration from others. Not that I care, particularly," with an open sneer, "what either of you could possibly say against the mature convictions of my mind."

"Could nothing alter your views, Scott?" from Avery, gently.

"Nothing conceivable. I need something more than spook-work, something more than Whitney's proposition that the belief is good policy, something more, even, than Avery's exalted creed, to convince me that a man's brain can go on living after the body has died. The thing is—preposterous."

And he stopped, with a gesture of impatience, as though he had been wasting his time.

But the minister was not quite silenced. Instead, a certain look of cunning came into his eyes as he remarked: "You are

inconsistent, Scott. As a physician, you are constantly showing a great amount of self-sacrifice." Scott stood motionless. "Altruism is an every-day affair with you doctors.

"And yet, you disavow the fundamental tenet of the faith which teaches self-sacrifice!"

Scott only laughed, somewhat bitterly, I thought. "Such self-sacrifice as I practise, Avery, is merely a part of the game."

Whitney took him up. "You mean, you do it because it pays—in money?" He gave us an "I-told-you-so" glance, and went on:

"So does the belief in a future life, Scott; it pays, and pays big!"

"It cannot pay me anything!" retorted the surgeon, sharply. "I can stand for the idea of—well, call it 'service'—because it appeals to me as being reasonable, within limits. But I cannot stand for your orthodoxy."

Carter, for the first time in several minutes, put in: "Your parents were church-going people, weren't they, Scott?"

"Yes; and devout believers. I was baptized when I was too young to know any better."

The minister took this personally. "Don't you consider that there is such a thing as ecclesiastical authority?"

"Of course not!"—sardonically. "Who on earth can be an authority about heaven?"

"Oh, it is a waste of time to talk to me!"—irritably. "I am an infidel, and proud of it! If I found myself believing, for one second, that my mind could survive my body—could go on living after the gray matter of my brain, which had maintained my mind and upon which it had been utterly dependent, had rotted in the grave—if I believed that, I would have myself committed!"

Carter turned his head so as to eye the three of us in the chairs. "What did I tell you?" he cackled, grimly. "Scott is hopeless, right now.

"But I'll bet any money—he changes his mind—within twenty-four hours!"

Instantly four pairs of eyes were turned upon the invalid. Even Scott, for all his

assurance, could not but be impressed with the remarkable confidence in Carter's tones. And he listened as intently as any one for what the man next said:

"I'm going to pass on," came his voice, now on the verge of giving out, "and see for myself—whether there is such a thing—as life hereafter. Rather—I'm going to find out—the conditions there; for I haven't any doubt, whatever—that I shall survive."

He paused, as though gathering strength, and then drew a sheaf of papers from beneath his coverings. He extended it, with a shaky hand, to the doctor; and then steadied his voice impressively as he concluded:

"Scott—that will change your mind—for you!"

III.

THE surgeon frowned hard, plainly perplexed, as he took the document and glanced over its pages. They were typewritten, and about five in number. Scott looked at his patient.

"Do you want me to read this later, Carter?"

"No; right now—while the others are here."

Scott hesitated. I could see that the whole idea was extremely repugnant to him, and only a lingering sense of decency was urging him to comply with the sick man's wishes. At length he stepped to the phone, called his office, and told his assistant that he would be delayed about an hour. Then he stepped to the middle of our little group, polished his glasses, cleared his throat, and began to read the manuscript:

"It occurred to me, when I first became ill, that I might never have a chance to tell the world the peculiar knowledge that has come to me." The invalid lay back, exhausted, in his chair; only the brightness of his eyes showed that he was listening closely to the words he had asked Scott to read. "So I went to the trouble of typewriting this, in order that, in any emergency—such as the loss of my voice—I might be able to put it over anyhow."

"The first thing I want you to do is to examine the machine which you will find, standing on a pedestal, in my living-room."

Scott paused and looked around. On the other side of the room stood the object Carter evidently meant, a pedestal, upon which was placed what looked very much like a typewriter, cover and all.

"Remove the cover." Scott stepped to the machine and did as the instructions directed, revealing, as I had expected, a typewriter of well-known make, possessing what is called a "wide carriage." Such machines are used a great deal for writing policies and other documents, where an extremely long line is required. This one would write twice as many words to a line as the ordinary machine.

"Next, examine the machine very carefully to see if there is anything out of the ordinary about it."

Scott looked the machine over thoroughly. He also gave a glance to the inside of the black metal cover. Moreover, he lifted the typewriter bodily from the pedestal, to make sure that they were not connected in any way; and before replacing the machine, he even moved the pedestal slightly to one side of the spot where it had stood.

"It seems," he reported, sententiously, "to be a perfectly normal typewriter." Then he took up the manuscript again:

"I wish that Avery, and the others, would examine it also."

We stepped over and gave the machine a careful examination. In the end it was I who said: "It's just like the one I use, except for the extra wide carriage. Strictly standard in every way."

"Then," went on the doctor, reading, "'you will please test its keys.'"

We found them to be somewhat extraordinary. The fact is, they had about the most delicate touch imaginable. I did not know that such keys could be so very finely balanced; the slightest touch of the finger would operate them. In fact, as Scott bent closely over the things, Whitney gave a queer exclamation.

"By Jove, doc! Did you notice? One of those keys flew up when you breathed upon it!"

This was true. We found that either of us, without making any extra effort, could make those keys fly by merely breathing upon them.

"Now, kindly examine the machine once more and satisfy yourselves—especially Dr. Scott—that there is nothing out of the ordinary about it."

Once more we went over the typewriter. Aside from the items of the extra wide carriage and the extraordinarily sensitive keys, it was, as I have said, just what you might find anywhere else.

"If you all are satisfied, kindly open the compartment of the pedestal and remove what you find there."

Scott seemed eager to do this. All that he found, however, beyond the thin, bare walls of the thing, was a sealed box of typewriter paper, which he handed to the rest of us to inspect. Then he read:

"Next, break the seal of that box and remove any one of the sheets of paper you find therein."

Scott was the one to do this, finding the paper to be plain white stuff. He selected one sheet from the middle of the ream, and scrutinized it very closely. So did we. We pronounced the paper entirely blank and absolutely white, except for one tiny blemish.

Scott even went to his bag and brought a small vial of some chemical, with which he tested one corner of the paper. He seemed satisfied with the lack of results.

"Take this paper and place it in the machine."

Scott stepped over to the pedestal. In front of it he paused, and glanced back at Carter. The invalid was facing the other way. Like a flash, Scott thrust the paper into one pocket and from another produced an old letter. This he placed, blank side uppermost, between the rollers of the machine. The three of us saw him do it.

"Finally, I wish you would move the carriage as far as it will go to the right, and then replace the cover."

Scott elected to do this as well, leaving the machine ready to begin writing, and taking care to fit the black metal cover down closely around the device.

"And now, if it so happens that I am

with you in the flesh at the time you read this, I hope you will excuse me. I wish to go back to my room."

"Very well," said Scott, laying the manuscript aside. He took the sick man's pulse, and then called the nurse. "No change in his treatment," he ordered, and stood aside to let the chair go past.

Avery got up and offered his hand to Carter. There was something very eloquent in the minister's silence; somehow it became very clear to me that we were not going to see our friend again, in this life. We all shook hands without a word; but Carter would not let it stand that way. He summoned strength enough to say:

"Well, see you later—boys!"

And next moment the door closed upon him. Scott immediately took up the manuscript again; and hurrying just a little, at first, as though time were pressing, he began as follows:

"First, let me remark that I am going to say things which will appeal chiefly to the doctor's mentality, although they could be intelligible enough to any well-informed person. But Scott has declared that life after death is *unreasonable*; and I propose to show that it is entirely, absolutely rational. And I shall do it by stating facts with which he himself is especially familiar.

"You will readily admit this proposition: If a certain man is known to be capable of running a mile without stopping—if it is universally admitted that he can do it—then he does not need to prove that he can run half a mile. The fact that he can perform the greater feat is a guarantee that he can perform the lesser.

"You admit this? Surely you would not demand that this man proceed to run the half-mile in order to prove up? Very well; you will then also admit that, if nature can, and does, perform a certain great miracle, then she certainly can perform a lesser one of the same character. We do not need proof.

"All that remains for me to do, is to show that the proposition of life after death, to which Scott objects so strenuously, is not as great a miracle as some with which he is familiar.

"As a physician, he is well versed in biology. He knows that all living creatures are very closely related; that man is simply a different kind of an animal; that the researches of the geologists and other scientists have proved that man has become what he is now through millions of centuries of slow, patient development—what we call evolution.

"Now, the doctor also knows that every human child, some nine months before its birth, starts life on an exceedingly small scale within its mother's womb. In the earliest stages this human embryo—as it is scientifically called—is almost microscopic in size.

"The peculiar thing about this 'egg' is that it cannot be distinguished, chemically or physically, from a certain form of lower life which science calls the *amœba*. This *amœba*, in fact, is the very lowest known form of life. And science has never been able to tell the difference between it and the human embryo; the doctor, and every well-informed person, knows this to be true.

"It is also true that all the so-called higher animals, as we know them now, have evolved from lower forms of creation. Science has known this for half a century. And geologists have proved this by uncovering the fossil remains of these animals' prehistoric ancestors. And there is a practically unbroken chain of evidence to show that, the further back we go in the history of the earth, the simpler and cruder was life; until we reach a point where investigation can go no further. All forms of life, as we know them, evolved from what we now call the *amœba*!

"The human embryo proves this. For, as it grows and develops, it distinctly resembles the embryos of other creatures! What is more, these resemblances occur in exactly the same order in which these creatures are ranked by the biologists: first it is like the embryo of a fish, then like that of a reptile, and later like that of the higher animals.

"In a word, the human embryo is a sort of an index to the development of the human race. It actually summarizes, within the space of nine months, the whole history

of mankind from its beginning, millions of centuries ago, to the present time.

"The doctor knows this, as well as a child knows its alphabet. It is an old story to him. Yet, it has never occurred to him to compare the figures in the case; to set millions of centuries against nine months, and to marvel that so much could happen in so brief a time."

Carter had been right. Beyond a doubt, the thing that Scott had just read was appealing powerfully to him. He paused and considered the thought a while before going on:

"Do you appreciate the miracle of it all? To think that the human embryo, in less than a year, covers all the ground that the human race has covered in the last several millions of centuries! Could there be a greater marvel?

"There is! And in this case, Dr. Scott also knows every fact I shall state. It will be an old story to him; but I intend to tell it in a new way.

"All the time that the human embryo is developing within the mother it is protected with the greatest care. Its temperature is kept constant; it is steadily nourished, not with food, as we know food, but with living blood directly from the mother.

"So long as it remains within the womb it is really in another world—a world by itself. Not once during that nine months does it draw breath. Its lungs are never used. Its mouth has never opened to cry, much less to suckle; it has never swallowed a drop. Its hands have never grasped anything; not a thought has passed through its mind. In fact, it has no mind at all.

"With the single exception of its heart, none of the organs of its body have yet performed; it has never felt, never tasted, never smelled; it has never seen, never eaten; above all, it has never breathed!

"Never breathed! Not once! It has no more control over the new world it is approaching than you, Dr. Scott, have over the world to come.

"All of a sudden, at the end of the period of nine months, the child is born into this world. What happens? Immediately, and for the first time, the child

begins to—breathe! Breathes air—something it had never known before! Why, if we take a fish out of its natural element, water, it dies in the air; yet a baby, newly born—lives!

“Not only this—whith is entirely familiar to the doctor—but this child, after an hour or two, is put to the breast; and instantly it begins to suckle! It has never done it before; but it makes good! Presently all its organs are in working order, the organs which had been dormant for nine months!

“Think what a prodigious feat this baby has performed! In nine months it has done as much, in the way of development, as the whole human race has done in millions of centuries; then, totally without warning, it is thrust into—the air! Into the air, where the conditions of life are as entirely different from the conditions in the womb as life in the spirit is different from life in the air! And the baby—makes good!

“Now, Dr. Scott, if an ignorant, blind, helpless infant, with unused lungs, relying solely upon instinct, can survive such a shock—if that new-born child, I repeat, can come into this world and manage to exist side by side with a full-grown man like you—*what can you do?*

“Can you survive the death of your body? Can your mind get along without it? The infant was able, after nine months of total dependence upon the womb—was able to get along without the womb! Can your mind dispense with your skull?

“Think it over! Can your mind, which you have been using consciously, wilfully, for years—can it survive the loss of the gray matter in which it now lives? You, as a baby, survived the loss of the womb in which you had developed. You came into a new world and contrived to get along, although the conditions were quite unknown to you in advance; just as unknown to you, in fact, as the conditions of the next world are to you now.

“And yet you, as a baby, survived this terrific change. Are you as strong now as you were then?

“There is only one answer. There can be but one. Your mind is not only strong

enough to survive; but it *will* survive, whether you want it to or not!

“I have nothing further to say. It ought not to be necessary. Scott knows, and knows that he knows, that what I have just said is God's own truth!

“The greater miracle—

“On second thoughts, I will not finish that sentence now. I will do it at another time, and in another way.” Signed, John Carter.”

For a moment nobody stirred or spoke. Scott stood in the middle of the room, holding the manuscript in nerveless hands. He was staring off into space, his eyes unseeing; there was a great wonder in his expression; his face was quite pale. He presented a picture of uncertainty and indecision.

Next instant the door to Carter's room burst open, and the nurse rushed out. She gasped:

“Doctor! Come quick! I'm afraid that—I mean, Mr. Carter—” The girl became incoherent.

Scott dashed into the other room. The rest of us stayed, eying each other questioningly. We had only a moment to wait. Scott came back directly, closing the door behind him.

“Gentlemen, John Carter is—dead!” he announced in a strained voice. “He took an overdose of sedative!”

There was a stunned silence. What did it mean? Had Carter been so very anxious to go that he had taken this means to hasten the end? Suicide!

“Perhaps,” said I softly, “perhaps it was for the best. Carter had no—”

“Hush!” came a hiss from Avery. I wheeled, and followed his gaze. It was fixed upon the typewriter which stood, just as Scott had left it, upon the pedestal.

Next second I heard. From within that black metal cover came a faint clicking sound, muffled but unmistakable. *The machine was in operation!*

For three or four full seconds it continued, regular and deliberate. I strained my ears for the tinkle of the bell; but, as abruptly as it had begun, the clicking ceased. We stood as though petrified. The room was deathly still.

At last Scott, in perfect silence, moved to the pedestal and took the cover from the machine. The apparatus stood quite as before, except that the carriage now rested at the extreme left. The paper was still in place. Scott pulled it out.

He held it to the light. Next instant his fingers twitched, and his hands shook as with the palsy. And in a voice we scarcely recognized he read haltingly, jerkily:

"The greater miracle is, not that your mind—can survive your body; but that your body—ever existed at all!"

The paper fluttered from his grasp. He swayed, and caught the table for support. His lips moved convulsively.

"God," he whispered, as though in dreadful pain. "God."

He stood there, swaying a little and looking around uncertainly. For a moment his eyes rested on the typewriter, as if to make sure of its presence; then they wandered aimlessly to the door of Carter's room.

He stared, vacantly, at each of us in

turn. Finally, his gaze shifted slowly back to space; and then, all of a sudden, a wonderful change came to his face. In a flash it became hopeful, assured—joyous! And his eyes lit up marvelously as another word escaped his lips:

"Lydia!"

He gave a quivering sigh and moved away from the table. The spell was breaking. Avery, who had kept his composure through it all, leaned forward; and with the utmost gentleness he murmured:

"Is there anything we can do for you, old man?"

The words had an electric effect. Scott straightened; on the instant he became alert, determined, and once more sure of himself. He whipped out his watch.

"Yes!" biting the words off as with a knife. "You may come with me and help me to pack!"

"To pack!"

"To pack!" He snapped the watch shut. "I leave in one hour for the South, to help fight the plague!"

YELLOW BUTTERFLIES

BY LILLIAN P. WILSON

IF we were yellow butterflies,
Without a tint of care,
And only lived from hour to hour,
To dance upon the air—

To flit with glee, from flower to flower,
Just drifting, with hearts-ease,
With nothing sterner on life's way,
Than wings upon the breeze—

To tip and dart, with new delights,
Off with a sunbeam roam,
And then joy-tired, spread languid wings
Upon a soft wind home—

If we were yellow butterflies,
With no love tears to rue,
Would you as wholly dear, be mine,
Tell me, beloved—would you?

Clung

By Max Brand

Author of "The Untamed," "Children of the Night," "Trailin'," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

THE whites of the Arizona town pronounced Clung "a no-good Chink," but they were willing to allow his father, Li Clung, was a law-abiding laundryman. Young Clung preferred ponies and pistols to soiled linen.

At a public dance he killed Josiah Boyer, who attempted to eject him from the hall on the score of his color, which, as a matter of fact, was as white as any man's. Previously he had done for four Mexicans. By stealth he returned to his father's house before he took the long trail. Then Li Clung confessed Clung was not his son by blood. Li had taken him while yet a baby after his mother's death from a man who had grievously wronged him. With a posse at his heels, Clung rode into the desert.

Later he came to a big ranch-house, where he found Winifred Sampson, her father, and her fiancé, William Kirk. The latter was a querulous invalid, whom Clung put to sleep and then cured by the strength of suggestion and a harmless tea.

On his recovery Kirk sought to marry Winifred at once, but she, too, had come under the influence of Clung, and refused to be hurried. Moreover, Kirk had his suspicions, and determined to put Clung to the test. Unexpectedly entering a room where Clung was occupied with a book, Kirk called out: "Hands up!" In another moment Clung was on the floor behind his chair, and in his hand was a revolver, leveled at Kirk.

To confirm his suspicions of Clung's outlawry, Kirk had sent to Mortimer. The following morning Marshal Clauson and his men surrounded Clung as he appeared in the dining-room with Winifred. Clung lodged that night in Mortimer jail.

Li Clung went to Clauson to plead for his son's life, and told him that Clung was the son of John Pemberton, of Cripple Creek, who had murdered Li's wife and his two children. Later, Winifred also came to the marshal to intercede for Clung.

Clauson told Clung of Winifred's visit and Kirk's departure for the north. He supplied him with tools, and three hours later Clung had taken the south trail.

When Clauson suffered in popular esteem because of "the escape," Clung, disguised as Yo Chai, and with a declaration that he chose to be "all yellow," offered to surrender himself. When the marshal refused to arrest him, Clung declared he was off for Kirby Creek, where a rich streak was inaugurating a mining-camp in full force.

Winifred's father learned from the old laundryman the secret of Clung's birth, and was determined to keep his daughter free of the man's enchantment. But Winifred announced to him out of a clear sky that they were going to Kirby Creek to look for Clung.

CHAPTER XVII.

SAMPSON PLAYS FOR TIME.

SAMPSON went to his room at once and sat for a time with his hot face buried in his hands, then he took pen and paper and wrote to William Kirk, far in the Northland. No pleasant task, for his wet hand stuck to the surface of the paper; and his thoughts came haltingly.

Thus he wrote:

DEAR BILLY:

Hell has broke loose at last.

I wrote you that we were still on the trail of

the scoundrel Clung; and here in this miserable little oven of Mortimer we have stayed all these days, walking these infernal dusty streets; you know this alkali dust that stings your nose and throat like pepper. Here we've remained, but today the devil, as if he were tired of my rest, rose up and in the language of the streets, hit me where I live. He hit me twice.

And both punches, Billy, are as hard on you as they are on me.

First I went to see Li Clung, reputed father-of our outlaw. I found a withered mummy of an Oriental, and began to pump him, but after the first draw I wanted to seal the well. For I learned right off the bat, Billy, that Clung is not a half-breed at all; there is not a drop of the yellow blood in his veins; he is pure white.

This story began in the *All-Story Weekly* for April 10.

It stunned me. Then I thought of trying to find out where Clung is hiding and warn the officers of the law—such law as they have in the sand-wilderness. But the old Chinaman grew suspicious. He would tell me another word.

So I went back to the house and the first thing that greeted me was the voice of Winifred singing: "Robin Adair."

You know how she sings that little song when she's happy?

And she told me that she had received a hint that Clung is in Kirby Creek. She wanted to start for the place at once; she was on fire; I hear her singing at this moment; and it's enough to break my heart. For if she follows the trail of a half-breed Chinaman with this enthusiasm, what will she do when she learns that the man is white? God knows!

And what am I to do? I can't keep up with that long-legged girl of mine, and she's as tireless as a little devil—or angel. An angel when she does what I wish and a devil when she crosses me. Take a little of the coolest blue of heaven and salt it with some of the fire of hell and you have an idea of Winifred's stubbornness. What will happen if that fire touches the powder of Clung, the white man? But does Clung know that he's white? Isn't it possible that his father has never told him? Does any one besides old Li Clung know that the outlaw is white? I think not; pray God that no one does.

For I tell you, Billy, in all seriousness, if Winifred learns that Clung is white she's going to do something that will make the rest of her life one long torment. I know, because she has her father's hot blood. She *must* not know. And I must have help to keep the knowledge from her. Billy, you must come down here and work with me.

Winifred has recovered from her first anger against you because you turned Clung over to the law; now I'm sure she'd accept you on the basis of a friend, at least. And as for you, if I can believe the letters you write, two fevers possess you: one is for Winifred and the other is for another sight of the desert. In fact, there is a thing they commonly refer to down here as desert-fever. They claim that when a man has been touched with it he can never be happy away from the sand. The Lord knows it will never get me, but I'm afraid you're a victim. Perhaps you can't forget that you recovered your health down here in the wilderness.

At any rate you ought to be willing for a double reason to come back to me. We'll find reasons to give Winifred. Perhaps you can say that you regret what you did to Clung—inadvertently, at that—and that you want to redeem yourself in her eyes by helping her to find the outlaw. She'll believe you. On the subject of Clung, I assure you, she's blind and unreasonable and would question the help of no man. Perhaps this same quest for Clung will be the lever by which you pry your way back into the affections

of Winifred. Oh, lad, it will be a happy day for me when that happens.

Whatever you do, do it quickly. I have secured a moment of grace. Until Monday we stay here, and by that time you can surely be with us, make your peace with Winifred, and start for Kirby Creek.

Kirby Creek! The dumping ground of half the desperadoes of the country—gun fights and killings every day—drunkenness, rioting, cursing fills the town—what a place for a woman to go to! But a sheriff's posse could not keep Winifred back and I shall not make the effort.

Speed is the thing, Billy. If you want to save your game play now!

Yours most miserably,

JOHN SAMPSON.

He would have continued his letter, but the singing of Winifred had begun again and his thoughts would not run freely while that music continued. A dozen times, as her voice rose to a high note, he stabbed the paper with his pen and blotted the white surface evilly. So finally he scrawled his signature and mailed the letter.

It was hardly in the box before he wished it were out again. He should have made it stronger, more emphatic by far; but he walked back gloomily to the house.

He found Winifred surrounded with purchases. She had spent the afternoon in a dry-goods store preparing herself for the life in the rough mining-camp and laying in a stock of khaki clothes, short riding-skirts, broad-brimmed hats, boots, spurs, and every necessity. She had thought of her father's comfort and in his room lay his own requirements neatly stacked upon his bed. He looked on them with a feeling that fate was upon him.

Also, she had learned all the details of the ways to Kirby Creek and had decided in favor of the stage, which wound through the hills up and down a hundred miles to Kirby Creek. She became insistent that they take the stage on the morrow. When John Sampson protested against such haste she offered to go on ahead and leave him behind at Mortimer for a few days while she made inquiries at the camp. There was apparently only one way to hold her in the town, and John Sampson took it. Before night he was in bed with a fever.

It was not entirely assumed, for his nervous anticipations had set his nerves on

edge, and like the ringing of a bell, the name Clung echoed through his head day and night. Sometimes he recalled, bitterly, with how soft a step the fellow had stepped onto the veranda and into the lives of the three of them. How soft a step! Indeed, the strength of Clung was like the strength of the silences. It was rather a thing to be guessed at than a thing to be known. Before his dark eyes hung a mist; over his purposes there was a veil; it would have been safer to guess at the mind and will of a lone wolf than to try to unravel the inner being of Clung.

Not the mere mental problem alone, but the sheer physical labor of the quest and the physical danger. He regretted now that he had flung the Bible away in the shop of old Li Clung. Surely the father was in communication with his son and would warn him that John Sampson meant no good to Clung. And if that warning was carried to the strange fellow, what would be the outcome of it? Perhaps an approach in the middle of night, silent as the slipping of a snake's belly over a polished floor, the gleam of a knife-blade in the dark, and then the thud of the handle striking home, and horrible death; or the fellow might stalk up to him with his easy step in the middle of day, shoot him down without warning, and ride off again into the heart of the desert.

These fancies grew upon John Sampson, for though he now knew that Clung was white he could not separate him from his former conception of the half-breed, and he still attributed to Clung all the cold and subtle cruelty and remorselessness with which the Occident generally dresses its conception of the East.

In the mean time the long tenure of his bed began to irk him and the hours dragged slowly through Sunday. On Monday the doctor had assured Winifred her father would be able to travel over even a hard road. So Sampson waited for Monday nervously, thinking of Clung on the one hand and of William Kirk on the other; for Kirk might come on that day if he started from the North as soon as he received the letter of appeal.

And all the duration of his assumed sick-

ness Winifred was tending his bed with perfect cheerfulness. In fact, he had never in his life seen her so happy as she appeared, now that the trail of Clung opened before her. At times it seemed to her father that the girl was already separated from him by her devotion to the cause of another man. And every time he thought of that he shuddered, for Clung still remained in his prejudice, the half-breed.

So he delayed the hour for his rising on Monday morning, delayed it until the prime of the day; and he had hardly finished his dressing when he heard a very heavy foot-fall ascend the front steps, and then the excited cry of Winifred in greeting.

"Billy Kirk!"

"Winifred, by the Lord, it's good to see you!"

That heavy bass voice was like the trumpet of a rescuing angel to John Sampson.

CHAPTER XVIII.

REASON.

HE hurried to his door, set it ajar, and shamelessly played the eavesdropper.

"And it's mighty pleasant to see you, Will."

"Honestly, Winifred?"

"Of course!"

A great note of relief came into the voice of Kirk.

"Then you've forgiven me, eh?"

"At least, I'm trying to forget about it, Will."

"That's bully, you see—"

"I know. I was pretty bitter about it for a while, but now I realize that you had no idea just what John Ring's status might be. It was two-thirds curiosity, wasn't it? You simply wanted to see if you had guessed right, and if Ring was really an outlaw."

There was a little pause, and even in his hiding-place John Sampson winced, for he knew that the searching eyes of the girl were passing up and down the face of William Kirk. Then the voice of Kirk replied, growing hard as he nerved himself to an ordeal.

"I'll be straight with you, Winifred, I

might wriggle out of it in that way, but I won't. The plain, unpleasant truth is that I was jealous of Clung."

"Jealous?"

"No, no! Of course I don't mean in that way. But I was jealous of his influence over you, and jealous of the way in which the fellow seemed able to make me out a coarse and stupid fool whenever the three of us were together. I always felt, you see, that he was the silk and I was the rough-surfaced wool. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly."

"What a little aristocrat you are, Winifred! Well, now your eyes are scorning me again and you're commencing to be formally polite."

"Not a bit. But I want to think it over. That's all. You have to expect that, don't you, Billy?"

"I suppose so. Take this into consideration, too, I was just back from a close call with death and my nerves weren't very strong. I ask you to realize that I was hardly myself when I made that very rotten move, Winifred."

"But I have to remember who brought you back from that close call with death, Billy."

"Exactly! But ingratitude, now and then, is a mighty human failing."

"A very black one, Billy."

"If it's persisted in."

"Well?"

"I haven't persisted in mine. I'm going to try to undo in a way what I've already done."

"I'm perfectly ready to believe you."

"When you see me do it, eh? That's a man-to-man, straight-from-the-shoulder way to look at it. If I can manage to help Clung, will that restore us to something of the old footing?"

"I hope so—in a way."

"This is straight stuff. Three things brought me back to the Southwest. Now, I know I might make a pretty speech and say that I came only for your sake."

"Please don't."

"My dear girl, I know you much too well for that. Well, there are two things besides you. The first after you, to be frank, is

that I haven't got the feel of this dry, keen air out of my lungs. I've been hungry for this country."

"Really?"

"Sounds queer, I know; but it's the desert fever. I've been dreaming about the open stretches, the wide skies, and I've smelled the sweat of hot horses in my dreams. Tried the outdoor life up North, but it wasn't the same—it hasn't the same tang."

"You look wonderfully fit."

"Don't I! Hard as a brick, too. That's from polo and golf. The Southwest has left its mark on me. Don't like to stay inside four walls any more. You'd laugh if you knew how I've been spending half my time. Rigged up a little target-range at my country-place and I've spent two and three hours a day there practising with guns. Guns have a new meaning after one has seen a fellow like Clung make a draw. Gad! D'you remember how he dropped from his chair to the floor and how those guns of his simply jumped into his hands?"

She laughed, excitedly.

"I'll never forget it, Billy."

"So the first reason I wanted to come South was to live the life again. The last reason is that I want to redeem myself with Clung. In a word, Winifred, I want to help you hunt for him and find him and put him back on his feet."

"Billy!"

"Does that please you?"

"Billy, this is real man's talk!"

"If you can use me, tell me where."

"We start for a wild mining-camp to-day. By stage."

"I'll go."

"It'll be a godsend to have you. Poor dad is worn out with tagging about after me."

"Where is he? I'll pay my respects."

"Just knock at that door. He's dressing now."

And a moment later John Sampson found himself staring into the eyes of William Kirk.

He was singularly changed. He looked, as he had said, perfectly fit and hard as nails. The frame which had been wasted to pitiful gauntness by disease was now filled

and a mighty bulk of muscles swelled the coat at each shoulder. The sagging mouth had tightened at the corners with purposefulness and the jaw thrust out with meaning.

These were but the physical changes—these and a deep coat of tan which guaranteed health. More important still was a certain strong self-confidence in the man's bearing which went hand in hand with his bulk; of still greater significance was the brightness and steadiness of the eyes, mischievous, alert, brave, such eyes as one dislikes to have stare in enmity.

"Gad!" breathed John Sampson. "How you've changed, lad! How you've changed!"

He clapped a hand on either broad shoulder of the giant, reaching to the level of his own head to do so; and he conjured up, in contrast, the image of Clung, frail, delicate-handed, nervous of gesture and gentle of eye. This was such an ally as he needed.

"I have."

"Chiefly—inside?"

"Chiefly inside."

"I'm glad."

"So am I."

"And Clung?" queried Sampson cautiously.

"Well?"

"I heard what you said to Winifred."

"John Sampson, you old fox!"

"And you, Billy?"

"I suppose," said the other, and shrugged his heavy shoulders, "that I'll have to play the fox, too."

"For whose sake, Billy?"

"Damned if I know."

"Not your own?"

"To tell you the truth—" began Kirk.

"You seem," cut in the financier dryly, "to be bothered a good deal by the truth these days, Will."

"H-m!" growled the big man, and then lifted his eye sharply. "And what if I am? What if I am, Sampson? Don't you think it's a fairly decent thing to be bothered by?"

"Excellent!" sneered Sampson. "Excellent! It will be of great benefit to you, my boy—in the hereafter!"

"What an infernal old cynic you are!"

"Not a cynic. Practical, my lad."

"That sort of practise—"

"Sends men to hell. Come, come, Billy. Between your gun-practise up North you've been going to Sunday-school, eh?"

And he laughed softly.

A young man is not apt to insist upon morals when he finds them scoffed at by his elders.

"I'm not lying to you, Sampson," he protested, reddening.

"Not a bit," said the other instantly.

"You're merely telling me what you think you think. And I suppose that you're going to do exactly what you said you'd do when you were talking with Winifred. You're going to help her to find Clung."

"I am," said the other, and squared his shoulders resolutely. "I owe Clung more than that—more than—"

"More than you can ever repay him," nodded the financier. "And therefore the wise thing is not to attempt to repay any part of it. But you're going to help find him?"

"I am!"

"Not so loud! Well, after you bring the two together you'll send them a wedding-present and then step gracefully out of the picture—and back to your Sunday-school?"

"Sampson, you'd anger a saint."

"I hope so."

"D'you really think that Winifred—"

"When she finds he's white, lad, the novelty of the thing will knock her off her feet. Afterward she'll have a good many years for repentance, but that won't help me—or you. You're still fond of her, Billy?"

"Hopelessly."

"Not entirely. Patience, Billy, accomplishes strange things with both stock-markets and women. Besides, do I have to draw you a picture of what the girl's life would be with Clung? Will the world ever accept him as anything other than a half-breed? His blood may be white, but his mind is Oriental, Billy. You know that."

"Listen," said the tall man, and frowning he shook off the hands of Sampson. "If I listen to you any longer I may be

hypnotized. I won't listen. I *want* to do the right thing."

"Of course. So you're going to begin by running to Winifred and telling her that you know Clung is white."

Kirk was silent.

"There's the door. She's in the other room."

Still silence from Kirk.

"She'll be glad to hear it; very glad!"

Kirk seized the knob with sudden resolution, hesitated, and finally slumped into a chair that creaked under the impact of his great weight; he sat regarding Sampson with an ominous and steady scowl.

"I suppose," he muttered at last, "that you win."

"I knew," nodded the other, "that you had not entirely lost your wits; they've been merely frostbitten in the North. Wait until your blood circulates and you'll be reasonable. I'm in no hurry. In the mean time, the thing of importance is to find Clung—yes—and then call the law on him before Winifred reaches him."

"A pretty little plan—very pleasant," sneered Kirk.

"By which you are the winner. If Clung is gone she'll turn to you at last."

"What 'll make her?"

"The habit of having you around. Habit, my dear boy, is usually several points stronger than the thing the poets call love."

And he teetered complacently back and forth, from heel to toe, and grinned upon William Kirk. The big man sighed.

"I came down here to have a good time," he said, as if to himself. "To enjoy a long vacation, and incidentally to set myself right in the matter of Clung. I seem to be on the way—"

"To just the same sort of a vacation, my lad," broke in the older man, "except that instead of putting yourself right with Clung you'll put yourself right with Winifred. In the mean time you can play as much as you like—ride your sweating horse—swing your guns—drink this abominable bar-whisky—and in general, be a happy young fool."

"There's acid on your tongue," grumbled Kirk.

"And reason," nodded Sampson.

"After all," murmured the other, and he frowned into a corner of the room, "why not?"

CHAPTER XIX.

GOLD.

AS if by mutual consent of horses, driver, and passengers, the stage, as it topped the last ascent above the hollow of Kirby Creek, came to a halt on the little plateau of the hill-crest. Below, clambering in a rude swarm like soldiers to an assault, up swept the huts of the town, an astonishing aggregation for so new a place; but they were built without more than an excuse for a foundation—mere lean-tos propped against the steep hillsides. They were pitched like tents wherever the will of the owner decided, and decided hastily. Indeed, there were four tents to every cabin in that little host.

As if by casual mutual agreement, the huts and tents were so arranged that here and there a lane was kept open, every one well-worn even at this early date, for hundreds of horses and buckboards and trucks rolled into and out of the little town every day. It was new, indeed, but it had grown like a weed; for was not this a very fountain-head of the power that waters the works of man?

On the veritable verge of the town men labored at holes in the ground, and down the ravines on every side pick and shovel winked in the keen sunshine as the laborers burrowed at the soil.

From this distance the utter silence made the stir the more impressive. Then the wind, which had been blowing down the main valley, swerved and blew directly in the face of the stage. Slowly up the wind came the sound of the labor, a clicking of metal in it, and the rumble of men's voices, and now and then the sharper note of a braying burro, or the whinny of a horse, but all subdued and blended by that distance into a murmur no louder than the hum of a bee—an angered bee, heavily laden and struggling against the wind.

A dreamlike picture and a dreamlike sound, ugly enough in its way in spite of

the softening perspective, but the men in the stage sat forward in their seats, and their hands gripped and relaxed automatically as if they were already in spirit attacking the earth and hunting for treasure.

Not an eye turned to right or left. They were thinking, each man of himself visions of the "strike," the rejoicing, the glinting of yellow metal, the sweaty, furious labor, the triumph thereafter, the house in some great city, the soft-footed servants, the eyes of fellow men turned on them in awe. Burning it came on them, the dream, the dream of gold. And they were silent and awed. Gold! It banished the reality of burned, brown hillsides and the muddy creek far beneath. It raised visions of columned enfrances, stately ships, beautiful women with jeweled hands and throats. All this of beauty and grace, but the light that it kindled in the eyes of the treasure-hunters was a hard, keen fire.

Not one of the passengers—not John Sampson in spite of his great wealth already accumulated, nor William Kirk, with the desert fever upon him, nor Winifred, with her mission of charity—but found himself drawn at a single step to the edge of hate and murder and battle for gold.

Down the slope and into the city of gold the stage passed. It rolled on unheeded, for every man on the rude streets was like the men in the stage; he was looking straight before him with keen, hard eyes, thinking only of himself, the strike he had made, or was to make, or had missed.

But already the receivers of gold were mixed with the finders and the spenders. Their presence was made known in a hundred places. There hobbled a man in chaps, spurs, high boots, below; above he wore a long Prince Albert, a high silk hat, stiff white shirt and carried tan gloves in his hand. But he had made one concession to comfort. He wore no collar. The tailor was there on the heels of gold.

Here came a woman with vast, red, bare arms—bare to the elbow. She carried a flimsy parasol of blue silk, and twirled it constantly. At every motion of her hand a score of great diamonds flashed in the sun; and around her throat was a yellow, glimmering chain supporting a glorious

ruby. The jeweler was there on the heels of gold.

And another woman, sauntering, one hand dropping from her hip and the other raised at the moment to pull her hat a little more jauntily to one side. A man, passing, changed glances with her, stopped, and turned to walk on at her side. She and her kind who follow men over the world, they were here also on the heels of gold.

Here came two men, arm-in-arm, reeling. Alternately they cursed and laughed, then broke into a song of reeking vulgarity. The saloon was there on the heels of gold.

And now a large man in dapper clothes with the heavy gold watch-chain across the vast expanse of his stomach and a bright necktie at his throat, walked leisurely, at peace with himself, and his small, bright eyes picked out face after face and lingered on it a single moment like the hawk searching the field below for mice. The confidence man was there on the heels of gold.

Passing him, another type—pale, slender, stoop-shouldered, with white hands exceeding agile and forever busied with the lapel of his coat, or in pulling out his handkerchief. White hands and strangely agile and swift and sure, the sign of his trade. The gambler is here on the heels of gold.

The very air was changed in Kirby Creek. To breathe it was to breathe hope, chance, danger. It set the blood tingling. All things were possible at once, and nothing was to be too highly prized. The very gold for which men dreamed and prayed and murdered, had lost half its meaning. Like alcohol, it make men drunk. A pair leaned against a hitching-rack in front of a saloon. They were tossing coins and matching, and at every throw a twenty-dollar gold piece changed hands. Short time before and each of these would have given a month of hard labor for every one of those pieces of money.

And as the stage rolled past, another man came staggering through the doors of that same saloon. By the steps a one-legged man, stretched out his hand for alms.

A shower of silver mixed with gold answered, and the drunkard was gone while the beggar's insatiable hand was stretching out once more.

William Kirk turned to Winifred.

"Do we stay here?" he asked.

"He is here," she answered.

"Can you trust yourself here among these men?"

"They're Southwesterners, Will. I'm safer among them than I would be walking the streets at home with an escort. They will treat me like a sister. Besides—"

"Well?"

"I like it!"

He looked at her in amazement. She seemed to have awakened; her face flushed, her eyes shining with excitement.

"Like it?" he repeated, breathless with his surprise.

"All of it!" she answered, and made an all-embracing gesture. "The dirt, the vulgarity, the cheating, the danger. They're men—all men—and all in action, Will!"

"But such an impossible gang of swine—" he began, and then he stopped short and some of her own fire lighted his eyes.

His blood ran with a thrill, warm and then cold. As she had said, here were men, real men, and all in action. It was the old lure of the desert, stronger, wilder, sharper, but the same. The chances bigger than in the North, the danger greater, and also the reward. And somewhere among those men, he felt, he should find a place for himself. It was the New World, the undiscovered country—himself and these. Three centuries of culture surrounded William Kirk, three generations of gentlemanly traditions. At this moment the first century of these traditions dropped away and he tossed it aside as a man might toss off an encumbering cloak when he is about to enter a fight for his life.

CHAPTER XX.

LIFE!

BY luck, they found a place to live in within an hour after they reached the town of Kirby Creek. It was on the outskirts of the town and the most commodious dwelling in the village. It had been inhabited by a prospector and his family. But a few days before, his eldest son had

been killed by a blow with a pick-handle in a drunken brawl, and the prospector, in consequence, was leaving the camp. He sold his rights at an outrageous price and the three spent the rest of the day purchasing household furniture at prices running up to ten times that of the real value.

A crippled negro was retained for the housework and by nightfall they were eating their first meal in their new residence. It consisted of three rooms. The kitchen, where the negro was to both work and sleep; a room in front used for storage and for the bunks of Sampson and Kirk; and a third room devoted to Winifred.

The house had been thrown together rather than built, and whenever the wind struck it fairly, it shook and trembled and moaned like the haunted castle of some old romance. Nevertheless, it was a shelter and gave them privacy. Furthermore, it was on the extreme outskirts of the town, up the ravine, and the noise of the brawling, drunken miners would disturb them less in this spot.

Hugh Williams, the negro, who had served the master of a great plantation in southeastern Texas, cooked amazingly well considering the rickety tin stove with which he had to work; and after supper, when it was decided that they should venture forth into the night life of the wild camp, they asked Hugh Williams to direct them to the best place. His answer was prompt and decisive.

"They ain't no place fit fo' white gen'l'mun," said Hugh Williams. "No, sir, boss, they ain't one except that there gambling-house the yaller Chinaman runs."

"Well," said Winifred, "a gambling-house is the real heart of a mining-camp, isn't it?"

Then she murmured to her father: "Besides, Clung is a half-breed and he *might* be found near a Chinese place."

"What's the name of the Chinaman, Hugh?" asked Kirk.

"Yo Chai. He ain't here long, but I reckon he's done won mo' money than any man that's dug it out'n the ground. He's a honest Chink, boss, an' they ain't nobody ever called his games crooked, but such luck I ain't never seen. No, sir. I was there

when he won the house from Skinny Wallace."

"Won the whole place gambling?" asked Sampson.

"Draw pokah," said Hugh Williams, and he rolled up his eyes and drew in a reverent breath. "This niggah ain't never seen such playin'. No, sir, boss! The gold it was done stacked all oval that table, an' the yaller Chink, he win one hand and then he lose one, but the ones he lose don't 'mount to nothin', an' the ones he win jus' bring in the gold in heaps an' heaps an' heaps. Yes, sir, boss, nobody done no playin' much that night, but jus' stood roun' an' watched them two; an' old Skinny Wallace, he kep' right on drinkin' and playin' and losin'. Till finally he done go bust! Yes, sir, boss!

"Then Yo Chai take the place and next day he ask all the folks to come in and look at Skinny Wallace's machines, an' they was all crooked. Yes, sir, boss, they was a brake on the roulette-wheel an' they was everything else down to loaded dice. An' Yo Chai he ask fo' two men to watch while he had all the games put back on the level; an' since then we can all see every bit of every machine. But still Yo Chai keeps winnin'. Yes, sir, boss, this niggah never seen nothin' like it. Fifty dollahs in ten passes—that's what I lost! An' shootin' them lil dice is mah game; they done talk to me, them lil ivories—yes, sir, boss."

"Is it an orderly place, Hugh?" asked Winifred.

"Which?" asked the negro, and canted his head with a wrinkled forehead to catch the word.

"Much rough stuff around Yo Chai's house?" translated Kirk.

"Rough stuff? No, sir, boss, they ain't no rough-house aroun' Yo Chai. It don't pay none to fool with that yaller Chinaman. But Chapman, he done try to shoot up Yo Chai's place, and Yo Chai threw a knife, boss, and nailed Bud's hand plumb up ag'in' the bar. Nobody done fool aroun' Yo Chai since then. No, sir, boss, you can mos' hear a pin drop when that Chinaman's aroun'."

The recommendation was too strong to pass unfulfilled. They wound down the

hill following Hugh's directions and reached in due time the gambling-house of Yo Chai. It looked like a stable except that the roof at no point rose to more than twelve or fourteen feet above the ground, but it was finished as rudely as any stable, and as the lumber had given out long before the place was finished, the roof was formed chiefly of tarred canvas stretched across the rafters. Even this was lacking in one wide corner, and the gamblers played under the roof of the white, distant stars.

Through this gap, also, there came an occasional gust of wind which billowed the blue clouds of cigarette-smoke in choking masses across the room—and sometimes it poured in such masses through the door that the building seemed to be on fire. The smoke in itself was enough to obscure the brightest of lights, and such illumination as there was consisted of lanterns of great size swinging from posts here and there in the wide structure. They made not a general glow of light, but a number of distinct halos of brilliancy through the mist of tobacco-smoke. Each halo embraced a table at which some game ran in full blast—crap, faro, chuck-a-luck, poker, every favorite of the Southwestern gambler; but beyond these halos, faces were continually passing to and fro and withdrawing into the twilight confusion, like ships moving through a fog.

As for the silence in which a pin could be heard to drop, it seemed at a glance to the newcomers as though the place were the scene of a riot—a murder just committed, or a brawl in full blast. At one end of the room stretched a bar at which half a dozen men labored steadily to supply the demands of the customers, for drinks were served free at every table. However, since these did not come fast enough to suit many of the players at games which did not demand undivided attention, there was a continual stream of men running from the tables to the bar, drinking hastily, and then turning to run back to their places. These, very often, collided with one of the Chinese servants who bore trays of drinks to the seated and more patient gamblers; each collision was announced by a shiver of glassware, a shrill chatter of Oriental rage,

and the deep, booming laugh of a white man.

These were only high points in the general clamor, for the calls of the "men-on-the-sticks" and of the dealers and of the players kept up a continual monotone, broken sharply here and there by a snarl of fury, a shout of delight, or the deep groan which announced that one of the players was broke. A tawdy, dim, drunken confusion, but here, as over the entire town, there was the glamour of chance which shot the smoky gloom full of rays of gold.

It was a colorful assembly, for at least seventy per cent of the inhabitants of Kirby Creek were Mexicans and all of these were flush, either through the high wages paid to laborers or because they had made their independent strikes. Their profits were about equally divided among drink, gambling, and clothes—clothes of every sort. Brown-faced villains passed in the mantillas of women, yellow, priceless lace. Silk shirts of yellow, purple, red, and blue, glowed here and there like so many fires through the great room; and in between was ever the scintillating play of the hard brilliancy of jewels. The man who makes money easily invests it in diamonds just as his more civilized brother puts it in a bank. It draws no interest, but interest does not attract those who dig raw gold from the common earth.

Winifred heard the voice of a stranger beside her saying: "Life! By God, here's raw life!"

And she turned to look up into the face of William Kirk. It was so changed by the shadows and by the hardening of the mouth and the brightening of the eyes that for the moment she hardly recognized him any more than she had known the sound of his voice. But she laughed, and, throwing up her arms, answered: "Life, Billy!"

The sound of her own voice startled her; it was rougher and more strained than she had ever heard it. And she knew, all at once, that the same fierce light which transfigured the eyes of Kirk was also in her own. She turned to her father, to see if he also had caught the fierce fever of the place, half awestricken, and half amused, and more than half delighted.

But her father was not beside her any longer. It sobered her to coldness to miss him, and she cried out to Kirk in her alarm.

"There he is," answered the big man, and then laughed deeply, a boom and roar of sound, exultant. "There he is; he's in the fire, Winifred!"

The comfortably plump back of her father, indeed, was at that moment settling into a chair at the central table.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GUN PLAY.

THIS central table stood apart from the rest of the gambling-hall; no matter how high the riot rang through the rest of the place, no matter what bright hosts of gaudy Mexicans drifted like autumn leaves through shadow and light, in this central space, voices hushed, and it was surrounded by an atmosphere of comparatively quiet dignity.

Whereas the rest of the floor was thickly strewn with sawdust, which served the double purpose of cleanliness and of muffling the fall of heels, the central table was supported by a dais, spread with Indian blankets of price and rising a foot higher than the common boards. On the dais was a round table capable of accommodating five people in comfort, and no more were ever allowed to sit there. Moreover, a man had to show at least a thousand dollars in gold currency or in dust before he was allowed to sit in on the game, which was always draw poker. One of these chairs had been recently vacated by a disgruntled loser, and into his place stepped John Sampson.

The glance of Winifred passed from her father to the loser who had just left the chair. He was a Mexican, and she saw his face clearly, for the dais was brightly illumined by half a dozen lanterns hanging from the surrounding posts. She saw a complexion, somewhere between brown and black, with the wide, heavy lips, the blunt nose, and the cruelly high cheek-bones which told a plain story of predominate Indian blood.

That face was further darkened now by a malevolent scowl which shifted gleaming

back toward the table and then returned darkly to the front. The Mexican joined a compatriot who leaned against one of the posts. The lantern overhead cast a black shadow which swallowed up the pair immediately, but when they moved on toward the bar she made out that the second Mexican was wrapped to the ears in a gay blanket. The loser made many gestures as they walked, speaking with his lips close to the ear of his companion. Winifred turned to William Kirk.

"See those two?" she asked.

"The greasers?"

"Yes. They mean mischief. One of them has lost a good deal of money, I take it, and he means to try to get some of it back."

"Bah!" smiled Kirk. "A Mexican is always like a child. He sulks when he loses, but he never strikes while his father's face is toward him."

"Nevertheless," she said, "it looks dangerous to me, and I want to get dad out of here before any shooting starts."

At that Kirk stiffened, his big shoulders going back, and his face altered to a singular ugliness. At the best he was not a handsome man, with his heavily defined features, but now, at the mention of shooting, his lips twisted back into a mirthless laugh, like the silent grin of a wolfhound, and his eyes lighted evilly. She remembered what he had said of practising with his guns every day when he had been at his home in the North. She believed it now, for he made her think of the boy who has learned to box and goes about among his companions looking for trouble. His glance swept around the room, lingering an instant on the more marked faces, and then it returned to the two Mexicans, who by this time were leaning against the bar, drinking, and talking earnestly, their heads close together.

"Leave this to me," said William Kirk, and his voice was dry with a peculiarly harsh command. "If there's trouble there's no reason why I can't take care of your father. In the mean time, he's robbing the robbers. Look!"

It was the end of a hand, and John Sampson was methodically raking from the cen-

ter of the table a great heap of chips—a big winning. Other faces at the table turned enviously toward the new, successful player, but the dealer remained unmoved.

She noticed first the yellow, slender fingers flying over the cards as he shuffled and then the small, round wrists twisting as he dealt the next hand. She had never seen greater suppleness and grace. Looking up above the hands she encountered the face of a middle-aged Chinaman wearing a crimson skull-cap with a black tassel. For the first moment she noted only the garb of the man, a loose robe of a color somewhere between violet and purple, and heavily brocaded with gold—the wide, trailing sleeves made the slender grace of the wrists more apparent.

Here, certainly, was Yo Chai, the owner, and now she studied his face carefully. The eyebrows were highly and plaintively arched, and a purple shadow on both the upper and lower lids made his eyes seem deeply sunken. The lines running from the eyes, together with the arch of the brows, gave a touch of weary wistfulness to the man's expression, so that she felt that she could have stood for an hour and lost herself in the study of the face. From the upper lip straggled the sparse, black hairs of a typical Chinaman's mustache; but the mouth itself was finely and thoughtfully formed and the other features delicately chiseled. His expression was so devoid of life that he seemed rather a Buddhist rapt in mystic contemplation than a Chinese gambler concentrating on a game.

It seemed that Kirk had followed the steady direction of her glance, for he muttered now: "Rum old bird, isn't he? Seems to me I've seen him before. I suppose it's Yo Chai?"

As if to answer him, a miner dressed like a cowboy, at that moment mounted the dais and stood beside the dealer, shifting his hat awkwardly on his head. The Chinaman turned and the white man leaned down to whisper in his ear. At that the dealer nodded, pulled out a long purse of wire net, embroidered with the figure of a flashing dragon, and handed the other several coins. The white man shook hands enthusiastically and departed.

"Yep," nodded William Kirk, "that's Yo Chai. A white man wouldn't talk as respectfully as that to any one but the boss Chink of a place like this. Watch the play; they don't lose any time in that game; ha! there goes your father's winnings!"

For John Sampson had pushed forward a large pile of chips which were matched by the Chinaman; the hands were laid down, and Yo Chai raked in the chips. John Sampson shook his head and settled a little forward in his chair like one prepared for a long session.

"After all," chuckled Kirk, "this is better than playing myself. First time I've ever seen your father bleed, and I've watched him play a good many times!"

So they stood leaning against the pillar near by and watching the progress of the game. It fluctuated here and there; but on the whole there was a steady drift of chips from the other four players to Yo Chai; even, during the few moments of their observance they could readily perceive this movement. It seemed to exasperate John Sampson, and repeatedly he pushed out large stacks of chips; he was beginning to lose at a rate which enriched every player at the table. He was fighting rather than gambling, and Kirk began to chuckle steadily with enjoyment.

"For," he explained to Winifred, "your father ranks himself with the best of 'em a player, and this will be a story I can tell a thousand times. Ha, ha, ha!"

For what followed, the exact situation of the dais and the players at the table must be borne in mind. Yo Chai sat with his back toward the bar and three-quarters toward Kirk and Winifred. Directly opposite him was John Sampson, his back, therefore, being three-quarters toward the same observers. The eyes of the two witnesses, in the mean time, were fluctuating chiefly from Sampson to the Chinaman, for they seemed chief opponents in the game, and it was while they were watching Sampson rake in one of his rare winnings that Winifred saw her father stiffen quickly in his chair, his hand still among the chips before him. At the same instant, a hubbub broke out at a

neighboring table and William Kirk turned to watch it; her own eyes remained fastened on her father. All that followed filled not more than one second at the most.

At the same time that John Sampson stiffened in his chair Yo Chai, opposite, allowed his head to tilt back lazily, and a half-smile stirred his lips; he seemed like a man blinking contentedly in a warm sun on a spring day. Also, he was shoving his chair back from the table with his feet. So the eyes of Winifred, following the apparent direction of her father's stare, plunged past Yo Chai and into the semi-gloom in the direction of the bar. There she saw the two Mexicans side by side. One of them was pointing toward Yo Chai, and as his arm fell steel gleamed in the hands of both, the guns raising almost leisurely to the safe kill from behind.

It was then that the movement of Yo Chai changed from leisureliness to action as sudden as the winking of light. It should be borne in mind that all occurred so suddenly that John Sampson had not even time to cry out a warning; but the Chinaman acted as if the eyes of the white man opposite him were two large, clear mirrors, in which he read the stalking danger; he swirled from the chair swifter than a dead leaf twisted by a gust of wind. The four guns of the Mexicans roared; and then there were two sharp, quick, barking reports in answer. The Mexicans sank out of Winifred's sight beyond the table.

CHAPTER XXII.

RED ELEVEN.

IT was not a great commotion. John Sampson and another player at the table stood bolt-upright, but rather as if in curiosity than in alarm. The other two turned in their chairs, but did not rise. From the rest of the great gambling-hall men swarmed to the point of action like water toward a whirlpool; and then Yo Chai rose from beyond the table and waved his frail hands apologetically toward his fellow players. The gun he had fired had already disappeared into the folds of his robe; the whimsical wistfulness of his face

was unchanged; he might have been rising to bid them a calm good night. But Winifred, watching him closely, started as though some one had shouted at her ear.

What she saw, indeed, was not so much the middle-aged face, and the rather shrunken, bowed shoulders, but the exceeding grace of the narrow wrists of the Chinaman and the transparent frailty of the hands. Already the crowd was leaving the scene of the firing and drifting back toward their original tables; William Kirk, who had run toward the spot, now returned, bringing John Sampson with him. She ran a few paces to meet them and caught her father by the arm with both her excited hands.

"Do you know who that was?" she cried. "Do you know who that was?"

Then she stopped the full tide of speech that was tumbling to her lips; a suspicion froze up her utterance.

"Who?" asked the two men at the same time.

"I don't know. I'm asking you," she answered.

"Sounded to me," said William Kirk, "as if you were about to tell us something. Whom do you want to know about?"

And she lied deliberately, for she knew all at once that she must not tell either of these men her suspicion about Yo Chai.

"I think one of those Mexicans was a fellow I've seen in Mortimer."

"Really?" grunted her father. "Well, he's a dead one now."

"Not a bit of it," said Kirk. "That was a nice bit of gun-play on the part of the Chinaman. D'you know where he shot those two fellows?"

"Where?"

"Drilled 'em squarely through the right hip—each one. They'll both live, and they'll both be cripples for life. When you come down to it, Sampson, that's better revenge than killing the beggars, eh?"

"Maybe," said the older man, "but let's get out of here."

"Why?" said Kirk, frowning. "This place just begins to look good to me."

And: "Why?" asked Winifred. "I agree with Billy!"

"Because," said her father, "if I stay I've got to go back to that game, and this

is a good excuse for me to get away from the cards. That Yo Chai has bewitched 'em, Billy!"

It was strange to see how the environment of the mining-camp had gained upon these three. Each was the inheritor of centuries of pacific culture, but half a day had moved them back a thousand years toward the primitive. In their nostrils was still the scent of powder; in their minds was still the picture of the falling men through whose flesh and bones the bullets had driven; yet they had already closed their senses to the nearness of death. A tale which in the telling would have kept them agape in their drawing-rooms, in the actuality was a chance to be seen and forgotten. Ten centuries of refinement, of polish, were brushed away, and the brute with slope forehead and fanglike teeth rose in each of them.

In the older man it held the longest and moved him to leave the place as soon as possible. In the others it was merely a stimulus; but though they heard and felt the call of the wild, they were not yet of the wilderness. They followed John Sampson slowly from the gambling-house of Yo Chai. At the door, when they looked back, they saw Yo Chai settling back into his chair with the extra man already in the chair of Sampson.

"By the Lord!" growled the financier. "I've left like the greaser before me, beaten and sulky; and there's my successor ready for the bait!"

And then he led the way, grinning, from the house, for to be beaten was so great a novelty to him that it was not altogether displeasing. They took the course for their shack and Hugh Williams; they walked in such silence that finally John Sampson asked: "What you thinking of?"

"Yo Chai," they answered in one voice, and then laughed at their unanimity. "Yo Chai," chimed in Sampson, "but it's the first time in a month, Winifred, that you've got your thoughts away from the—half-breed."

And he glanced at William Kirk.

"His blood," said the girl calmly, "is nothing against him. It's not of his choosing. Besides, he's whiter than most."

A remark which left the other two strangely silent, and in that silence they reached their cabin, and went to their rooms at once, for it had been a hard day. But when the voices of her father and Kirk died away in the next room and the bunks creaked for the last time as they turned and twisted about finding comfortable sleeping positions, Winifred remained awake, sitting on the edge of her bed. For her mind was haunted by a picture of singular vividness—the face of Yo Chai as he shoved back his chair, slowly, his head tilted, his eyes half closed like one who basks in the sun, a smile of mysterious meaning touching his lips. It grew on her with astounding vigor and made another name grow up in her memory—Clung! She had been on the verge of imparting her thought to Kirk back there in the gaming-house, but something had held her back with the force of a single thread of caution.

Now the overmastering curiosity was too great for her. The impulse to go back to the gaming-house, confront the impassive face of Yo Chai, and tax him with being Clung disguised, swelled in freshening pulses in her blood. As the precipitate hangs cloudy in the acid, waiting only the presence of some foreign substance before it drops to the bottom of the glass, so the impulse to go back to Yo Chai hung in the mind of Winifred. And the deciding force, oddly enough, was a sudden creaking of a bunk in the next room.

At once she knew that she must go, alone, and at once. It would be a great adventure; she felt that she could trust herself implicitly with the roughest of those Southwesterners; if it was a cold trail she would escape the ridicule of her father if she dragged him back to the gaming-house; if it was the true trail she would have all the glory of the discovery in the morning. Besides, while Clung might reveal himself to her, it was very doubtful that he would acknowledge his identity in front of her father.

And so, at the creaking of the bunk in the next room, she rose straight from the bed and went to the window. It was close to the ground and already open. Through it blew the night wind softly, inviting her out; and beyond glowed the confiding stars

and the lower, redder lights of the town. She slipped at once through the window, went to the shack which served as a stable, saddled her horse hastily, and rode down the trail toward Kirby Creek.

The creaking of the bunk was caused by one who, like Winifred, had not been able to sleep because of something he had seen that night in the house of Yo Chai. It was Kirk, and the vision which haunted him had nothing to do with the yellow face of Yo Chai, but with the roulette-wheel, spinning brightly, clicking with a rapid whirl to a stop, and then the droning voice which called the number and the color: "Eleven on the red—black five—eleven red—black two—eleven on the red." It suddenly recurred to him that eleven had come many times on the red—four times as often as any other figure. He sat up sweating with excited eagerness. What a dolt he had been not to venture a few dollars on the wheel! Not that he needed money, but the excitement—the great chance—he might—

But by this time he was sitting bolt upright on the edge of his bunk, grinding his teeth and cursing softly in the dark. The heavy snore of John Sampson broke in upon him and he felt a great impulse to take the older man by the throat and choke off the noise. He began dressing hastily. The gaming-house ran all night and he might as well take a whirl at the roulette-wheel as lie awake and think about it until morning. His hands began to tremble so that he found it difficult to tie his shoes. Then he tiptoed cautiously across the floor. There was little need of such silence, for John Sampson was a redoubtable sleeper.

As Kirk opened the front door he heard the clatter of a galloping horse speed away over the soft sod, and looking quickly to the side he saw what seemed the phantom of Winifred speeding through the night. He almost cried out to her, but an instant of thought made him check the sound as a foolish impulse. Yet the figure had seemed so familiar that he could not help walking to the side of the house and peering into the room of the girl. It was faintly lighted—very faintly, but he made out with perfect certainty that the covers of the narrow

bed were too straight to conceal any sleeper. His breath went from him, and he turned and stared down the valley toward Kirby Creek. Then he ran to the stable, saddled, and bore at a full gallop for the town.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HOUSE OF YO CHAI.

THE first thing the eyes of Winifred sought when she reentered the gaming-house was the high central table, but at it the form of Yo Chai no longer appeared; a white dealer sat in his place. The beating of her heart decreased by a dozen strokes to the minute. She stopped one of the Chinese waiters: "Where catchum Yo Chai, John?"

"Yo Chai catchum home," said the waiter. "Catchum sleep."

"How long?"

"Maybe fi' minute."

"Where?"

"'Loun' corner. Lil square house. Maybe John show?"

His eyebrows raised in inquisition, and the girl slipped a fifty-cent piece into his hand.

"Sure," said the waiter. "Plenty quick."

And he led her to a side door, from which he pointed to a low, square building at the back of the large gaming-house. Even as she looked lights appeared in two little windows. It was as if the place had awakened and were staring at her with ominous, red eyes through the darkness. The waiter disappeared and she felt a great need of reenforcement; to face Yo Chai in the public gaming-house was one thing; to beard the lion in his secret, Oriental den was an affair of quite another color. Into her mind boiled a thousand ugly tales about Chinamen and their haunts. She forced these fears back with a use of simple reason. Through the walls of any of these shacks her voice would ring out for a hundred feet, and the first murmur of a white woman's voice would bring a score of men to her help.

Before her courage cooled she went straight to the door of the little house and

seized the knocker and rapped. While her fingers still clung to it, she saw that it was of brass, hanging from the mouth of a brazen dragon that writhed down the face of the door, his scales glinting here and there as if with inherent light. Not a pleasant sight. She regretted sharply that she had touched the knocker, and had already withdrawn a step when the door opened. It swung a foot or so wide and no one appeared at the opening. Then, as if the opener decided that he might safely show himself, a Chinaman, tall and of prodigious bulk, evidently a Manchurian, stepped out before her and stood with his hands shoved into his capacious sleeves—sleeves that might have contained a whole armory of knives and revolvers.

He frowned upon her, so that her knees shook. And because she knew her knees were shaking nothing in the world could have induced her now to draw back from her purpose.

"White girl lose plenty money," boomed the big Oriental. "Yo Chai not help. Yo Chai lose plenty money, too. Too bad. Catch bad-luck devil."

He stepped back through the door.

"Wait," called Winifred eagerly, and she stepped close to the guardian. "White girl got plenty money. Want see Yo Chai. Maybe pay Yo Chai much money."

But the guard was not to be moved by eyes that would have shaken the firmness of any ruffian in Kirby Creek.

"Yo Chai maybe sleep. No can see."

And he began to close the door when a singsong current of Chinese began from the deeps of the house. Chinese, but it made Winifred rise almost to tiptoes with eagerness. She thought that she recognized that voice. The doorkeeper turned his head and answered over his shoulder the speaker from within. He turned back, regarded the girl with a keen scrutiny, and then added something more to the inquirer—evidently a description.

There came a sharp voice of command and the guard stepped surlily back from the door, motioning her mutely to enter. She slipped past him at once and found herself in a little, boxlike hall. On the wall opposite her hung a tapestry of shimmering

blue silk run with a pattern of golden brocade, cunningly, so that while she guessed at dragon figures she could find neither head nor tail to the design. She only knew that it was beautiful and extraordinarily expensive.

From the tapestry depended three scrolls of parchment covered with Chinese writing in even columns, the central one much larger than the neighboring ones. This she saw by the light of two lanterns, one at either end of a rather long, narrow table directly before the tapestry and scrolls. They were unusual lamps, made in the form of two conventionalized forearms, broadening at the elbow into a comfortable base, tapering up, and curving sharply at the wrist so that the bent hand caught with its brazen fingers the top of the lantern. This was a square-faced light, barred heavily with iron. The whole was so grotesque and interesting that it needed little imagining for Winifred to feel that two unbodied arms were there supporting their lanterns so that she could read on the scrolls something which it imported her to know—something of a fatal significance, perhaps. And the sight quelled her so that she could not help a timorous and regretful glance back at the door.

It was completely blocked by the bulky form of the Chinaman, who stood with his arms folded as before. With the light striking up and tossing shadows from his cheek-bones slant across his forehead, the fellow seemed absolutely gigantic, and his eyes gleamed ominously down at her. Panic caught at her.

"I have changed my mind," she said, "I'm going to wait until to-morrow before I see your master. Tell Yo Chai I'm sorry to disappoint him."

And she advanced toward the door with a hand outstretched toward the knob; but the guard did not move, and it seemed to her that he was setting his teeth to keep back a meaning grin. She was armed with a small revolver, and now, in her rush of cold terror, her hand moved down to the handle of the weapon. She checked herself in time, for she knew enough about the Southwest to understand that one must not draw a weapon until one intends to kill, and

the shot must follow the draw. She would reserve the weapon for an emergency. So she mastered herself again with an effort.

"Where?" she queried.

The guard extended an arm of prodigious bulk and length and pointed to a door standing open at the left, with the view of the room beyond blocked by a tall screen. She hesitated a single instant and then stepped boldly through the doorway. Even as she did so, there was a click behind her. When she whirled she found that the door through which she had just stepped was closed. The Chinaman must have followed her closely with noiseless, slippered feet. And the fear she felt was greater than if a gun had been held under her chin with an ominous face behind it. She seized the handle of the door; she could not even turn the knob, and as she strove to do so, it seemed to her that she caught a faint, bass chuckling from beyond the door. Then came a whisper behind her.

She whirled and set her back against the honest wall, but nothing threatened her, apparently, from behind. Only the pleasant screen rose before her. And then, in the midst of her panic she realized why that door had been closed. Until that time her voice would have struck through the walls of the house to the street. Now she was in the interior of the house and even if she screamed at the top of her lungs she would not be heard, probably. She thought of William Kirk, the bull strength of those shoulders and hands which would have torn that door down and felled the huge Chinaman with a blow; and tears of helplessness welled up in her eyes.

Only for a moment. She knew, all at once, that her fear had not paralyzed her, for though her heart thundered fast it beat steadily. She was able to fight to the end, and she had the means for the battle. She drew the revolver; set her teeth; and stepped from behind the screen, crouching, ready to fire in any direction.

What she saw was Yo Chai himself. He sat among a heap of cushions, cross-legged, a crimson skull-cap with a black tassel on his head, his eyes half shut, and his frail fingers supported a long-stemmed pipe from which he puffed a slowly forming cloud of

pungent, pale-blue smoke. Loathing, a desire to murder, filled the heart of the girl; and she drew the revolver close to her.

"Who locked the door on me?" she cried.

"Who dared to lock the door on me?"

She pointed behind the screen.

Yo Chai removed the pipe slowly, slowly from his lips, blew forth another delicate tinted cloud of smoke, and answered in the softest of voices: "*K'e pu chih tao t'a shi shui.*"

"English," said the girl fiercely. "Don't sit there jabbering your Chinese nonsense at me. Speak English!"

The eyes under their whimsically high arches did not vary by the stir of a lash as the gambler stared at her, wearily, not in anger.

He repeated: "*K'e pu chih tao t'a shi shui.* I do not know who he was."

"You don't know?" she whispered, for terror had taken the strength from her voice. "You don't know? In your own house? Yo Chai, I'm not alone. Men wait for me in the street. Open that door and let me go. Or if you won't, this gun is leveled on you—and I don't miss at this distance."

The head of Yo Chai tilted ever so slightly back and the dreamy smile she had known so well somewhere in the past crossed his lips.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LOVE.

SHE did not connect it with Clung this time, but rather it seemed to her a characteristic of the entire Chinese race, a smile of devilish cunning and subtlety.

"You dog of a Chinaman," she said, her voice returning, a warmth of rage filling her now that she faced a crisis: "The white men will burn you—inch by inch. Call your servant; make him open those doors!"

Yo Chai arose, laying down the pipe on a little ebony table. The slender fingers of one hand gathered against his breast the priceless silk of his robe; he bowed till the long, black pigtail slipped over his shoulder and tapped the floor.

"Yo Chai," said that softest of voices, "will open the door."

And he stepped past her beyond the screen. That complaisance scattered her fears as a wind scatters the morning mist.

"Wait a minute, Yo Chai," she said hastily. "Maybe I've spoken too quickly."

The other turned and stood with his arms thrust into his flowing sleeves and his eyes looking past her. Seen at this close range his face seemed at least ten years younger than when she had first glanced at him in the gaming-house. Moreover, his throat was more smoothly rounded than should be in a man of his age, even a Chinaman. The shadows about the eyes appeared now rather a coloring of the skin than the sunken pouches of debauched middle-age. The features, too, showed with extreme delicacy of chiseling. Altogether she had never seen a Chinaman like this, and her first suspicion came back over her.

"Sit down again," she said with perfect calm. "I want to talk with you."

He bowed again, this time not so low, and turned back toward his cushion; but as he was in the very act of stooping she spoke, changing her voice, making it rough, hoarse, like the voice of a man, and bringing out the word with a sharp, aspirate force: "Clung!"

As a horse starts when the spur is buried in tender flesh, so Yo Chai started, whirled with a movement swifter than the eye could follow, and Winifred found herself staring into a face drawn, and terrible with fighting eagerness; and below it, the yawning muzzle of a forty-five.

"Clung!" she repeated faintly, and her lips remained parted on the word.

The revolver disappeared somewhere into the folds of his clothes. He drew himself up until the artificial stoop of middle-age disappeared suddenly from his shoulders; and his eyes went again past her, past her and into infinity.

"Call your men," said Clung, "I am weary of living. I will not fight."

She did not answer.

"Call your men," he repeated with a more metallic clang in his voice.

Still she could not speak, though her lips moved.

"Call them," he repeated, "or else I will go with you alone. Be quick before the mind of Clung changes. Quick! There is a reward on the head of Clung!"

"Oh, Clung!" she said at last, and she threw out her hands toward him. "Do you think I have come to betray you?"

"Who will call it that?" he answered in his soft, flawless English. "Clung is a dog of a Chinaman."

"I said it when I was afraid," she pleaded. "I thought—the door closed behind me—the big man acted as if he were making a prisoner of me. Clung, forgive me!"

"Clung has forgotten," he said quietly.

"But he will not forgive?" she asked wistfully. "No more than you would ever forgive that day when Marshal Clauson came to my father's house and took you. Clung, do you know that I had no part in that?"

"Clung has forgotten," he repeated with the same calm.

She sighed. Then, eagerly: "But we don't ask you to forgive us so easily. Do you know that Kirk has come from the North to help me find you and make some amends for what he did?"

"It is good," said Clung.

And he smiled.

"And when I passed you in the room that day," she went on hurriedly, "it wasn't because I was not sorry for you, but—I had been thinking of you in another way, and—and—"

"It is very clear," he said. "A child could understand. You thought Clung was a man, and you found he was only a Chinaman."

"I see," she said sadly, "you will never forgive me, Clung."

"Clung has forgotten," he repeated.

She bent her head.

"After all," she said, "what can we offer you? My father has wanted to send you North and put you in some fine school. But I see how foolish all that is. You could never go to such a place."

"My father is Li Clung," he said.

She winced, and seeing that, his head went back in the old familiar way and the lazy smile touched his lips.

"My father is Li Clung, and he has taught Clung what a Chinaman should know: the prayers of heaven and earth and the teachings of Confucius. It is well; it is ended. Clung has learned a little. He shall learn more hereafter."

She began to speak, but finding his eyes fixed once more on the infinity behind her the words died at her lips.

"There is nothing I can do," she said. "I see that all my hunt has been foolish. But if you should ever be taken again, I want you to send for us and we will get everything for you that money can buy—the best of lawyers and the influence of white men."

He bowed until the pigtail once more tapped on the floor, and it was the sight of that shining, silken length of hair that convinced her of the unsurpassable barrier between them.

"When a white man wishes to show that he bears no ill feelings for another man," she said, "he shakes hands when he departs. Will you shake hands with me, Clung?"

"It is good," said Clung, and held out his hand. The fingers were cold and lifeless to her touch; she withdrew her hand hastily and turned to the door. But there an overwhelming sadness stopped her. She went back to him with quick steps.

"I know now why I have hunted so hard for you, Clung," she said. "It isn't because I can give you anything, but because you can give me so much. To-night we are parting. I shall never see you again. Can't we have one more talk like the ones we used to have?"

He said: "Many words have little meanings."

And she laughed: "That is just like the old times. If you don't want to talk, let's have one of our old silences, Clung."

He bowed, and pointed on the floor to a comfortable heap of cushions facing his own. They took their places, and for a time the silence went on like a river, and Winifred began to grow almost breathless. It seemed as if Clung were slipping away from her with every instant, and as if Yo Chai were growing up more vividly and really in his place. At length he picked up

a little stick and struck a musically tingling note on the gong beside him—once, and then rapidly two more strokes. The shivering notes had scarcely sunk away before a little, bent Chinaman, so hollow-cheeked and narrow of throat that it seemed as if every ounce of living blood were dried from his body by age, shuffled into the room bearing a tray. From this he produced two little tea sets which he placed on the small tables near them. It was beautiful porcelain, her own dishes of a marvelous transparent green, shading almost to white at the lip of the tiny cup which held only one or two swallows of liquid. The set of Clung was of a dull gold which flashed so in the lights that at moments it seemed as if he were lifting a piece of flame toward his lips. Besides the tea there were little cakes, thin, and with a delicate, aromatic taste that gave added flavor to the tea.

She drank the tea; she tasted the cakes; the silence held. Once more Clung smoked his pipe in solemn-eyed, meaningless peace. The faint, blue drifts tangled before his face so that he was removed as if to a great distance, and looking up through the higher streaks of smoke she found herself staring into the face of a great, ugly image, squat, misshapen, grinning with the same heavy, unbroken, meaningless peace. It was a place for endless meditation, and the world which she knew slipped away from her like a cloak, and around her fell the silken influence of the world of Clung.

"Speak to me," he said at last.

"What shall I talk of, Clung?"

"It makes no difference. Clung wishes to hear your voice."

Once more he was smiling into dim distance, but his eyes dwelt finally upon her, more and more steadily, drawing his face closer to her through the wraith of smoke. It had seemed impossible that she could have any meaning to him. Now she thrilled mightily, and her lips parted as she listened.

"The voices of men—the white men—are like the braying of donkeys; the voices of Chinamen are like snarling dogs; the voices of white women are like scolding parrots. But once Clung rode for his life over the hills and he came about sunset-time within sight of a mission church and

all the bells were pealing. Sometimes the bells were slow and the sound came humming over the hills to Clung. Sometimes there were many quick, high notes, like the talking of a flock of birds when they fly down out of the sky and tell the earth of the bright things they have seen. Then Clung heard you speak; and it seemed to Clung that he was once more riding over the hills, and the hills went up closer to the sky, and the red sky came closer to the hills, and in between there was the voice of the bells, sometimes deep and humming, and sometimes quick and high, but always music. If Clung were a rich white man, he would buy a woman with such a voice and she should speak to him every night just before he slept."

"But white men can't buy women."

"It is true," said Clung calmly. "They have no pleasure in life. In all things they are clumsy. They buy a horse and when it is old they sell it; they buy clothes and when they are old they give them away; but they take a woman for nothing. She is a gift. See, because she is a gift when she is old and withered, the white man cannot sell her and he cannot give her away, for what man would take her?"

"Then you would sell the woman you bought—the woman with the musical voice, Clung?"

He pondered the question a moment.

He said at length: "When the bell in the temple is old and broken, do they throw it away? No, because the rich metal is good. Do they sell it, then, for the price of the metal? No, because it has made much music and it is a holy thing. Who can find the price of a holy thing?"

"But if you would not throw the woman away or sell her, why not take her as the white man takes a white woman—as a gift from the first, Clung?"

"Because a gift is like a saddle. At first it is pleasant but soon it wears away the skin. Who will have a saddle that is tied on the back of a horse always?"

She laughed at the naive explanation.

"It kills the horse and the horse is worth more than the saddle. Also, I, Clung, have seen white women kill the spirits of their white masters. It was not good to see."

"You've never seen a happy married couple, Clung?"

"One pair— Marshal Clauson and his wife. But they have a great sorrow which keeps them together. They may have no children, and the grief for that is like a chain that holds them together."

"I can't understand you, Clung. Well, I'm glad of it. If I understood you I suppose I never should have followed you."

He nodded.

"Yes. The book that I know by heart I put away on the shelf and the dust comes and covers it; but the book that I do not know is like the voice of a wise friend. I am always asking and it is always answering. And see: I have sat with you many times in the morning and in the mid day and at evening, and each time the day was different. But after I left you the days ended. They have rolled all into one—one morning, one noon, and one night. It is very strange. But now you sit here again and time begins for me. I feel the ticking of the clock and every second has a new sound; I feel the beating of my heart, and every beat is happier. Is it not strange?"

"It is very strange," she nodded, and she leaned a little to peer at him, for he seemed to have been describing the very thing she felt. The smoke from the pipe had not floated away for several seconds and now it hung before his face, veiling it with mystery. He laid down the pipe; his frail fingers interlocked; his smile no longer went far past her but dwelt on and around her like the warmth of a fire on a chilly night.

"You have made me rich with your coming," he said, "for night after night I shall sit here; I shall have the green cups and the tea placed on that table; I shall sip my tea and smoke my pipe and imagine you opposite me. It will be as clear as something that I touch with the tips of my fingers; it will be like something that I see with my eyes; it will be like the things I hear with my ears."

And she knew suddenly that this was love; she knew it not with revolt, but with a sharp and painful curiosity; there was fear somewhere in it.

"I must go," she said.

He rose; he bowed once more until the pigtail slipped over his shoulder and tapped the floor.

"It is true."

"And I'm so happy, Clung, that we are friends."

"It is true."

"But may I never come again?"

"Clung does not know."

And an instinct made her know that he was fighting against a great hunger within him. She could not keep from tantalizing him.

"Do you wish me to come, Clung?"

"Clung cannot tell. He has learned one page of the book by heart."

"And the rest of the book?"

"What does it matter?" he said, and he smiled a little sadly, making a gesture of abandon, palms up. "All the days of Clung's life, if he were to turn a page every day, he could never learn them all. It is true!"

She stopped. She frowned high overhead, and her glance went inward, examining her very soul.

"Do I dare come again?" she whispered to herself.

And aloud she said: "What is there to fear? I *shall* come again. Why not? I am *never* so happy as I am with you!"

And afterward Clung, from his open door, watched her go out to her horse and swing into the saddle. As she started down the road a large man on a tall horse came toward her. Clung saw the girl swerve her mount to one side and gallop off. The man followed, and Clung whipped out his revolver. But the distance was too great.

He turned with a little moaning sound of anxiety and raced through his house to the stables, where his horse stood ready saddled, night and day. There, also, were riding clothes hanging ready and he literally jumped into them. An instant later his horse tore from the stable-door and swept circling around into the streets of Kirby Creek in a pungent cloud of dust. It would need hard riding indeed to distance Clung to-night. He had much ground to make up.

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.

The Death Sentence

by Charles B. Stilson



SMILING BILL PRENTICE, running a desperate race with an unseen fear, pitched from the brink of a tremendous precipice, gyrated end over end through several hundred feet of breathless nothingness, and fetched up with a sickening *plump*.

Not relaxing for an instant his death grip on the pillow which he had clutched against his abdomen, Bill set his bare feet out on the comforting and tangible coolness of hardwood flooring, padded across it to his bedroom window, and looked out at the calm moonlight and the questioning stars.

Bill's big chest—he wore a seventeen shirt—was heaving and falling by hitches; his hair was moist with the dew of terror, and his light pajamas were as hot and damp as though he had passed through a jet of steam.

"Wow!" he ejaculated, mopping his face with the pillow-case. "Wow! Twice! That's the first time a welsh rarebit ever backfired at me! I haven't dreamed of falling like that since I used to roll marbles!"

Aware of the pillow in his tight embrace, he let it fall on the floor, and kicked at it with his bare toes.

With a catch in his breath and considerable real distress in the region of his heart, Prentice sat for a while in the Morris chair beside the window. With a shrug and a laugh, he eventually picked up his trusty pillow and groped back to bed.

As a child, Bill often had dreamed of falling. Every child does. Beyond a squall of affright, or a bump on the floor if the dream happens to be particularly convincing, the youngsters seem to be none the worse for such nocturnal adventures.

But when grown persons begin to plunge from dizzy heights in their slumbers, or loop the loop without benefit of plane or parachute, they are apt to become suddenly solicitous concerning their cardiac action; and usually the family physician reaps some benefit.

Bill, having no family, and having been all his life almost offensively healthful, had no family physician. When his pillows began to be haunted by "drop the dips" and "shoot the chutes" and other aerial maneuvers—for the first was the precursor of many—he was not immediately troubled thereby, kept the matter to himself, and continued to tread the even tenor of late suppers, matutinal fox-trots, *et cetera*, which made up his bachelor existence outside of the hours passed as the hustling assistant sales-manager of Courser Motors, Inc.

Cobbert, Bill's superior, a sallow, dyspeptic chap, saturated with symptoms and pessimism—when he wasn't talking car—had been almost resentfully envious of his young assistant's perennial high spirits, spring-apple cheeks, and seemingly boundless capacity for work. Cobbert had the eye of a lynx for dark circles, the telltale twitch of a finger, or any other of the hun-

dred minor signals which the body makes when it is unfit.

Cobbert was first to notice that something was going wrong with Bill. He mentioned it to the younger man with a sympathy that was positively gleeful. Prentice confided in him.

"H-m, nightmares, dreams of falling, eh? Palpitation of the heart, and night sweats—you said night sweats, didn't you, Prentice? H-m—all very bad symptoms. Better consult Dr. Bentham."

Bill groaned.

Dr. Bentham was the big town's infallible medical genius; likewise was he an expensive luxury for an assistant sales manager.

But Prentice was badly off-color. There could be no doubt of that. His vertiginous dreams continued and multiplied. He began to lose flesh and nerve. When for three nights in one week he had scaled and dived from peaks beside which that of Pike was a piker, he went to Dr. Bentham.

From his farm-lad days in New England, Elijah Bentham had worshiped an idol of efficiency, whose prophet was system. At the age of fifteen he decided that he would be a physician—the best of physicians. On the day when he held out two square-fingered hands to receive the medical diploma, *cum laude*, which the best university of the East was glad to bestow upon him, his faith in himself and his mentors was unshaken.

But he had added another deity to his pantheon. Its name was Diagnosis.

"Efficiency, System, and Diagnosis; but the greatest of these is Diagnosis," was Bentham's creed. Most ailments had their remedies. Prescription was child's play. Diagnosis, infallible diagnosis, was everything.

Five years of practise in a small town brought Bentham only a local reputation; but it brought at the same time enough money to lift his college obligations, with enough left over so that he could afford a trip abroad. Almost overnight, he sold out his practise and departed.

Six months he had meant to devote to study in a foreign medical institution; but he fell in with a great French physician,

won his interest, and became his assistant. It was more than six years before Bentham returned to America, settled in the big city and put into execution the plan which had been born in his boy's brain.

It was unique.

Within three years Bentham had become an oracle in the city which he had elected to adorn; and his reputation was fast becoming nation-wide. He was infallible.

One hundred dollars in cash was Dr. Bentham's consultation fee. Were the patient who sought him known to be Cæsus himself, Bentham's diagnosis would have cost him no dearer. A bricklayer could buy it for no less.

No matter how obscure or baffling might be a man's symptoms, for one hundred dollars cash he could have the satisfaction of knowing exactly what ailed him. Bentham would have diagnosed the bodily afflictions of Job for one hundred dollars in cash.

Bentham diagnosed. Bentham occasionally prescribed. But Bentham never treated. For that, competing physicians were grateful. Frequently he sent them patients, from whom they extracted much more than one hundred dollars. They did not know whether to rate Bentham as a sage or a jack-fool. But they never disputed his diagnoses. To have done so would have been professional suicide.

Incredible as it seems, Bentham rarely ever saw any of the patients whose ailments he so infallibly classified. Efficiency plus system made it unnecessary that he should.

Bill Prentice had groaned at mention of the name of Bentham. That was because Billy was an impecunious youth. One hundred dollars! It gave him a cold cramp in the region of his bank account.

Courser Motors, Inc., was a bang-up fine concern to work for. It offered excellent prospects for the future of its young men. Alas that the prospects should have been so very future! thought Bill. Old Mr. Rodney Tighe, who directed the firm's fortunes, had made it an inexorable rule that advancement in the service of Courser Motor, Inc., was to be won only by five years of faithful work.

"If a man is worth anything to us, he's worth forty dollars a week. It takes five

years to find out if he's worth more. Start 'em at forty. If they last five years, boost 'em, and boost 'em plenty." That was "Old Tiger's" rule.

Those few who had "stuck for the finish" had found that the boosts were not mythical. Bill Prentice had been with Courser Motors, Inc., for two years only.

At certain periods of a man's life three years is a long, long time.

Billy had decided that it was too long a time to expect brown-eyed Myrtle Rogers to wait for him; so he had not asked her. Bill had his own ideas of fair and square dealing. Myrtle's father had a large bank account. Bill hated and feared comparisons. Heroically he throttled Eros, and left the field clear for Charley Lush.

Two o'clock, afternoon. Dr. Elijah Ben-tham's "establishment." Enters Bill at a respectful distance behind a prominent banker, and with a personage who bears the earmarks (cauliflower) of a broken-down pugilist treading close upon his heels.

They pass an architecturally perfect arch through an aggressively clean white front, and find themselves in a neatly-tiled corridor, where walls and floor and ceiling are immaculate and lustrous as a new set of teeth. Little palms with varnished leaves stand in porcelain jardinières at each side of the entrance. Porcelain salivatories are distributed at discreet intervals along the corridor.

A small window in the tiled wall is set with a wicket of glittering brass, behind which is a young woman with hard, china-blue eyes, "Zaza" hair, and an expression of unbreakable expectancy. A woman with an antediluvian brocade shawl and a Hibernian embroidered brogue has laid siege to the wicket in a voluble and utterly ineffectual effort to moderate the tariff.

The three men chafe impatiently in the office. The banker inspects his watch and finger-nails, Bill aimlessly explores his pant's-pockets, and the prize-fighter makes frequent and expert use of the salivatories.

"Hey, blondy!" calls this last individual, as the woman in the shawl sighs, pays, and muttering makes place for the banker. "Ring up yer ambulance. A fly just slipped up an' hurt hisself on one of yer

shiny palm leaves. I t'ink he busts a leg."

The banker is gone along the corridor. Bill surrenders his century, receiving in return a paper chart of many folds, which reminds him of his draft questionnaire.

"Like buyin' a ticket to the movies, ain't it, bo?" chuckles the pugilist, disinterring a roll, "Make mine an aisle seat, Flavia."

"Waiting-room, end of corridor," announces the unwinking lady of the copper hair and turquoise eyes, with extreme parsimony of language. "You will be called by number."

"By the numbers! Shoulder — *arms!* Hep! Hep! Git that step!" bursts out the irrepressible, again crowding upon Bill's hesitant heels. "Does this guy take out a feller's works an' give 'em the once-over, I wonder?"

Bill shivers.

"I got somethin' in me chist that hums like a hive o' bees," confided the pug. "Me name's McSworp."

Billy had drawn No. 383-X in the orders of the day. He carried it into Dr. Ben-tham's waiting-room, which was as clean and devoid of cheer as had been Dr. Ben-tham's corridor. More tiles, more palms, more salivatories, white-enameled wicker chairs to sit upon, white-enameled wicker reading-tables to sit by, magazines to read.

"Smoking is not encouraged," read a sign framed under glass on the wall.

"Doesn't discourage me," said McSworp, lighting a cigarette. "This may be me last."

Previously-arrived patients were reading, or pretending to. No one seemed inclined to start anything conversational, with the exception of the fighting-man, and no one answered him, with the exception of the woman with the shawl, who told him to "hould his whisht." Everybody read.

The banker chose a sporting magazine, the Irishwoman a high-brow review, and the pugilist a fashion paper. Bill toyed with a motor magazine, but couldn't seem to get interested. In the course of time his number was called by a small darky, who at intervals bobbed like a wooden cuckoo from a white door which was lettered, "Registration-Room."

"So-long, bo," remarked the man from fistiana. "If any one starts anything in the hot room, why, you know me."

Another young woman presided in the registration-room. She was of an aplomb hardly less impenetrable than that of the girl with the china eyes. She vised Prentice's passport, inscribed his age and one or two other salient facts, made for her filing cabinet a duplicate, on which she wrote his name, and steered him toward a door labeled "Heart and Lungs."

Bill twisted the knob diffidently.

"Take off your shirt!" commanded a strident voice.

Then began an orgy of auscultation. Billy was hammered, tapped, thumped, pinched and mauled, inflated, deflated and enervated. When the tormentor wearied—and in time he did, though he was a robustious man—he jotted a grist of cuneiform inscriptions on Bill's questionnaire. When he had filled his allotted space, he folded the paper over with care, and sealed his section with a couple of little red stickers, which he moistened on a sponge.

"All right—liver and pancreas," he announced briskly, drowning Bill's feeble attempt to question him, and waving the patient toward another lettered door.

This was the system of the infallible Bentham.

With great care he had selected and assembled under his roof and guidance ten physicians, each of whom was a specialist of distinction in his chosen field; but who had, because of temperament or other handicaps, failed as practitioners.

On these failures Elijah Bentham had reared the imposing edifice of his astounding success.

Patients who called at the Bentham consultation establishment, after being denuded of their one hundred dollars and their identity, were sent through the ten examination rooms by a simple transfer system. They were ausculted from hair to toe-nails, each specialist sealing his findings from the eyes of his successors.

The complete questionnaire was put into the hands of Bentham himself, who "cast up the sheet," formed his conclusions, and had his infallible diagnosis conveyed to the

waiting patient by the hands of a stenographer.

It seems simple. Reflection will suggest that a physician with less than Bentham's really remarkable judgment would have made a miserable mess of it.

In another sanitary waiting-room—a smaller one this time, furnished with one chair and one table only—which had earned the sobriquet of "Hall of Fate," Billy Prentice sat to wait for the answer of the oracle.

Presently, which was unusual to the routine of the establishment, another patient joined him. It was the prize-fighter. Mr. McSworp had been somewhat subdued by his recent experiences.

"That was a tough ten rounds, I'll say," he remarked. "Wonder what th' decision will be?"

A narrow white door opened.

Contrary to his established custom, Dr. Bentham had come to deliver his dictum in person—sign that the dictum itself was out of the ordinary.

Perhaps, noting his victim's age—Bill was twenty-five—the scientist was moved by a certain cold, scientifically unemotional curiosity to note the effect of the sentence which he had to deliver.

He raised his eyebrows slightly when he saw two patients where he had looked for but one; but he did not hold back.

"Number 383-X?" he questioned.

Bill stood up.

Dr. Bentham stood squarely in his square doorway. Square-toed shoes were on his feet, and a square-cut coat of professional somberness hung from his square shoulders. He looked at the young man through square, shell-rimmed spectacles; and his chill regard was direct and level. Squarely and uncompromisingly he spoke:

"You have an aneurism of the aorta. It has progressed beyond the aid of medical science. You have, in my judgment, fifty-six hours to live."

He laid on the possessive pronoun a cold emphasis, calculated to remind the hearers that it was Bentham the infallible who had spoken; that the minutes and seconds of those fifty-six hours had been numbered; that they would be 3,360 minutes, or 201,600 seconds, neither more nor less.

Prentice felt his brain rock on its foundations and his body on its heels. That was imagination. Outwardly he stood as squarely as Bentham; but his face began to reflect the pallor of the tiled walls.

For the fraction of a second Bentham gazed at his patient unwaveringly, and then permitted himself an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders. It had not been worth while leaving his desk. He held out a piece of cardboard. It was stamped with Bill's consultation number, and bore in cold ink the same information which the doctor had just imparted.

"Here is your diagnosis, sir."

Bill advanced and took it. His throat was hot and dry; but he managed to say "thank you" clearly. Dr. Bentham's square door closed upon Dr. Bentham's square coat-skirts.

McSworp came out of the fog in which the gruesome proceedings had enveloped him. He was profanely sympathetic, mopping his red face with a yellow silk handkerchief, and extending a damp and damaged hand.

"By Gawd, buddy, that was a cold way to count a guy out!" he exclaimed. "But you took it game, like an old-timer!" He lowered his voice. "Say, buddy, if you want to pry the lid off a bit before yer zero hour, look me up. Me name's McSworp. I know where it can be did."

"Thank you," said Bill, shaking the proffered hand. He went out into the street, followed by the pugilist's commiserating gaze.

"Fifty-six hours to live!"

From the card the words had seared themselves into Bill's retinas. Everywhere he looked, he read large upon building, street, or sky, the horrible legend, writ in monstrous enlargement of Dr. Bentham's square, precise chirography.

Penetrating through the *mélange* of all the city's busy clatter, he could hear a measured, emotionless voice, which repeated endlessly the hateful syllables:

"Fifty-six hours to live!"

A newsboy thrust an afternoon extra before his face. What could it matter to Prentice that anarchy swept Russia, starvation stalked through Armenia, and Bol-

shevism menaced America? He had the end of the world and the shadow of chaos in his own soul. So far as concerned him, the world and all its troubles would be ended in fifty-six hours.

His eye had picked up the date on the newspaper. It was Tuesday, August 19. He pulled out the card.

Yes; the damnable doctor had forgotten nothing. He had jotted down the precise minute at which he had reached his conclusion—"3.31 P.M."

Bill calculated, his brain functioning with cruel lucidity. Adding fifty-six hours to 3.31 P.M., Tuesday, would set his "zero-hour" as 11.31 P.M., Thursday.

He would be extinguished then on Thursday night, just as the life which he loved was entering upon its nightly orbit—just as the after-theater crowds were settling in their chairs to consult their *menus* under the bright lights; just as the musicians were beginning to warm up to their best; and little feet in dainty pumps were expectantly marking time.

He could see it all. He shut his eyes hard, and saw it more plainly.

But what was he going to do with his last fifty-six hours?

That question had not yet arrived to Bill. The dread fact itself overspread his horizon to the exclusion of any other consideration. He did not return to the salesroom of Courser Motors, Inc. Mechanically he followed a sidewalk crowd into a movie theater, walked out again less than an hour later, leaving the athletic hero in the midst of the most thrilling fight in his career, and went home to his bachelor quarters in the *Wilsonia*.

He bathed, shaved, and dawdled until evening. He dined alone in a strange restaurant and with scant appetite, returned to his rooms, read page after page in a magazine, where everything was a monotonous repetition of four words; and went early to bed.

Much to his surprise, he did not dream of falling; but he *did* dream of Myrtle Rogers. He awoke in the morning to a poignant realization that his desertion of the field in favor of Charley Lush had been the hollowest of pretense; and that he never had

entertained the slightest suspicion that Myrtle would look at the Lush person seriously.

"Well, what are you going to do about it now?" he asked, sitting on the edge of the bed and watching the antics of a patch of sunshine which a flapping shade was causing to cavort along the floor.

It was then that there smote Bill like a kick in the stomach the realization that nearly eighteen of his precious fifty-six hours were gone. He leaped up, dressed, and went out to breakfast at the old accustomed place, jaunty as he had not been in weeks.

Gone were the daze, the hang-dog feeling, and much of the pain. Smiling Bill had made up his mind to be the master of his own fate in the brief space which remained at his disposal, and to continue to be Smiling Bill to the end.

Over his eggs and muffins he argued somewhat in this wise, with philosophic finality:

"Would it be square with Myrtle to propose to her, knowing what I know? I want to know before I go whether she cares a cuss for me or not. If she does, I can—well, no; I can't say that I'll die happy; but it will be a whole lot more satisfactory sort of unhappiness. If she doesn't, why, hang it, old Doc Benthams can make it one hour for all that I care.

"If she cares for me, it seems to me that she'll feel just as bad when I die, whether she has told me or not—it might be some satisfaction to the dear girl to remember that she had made my last hours brighter. If she doesn't care, my death isn't going to make her feel very badly anyway; and this card of old Benthams will prove that I didn't kill myself because she had refused me; so she won't need to feel any remorse on that account.

"I'm going to ask her! I'll go this afternoon. And, by heck, I'll go in style! I've denied myself the luxury of a real little bus long enough.

"I've got something like three thousand iron men in the bank, and only two days to spend 'em in. I might as well have what I want."

Prentice knew where there was a sporty

little runabout of a model which his heart had longed for, ready for immediate delivery. It was *not* a Courser. To remove from its purchase any stigma of disloyalty, Bill stepped into a telephone station, got Cobbert on the wire, and summarily dismissed himself, with regrets, from Old Tiger's sales force.

"Something better in view?" queried the surprised Cobbert, who had come to view Bill as one of the fixtures.

"They all say it is," was Bill's ambiguous reply.

He drew his entire balance from the bank. Nineteen hundred and sixty dollars the car cost him; and he paid it without a tremor, though only yesterday he had groaned at parting with a hundred.

Trentman, manager of the Acton-Clark Company's sales-rooms, happened to be in, and witnessed the purchase of the machine. He was politely curious.

"Some one in this establishment has a raise coming, I guess," he grinned. "If he can talk strong enough to sell an Acton-Clark to a Courser salesman, he's worth more money than he's getting. But what will Old Tiger say when he sees it, son?"

Billy flushed.

"I'm not with Courser Motors any more," he explained, clambering into his new acquisition and pulling the choke-button. The eight-cylinder motor began to purr delightfully.

"That so?" Trentman was more than ever interested. "Going up-town, son? If you are, you can give me a lift." He winked.

"See here, Prentice," he began, when they were under way, "I've always been averse to pirating men from other concerns, or I'd have had a gun at your head a year ago. I'm sorry that I didn't know you were contemplating a change. Must be something pretty good to pry you loose from the Tiger, eh?"

"To tell the truth, Mr. Trentman, I've nothing certain—that is—er—I don't know just what my next job is going to be," stammered Bill.

"Glad to hear it, son," countered Trentman, laying a hand upon Bill's shoulder. "Here's my situation: I've been taken

into the firm. I'm going to look after the production end a good bit, and split my time between here and Detroit.

"I want a sales manager here. You suit me, if the job suits you. I'm tying five thousand a year to it, for a starter. Will you sit in?"

Bill liked Trentman, liked the Acton-Clark car, wanted the job, hated to turn it down; but—but how was he going to explain?

Trentman ascribed his hesitation to another cause, and shook his head disappointedly. "I might have known that you were hooked up to something with a gilt handle. I'm sorry that I can't offer more just now. But I can guarantee that you wouldn't have to wait long, Prentice."

"It's not that at all, Mr. Trentman," blurted Bill. "I—I can't tell you just what it is right now. I'd darned well like to take the job."

His obvious distress puzzled Trentman.

"Drop me here," directed the Acton-Clark man. "Remember that we want you, and think the matter over. My offer stands for ten days, son. If I don't hear from you within that time, I shall know that it's all off."

Bill motored on down the avenue, his head buzzing. Presently he pulled in along the curb and entered a store, where he blushing paid over five hundred odd dollars for an article which slipped very easily into his vest pocket.

After a spin along the river road and through Valley Park, he ate a four-dollar dinner, walloped his friend Johnny Norris a rubber at three-cushion billiards, and turned the nose of the new car in the direction of the Rogers home.

Myrtle was at home. She was unaffectedly glad to see Bill, marvelously and intelligently interested in the shining run-about; and being without malice, forbore both then and thereafter to grill him for his unexplained desertion. She yessed his invitation and flew to don her motoring togs.

It was a perfect afternoon. Come what might on the morrow night, Bill grudged not one of its fleeting hours.

"Billy boy, I just *love* this car!"

Myrtle's exclamation came as they were returning across the park after a thirty-mile spin through the country.

"Does that include all of the attachments, Myrtle?" asked Bill; and his throat began to feel dry. "Because—" The dryness became an obstruction.

"Billy, are you trying to put the burden of a proposal upon my slender shoulders? Because—"

Myrtle's pause was not mimicry. Her own throat was dry. Quite suddenly the opportunity to cooperate had come to her; and she had done her best. She became a bit panicky when she saw Bill turn off the ignition switch. The car drifted into the shade of a lonely elm and stopped, as gradually and smoothly as a watch that has run down.

What followed is not the public's business. It is sufficient to chronicle that the ring fitted.

At the Lyceum that evening Myrtle divided her attention between the antics of the comedian and the scintillant splendors of her diamond solitaire, which responded magnificently to the challenge of the cluster chandelier in the dome. Bill's prospects with the Acton-Clark Company had oiled the last ripple of parental objection.

Poor Bill! Insanely happy, desperately miserable Billy! It is beyond the power of human computation to estimate what it cost him to keep up the smile which he wore for Myrtle.

Again his dreams were peaceful. That he could sleep at all under the circumstances was further proof to him that his end was approaching fast.

"Poor Myrtle! Poor little girl! This isn't fair to her; and I've made a rotten play," soliloquized Bill, sitting on the edge of his bed in the gray dawn of his last day. "Well, she'll have to go through with it now."

One more brief day of heaven Prentice passed with the girl of his heart and the car of his choice. After a dinner at the Rogers home, he countered all entreaties, and crept back to his rooms to die. He dared take no chances. It would be a low down trick, he felt, to die in the Rogers parlor.

When he reached his den it was nine o'clock. He stopped his mantel clock and his watch. He did not feel equal to the suspense of watching their slow, inexorable hands creep on relentlessly toward the fatal hour.

On the table he placed Dr. Bentham's diagnosis card, where it could not fail to be found. He read his death sentence again.

"Gee! I'm beginning to feel pretty low," he muttered. He donned his dressing-gown, took his favorite book in his hand, and sat down in his Morris chair to wait for the Messenger.

But the book failed to hold his attention. He became sleepy.

"It must be the drowsiness which precedes death," he thought. The printed letters swam in a maze.

A prolonged ringing of his telephone-bell awakened him. From force of habit, he glanced at the clock, forgetting that he had silenced it. Its hands still marked one minute past nine.

The summons of the bell sounded again. Bill stumbled across the room. He felt very low indeed.

"Hello! Hello!" came a nervous female voice. "Mr. Prentice talking? Oh, I'm so glad! I've had an awful time findin' you. I'm talking from the all-night drug-store at Concord and Liberty. I'll be right up, Mr. Prentice."

Bill tried to word a horrified protest. Ye gods! Suppose he were to die with a strange woman in his rooms!

"I'm afraid—you see, I'm alone—"

"Oh, I know that it ain't conventional exactly," cut in the voice, punctuated by a shaky giggle. "But I just gotta see you—alone. Only for a minute. My job depends on it. Good-by."

"Here! Hi! Wait, and I'll— Good Lord, she's hung up!"

Five minutes later Bill opened his door to a blond young woman, who was obviously frightened and nervous, and just as obviously enjoying the adventure, in spite of that.

"I've called an' called; but you wasn't in," she began, her eyes roving curiously about the apartment. "Then there's been trouble on your line to-day. I just made

up my mind to come late enough to-night so's to be sure to find you."

She approached Bill's table, saw the Bentham diagnosis lying there, and swooped upon it as she captured it with a hysterical gurgle.

"There it is!" she shrilled. "But for the luvva Mike, mister, please, *please* don't make a complaint to Dr. Bentham! I've got an orphan sister to support, an' I don't know where I'd ever find another good job like this one."

Bill drew himself up and folded his arms across his bathrobe with the majestic dignity of one who feels that he is already far gone in the valley of the shadow.

"Madam, to what am I—"

"Why, don't you see? I'm Bentham's secretary. I got rattled the other day, tryin' to do my work an' him a long-distance connection with *Chicawgo* at the same time, an' I stamped the wrong number onto two diagnosis cards."

"You—stamped—the wrong—numbers!" Bill gasped, losing his majesty and collapsing into his Morris chair. "Then what—"

"Mr. Prentice, *that ain't your card!*"

The girl burrowed in her hand-bag.

"Here's yours. I'd 'a' got it to you sooner; but I didn't know your name, an' I had to watch my chance an' steal two sets of records out of the M's and P's in Maybelle's filing cabinets."

She held out another pasteboard. Mechanically Bill read the diagnosis upon it, set there in Dr. Bentham's square penmanship:

Stomach slightly fatigued. Take tonic. Avoid late hours and overstimulating foods for a time.

"You won't tell Dr. Bentham, will you, Mr. Prentice?" the girl faltered tearfully, clasping and unclasping her hands. "It's my first mistake. Bentham would fire me like scat if he ever knew. You won't tell, will you?"

"Bless you, no; I won't say a word." Bill's response was rather vague; for his brain was crowded with thought. "But what about the other chap?"

"Oh, Mr. McSworp, you mean? He won't tell. He died two hours ago."

The Shadowers

by David Fox

NOVEL I—THE MAN WHO CONVICTED HIMSELF (*Continued*)

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

REX POWELL, who had a first-hand knowledge of the underworld, conceived the idea of forming a crime-detecting organization of men who had been crooks. He took into partnership with him "Professor" George Roper, ex-medium and faker; Lucian Baynes, ex-smuggler, art and jewel expert; Clifford Nichols, ex-counterfeiter; "Dr." Henry Corliss, chemist; and Philip Howe, ex-cracksman. They called themselves "The Shadowers, Inc.," and engaged offices, which were placed in charge of quick-witted Ethel Jepson, who had been a shoplifter.

Their first case was that of Horace Punderford, retired merchant. His daughter, Mildred, told the Shadowers that while the lights had been out during a séance the previous evening her father had gone mad; her aunt, Miss Hornbottle, had suffered a stroke; the safe had been robbed, and the body of a man, apparently a burglar, had been found on the floor of the library.

Rex, Phil, and George were introduced by Mrs. Punderford as friends of the family. At the séance, in addition to the Punderfords, had been a Mr. Leacraft, Alan Goodhue (interested in Mildred), Mr. Scaynes, a mystic; Miss Hornbottle, and Mrs. Fraser, a friend of the family. Investigation developed that the safe had been opened either by an expert burglar or by some one who knew the combination. In it they found a note-book that showed that Punderford had been paying blackmail. It also contained objects of art of nominal value. George had an interview with Scaynes, and decided that he was a "wonder." From him they learned that a stork-pin, set with pearls, was missing. The other members of the Shadowers were called on the case. Henry had discovered that the man on the library floor had only been drugged, and had taken him to a place where he could be watched.

After a study of a lump of clay found on the floor, Lucian Baynes announced that he would take charge of the case. Henry learned from his prisoner, "Solo Dan" Cronin, that he had entered the library to rob the safe, had seen three bright spots and a pair of hands, and had become unconscious. Lucian made a trip to Washington, and, despite precautions, was followed. Phil located Mrs. Fraser in an up-town apartment, and purchased a taxi-cab so he could shadow her. Ethel was placed in the Punderford house as maid to Mrs. Punderford—who knew that she was a member of the Shadowers. She recognized Mrs. Punderford as a woman who had been the cause of one of Ethel's friends being sent to prison, and vowed that she should pay. Rex reassumed his real name—Pickney—and called upon an old friend, Ormsby, who introduced him to Leacraft. George learned that Punderford had started his business career with Kotoba & Jennings, importers, and had been discharged for stealing.

Punderford regained consciousness, and Rex sent Henry, George, and Lucian to talk with him, while he stayed with Solo Dan.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. PUNDERFORD'S STORY.

"YOU will be very gentle with him, and very brief, doctor?" pleaded Mrs. Punderford as she met them in the hallway of her home, her tall figure losing nothing of its dignity because of the dark, shapeless wrapper with which it was clothed nor the wisps of graying hair which strayed about her haggard face.

"I sent for you at once, of course, but

I did not think it would be necessary for these other gentlemen to see him. He is not in any condition to be questioned now. Perhaps in the morning he will be stronger—"

"It is absolutely necessary for Mr. Roper and Mr. Baynes to accompany me, Mrs. Punderford," Henry responded with respectful firmness. "They can sit in different parts of the room where they will not come within his line of vision, but we three must see him absolutely alone."

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for April 3.

"Alone? Do you mean that I am not to be present?" Her tones had risen sharply. "I shall never consent to that! Never! My husband has only just aroused from his stupor; he is weak, he needs my care, the comfort of my presence! I will not have him harassed, tortured by questions now!"

"Is that your real reason, madam?" Lucian had stepped forward quietly. "You have assured us that nothing is missing from the safe, and that all that remains of the case for us to handle is the discovery of the blackmailer. What if I were to remind your husband of something else, something that *was* taken from the safe, whether you were aware of its presence there or not? Is it not rather for him to decide than for you?"

White to the very lips, Mrs. Punderford drew back with a gesture of defeat.

"I told you the truth," she murmured. "Nothing has been taken from the safe, nothing! He will tell you so, himself. You are overzealous in the pursuit of your profession, Mr. Baynes; but I have placed the case in your hands, and it is too late to reconsider now, even if I would. Only, please be very gentle with him!"

She led the way as noiselessly as a wraith up the stairs, and on the landing above they came upon a quiet little figure, still fully dressed even to the diminutive apron, and it required more than a second glance from them to identify the demure maid as Ethel Jepson.

Mrs. Punderford glanced at her in silent exasperation, but she coolly ignored the older woman and drew Lucian aside.

"Look sharp that that looney old bird doesn't butt in on you!" she warned. "He had a scrap with the nurse because he wasn't allowed to go in and pray over Mr. Punderford. Hear him now in his own room jabbering away!"

"You mean Baynes?" Lucian whispered back, and even as he did so a low, crooning sound with a weird, monotonous cadence in its slow measures came from behind a closed door half-way down the hall.

Ethel nodded.

"Fierce, ain't it? I'll tell the world this is some bug-house you put me in!"

"Oh, Ethel," Henry edged close to her, "Mr. Powell told me to tell you to be sure to report as soon as you can get away."

"It 'll be *some* report!" promised that young lady darkly as she stepped back that the others might follow to where Mrs. Punderford waited in cold displeasure at the door of the sick-room.

A night light was burning very low at the bed's head, and by its glow they discerned a short, plump figure drawn up grotesquely beneath the sheets, and became aware of a pair of small, drug-dulled eyes which stared at them fixedly from among the pillows.

In health Horace Punderford must have been a well-preserved, well-groomed looking little man of the smug, unctuous type; now his white side-whiskers straggled forlornly from the flabby, pendulous cheeks which had assumed a pasty, gray hue, and his portly body shrank limply as if deflated into the soft expanse of the huge, canopied bed.

From beside it a tall, ungainly figure arose, and as Mrs. Punderford closed the door softly but impressively behind her and moved off down the hall, he addressed himself to Henry, speaking quickly in low, guttural tones. Then he, too, retired, and the three Shadowers were alone with their client.

"Who are you?" It was a hoarse whisper, little more than a breath which issued from the parched lips, and the dull eyes moved slowly, heavily from one face to another. "What do you want of me?"

"I'm Dr. Corliss," observed Henry, moving forward in his best professional manner. "This is my colleague, Dr. Baynes. You've been a very sick man, you know, Mr. Punderford; but you are coming around nicely now, nicely! Nothing at all to worry about. Mrs. Punderford called us in—"

"I remember, now." The words came slowly and the plump fingers which had been picking at the silken coverlet were all at once motionless. "You are the Shadowers."

"We are, and at your complete service," Henry responded as he poured a few drops of dark liquid into a glass of water and

held it to his patient's lips. "Mrs. Punderford told you of us?"

Punderford drank deeply and sighed with relief as his flaccid head sank back among the pillows.

"Detectives?" His dull eyes seemed to burn.

"Not exactly." It was Lucian who replied as he took Henry's place and seated himself by the side of the bed. "Call us rather adjuncts to yourself if you are in any difficulty; eyes for you, ears and brains and hands working for you alone, but with closed lips.

"Is your mind quite clear enough for you to understand me, Mr. Punderford? We are absolutely discreet, we take nothing to the authorities, we work wholly in your interests. No matter what your problem, you are safe in our hands."

Punderford's eyes closed slowly, and a faint tinge of color crept into his pasty, gray cheeks.

"You refer to the—the blackmail?" His breath came gaspingly. "It has been—been hell, gentlemen, but I have reason to believe that it has ceased."

"I referred also to the robbery of your safe." Lucian bent closer to the form upon the bed, then glanced significantly at George. The fingers which had commenced once more to pluck at the coverlet were as suddenly still.

"There was none. My—my wife assures me that nothing is missing but the letters which—which she permitted you to remove."

"Mr. Punderford," George seated himself on the other side of the bed and Lucian moved his chair back into shadow, "to-morrow when you are stronger I will bring you an inventory of the present contents of the safe and you shall check it off for yourself. It may be that your wife is mistaken."

The head with its flowing white whiskers moved impatiently on the pillow.

"She could not be; she knows its contents as well as I myself." His voice was stronger and his fingers began their restless picking once more. "Do not concern yourself with the safe, gentlemen. The attempt at robbery failed."

"Suppose you tell us as nearly as you remember, the events of last Sunday night? If you have reason to believe that nothing is missing, and that the person who has been systematically blackmailing you will cease his efforts to extort more money from you, Mr. Punderford, there is still a greater problem to be solved, and one which is fraught with more danger to yourself." George paused, and added impressively: "We must discover who it is that has been poisoning you."

The effect was electrifying. Horace Punderford drew himself up from his pillow and a steely glitter burst for an instant through the drug film over his eyes.

"Poison!" he croaked. "You are mad! Why should any one wish to poison me? No one will profit from my death except my wife and daughter! How—when have I been poisoned?"

"You are suffering from the effects of poison now, Mr. Punderford; one of the deadliest poisons known to medical science," Henry interposed gravely. "Tell us what you remember of last Sunday night."

"I know that I had been feeling queerly all day; my head, I mean. It did not ache, but felt congested and as if—as if my brain were pressing against my skull."

The feeble voice was gradually steadying under the influence of the powerful medicine which Henry had given him in the draft of water.

"I laid my condition to the oppressive heat which had continued all day, but with the cool of the evening my head seemed to grow worse instead of better. I said nothing of it for fear of worrying my wife, who was disturbed enough over the serious trouble I have had lately with my eyes.

"When the séance started the darkness was a relief to me at first, and then as the minutes lengthened I seemed to see strange shapes moving toward me in a rush, and then receding. Absurd, of course, when there was not a ray of light in the room.

"I—I assure you, gentlemen, that I actually feared that I was going mad! I could scarcely control myself in that silence which was broken only by the convulsive breathing of those in the circle. I

don't remember it very clearly, it—it all seems now like a haze, a nightmare!"

His trembling hands went up to his face, and Henry poured some fresh water into a glass, adding the drops from his vial. As he passed George to administer it to his patient he whispered:

"Cut it short; I don't dare give him another dose."

Punderford drank eagerly as before, and then raising himself a little on his pillows, he went on:

"I do remember, though, when that sound as of something soft but heavy falling came from the library. It seemed to break something in me that had held me taut, and I sprang up and rushed in there. I saw the open safe, and heard some one scream, and then—then the walls seemed to rush at me as those strange shapes had in the darkness!"

"I don't know what I did, nor how I came to reach my room, but I must have been conscious, for that frightful effect—nightmare, if you choose to call it that, for I know no other way to describe it—continued for days and days! Just of hideous, unnamable creatures all about me, and the walls—the walls—"

"I know, Mr. Punderford. The symptoms are perfectly familiar to me, and I shall not distress you further to-night," Henry interposed soothingly. "There is one thing I must impress upon you, however; do not tell any one in your household that there is a suspicion of your having been poisoned."

"No"—as the aged man started up in bed once more in wild alarm—"there is no thought in any of our minds that a soul beneath your roof would be capable of such a deed, and the intention was not to kill you, you know, but to bring about temporarily just the condition you have described."

"But why—why?" Punderford cried.

"We will discuss that when you are stronger." George rose. "In the mean time, it is supposed that you have been suffering from the nervous shock incidental to the discovery of your rifled safe. But I forget; it was not rifled, after all, since nothing was taken."

"But something *was* taken." Lucian bent very low over the sick man and spoke softly into his ear. "That was taken for which you have been blackmailed all these years; that is why you believe that the extortion will cease now, isn't it, Mr. Punderford?"

The plump fingers clawed at the coverlet and the dulled eyes sought to evade the keen, blue ones bent inexorably above them, but no words came.

"Remember," Lucian's smooth voice, though still very low, took on an added note of strength and reassurance, "we are working for you only, and in your interests. I know what was taken—"

"No! No!" The sick man struggled up to a sitting posture with hands outflung as if to ward off a blow. "You are mistaken! The blackmail—that was another matter. But I have not been robbed, I tell you! I have not been robbed—"

The outstretched arms stiffened and fell to his sides, and Punderford dropped back inertly upon the pillows.

"Now you *have* done it!" observed Henry as he returned to the bedside and hastily prepared his hypodermic syringe. "Couldn't that knockout have waited until morning?"

"Not from what I learned in Washington to-day," responded Lucian gravely. "The man is our client, and in common decency he must be warned that his secret is no longer his own."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WATER-FRONT SHACK.

THE nurse was recalled, and after Henry had given him copious instructions the three took their leave. They saw no more of Ethel, and the crooning chant from the theosophist's room had ceased, but in the lower hall Mrs. Punderford awaited them.

"My husband—he is— He will recover?" She spoke quietly, but one quivering hand found its way to her throat.

"Absolutely, if you will not interfere with the instructions which I have just given to the nurse." Henry spoke with

uncompromising sternness. "I know that it will be difficult for you, but you must remember that your selfish desire to appease your own anxiety by being with your husband will positively endanger his life."

"Dr. Corliss! I—I have never been spoken to in this manner in my life!" She drew herself up indignantly, but as he did not abate an iota of his severity of expression she added: "Do you mean that I may not even see—"

"I mean that your husband must remain in absolute seclusion with his nurse; that not even you must cross the threshold of his room until I have pronounced him out of danger."

With this decisive order they took their departure and made their way down town once more to Pink-Eye Mike's. The drive was a comparatively silent one, for Lucian at the wheel of the car was not inclined to be communicative, and his reference to his Washington trip had given the others food for thought.

When the Third Avenue saloon was reached, Henry asked:

"You'll let me know the next time you go to interview Punderford, won't you, Luce? There is something else I want to ask you about his condition, something entirely apart from this hashish business, and yet it may prove to be the key to this whole matter."

"Will he be in any condition to talk to-morrow morning?" Lucian countered.

"I'm afraid not, after the scare you threw into him just at the last. Better give him another twenty-four hours' rest at least before you tackle him again. I think Hendrik can be relied upon to look after him all right, and you don't anticipate another attempt to poison him, do you?"

Lucian shook his head.

"No. The object of that has been achieved. Nevertheless, I want one more conversation with him at the earliest possible moment. I'll see that you are relieved here when we go up there again."

"You'll see that I'm relieved before that, if you want to know by what means our young friend up-stairs here was made to play dead!" Henry retorted. "I'm not sure, but I think I have discovered the na-

ture of the drug which was used upon him, and the method of its application, and if I am right it is the most fiendish thing that has been perpetrated in the civilized world.

"I've sent for a specimen of the drug I have in mind. It will be delivered at the office, and the minute it arrives I want to make some experiments in my laboratory. You'll be sure to let me know?"

Lucian promised, and Henry mounted the rickety stairs to change places with Rex and take up once more his duties as jailer.

To his unbounded amazement he found Solo Dan and Rex seated side by side on the narrow bed, talking apparently in the most confidential and friendly manner imaginable.

At his entrance Rex looked up with a quizzical smile.

"Hello, Henry. Do you know, I don't think we have been treating our young friend here quite fairly. He is obviously over the effects of the drug sufficiently to get about alone, and he assures me that he has a most important engagement which he must keep."

"Yes; he gave me that stall, too!" Henry retorted disgustedly.

Solo Dan scowled ferociously at his late benefactor, and then turned eagerly to his new ally.

"I don't think it is a stall," Rex remarked, blandly disregarding his colleagues' scorn. "He assures me that if he is prevented from keeping this engagement he is likely to get in bad again with the authorities, and I am inclined to believe him, and to take his word for it that he will return here of his own accord within an hour."

"Rex, have you gone crazy?" Henry stared at him open-mouthed. "You know what Luce said—"

"And Luce is below? Let us go down and talk to him about it. Remember, my boy," Rex turned to the lowering youth, "don't try the fire-escape route. I'll do the best I can for you."

Seizing the reluctant Henry by the arm, he led him resolutely out and down the stairs.

"I don't get you!" Henry groaned. "I

don't get you at all! That kid has more than hinted, unconsciously, of course, that he had an accomplice in that job or was hired to do it, and that the man, whoever he was, double-crossed him by putting him out with that drug and leaving him to face the music. We've got to keep him until we can make him come across and tell us who it was."

"Why not let him lead us to the man?"

Rex asked quietly.

"Huh?"

"Why not turn him loose now and trail him? It is by far the simplest way. I'll shadow him and you and Luce and George can follow in the car to grab him again when he reaches his destination, for, of course, he has no intention of returning to be shut up again at Pink-Eye Mike's."

"That is what is bothering him, his accomplice or employer. He wants to find out if he has been double-crossed or not, and if the other has the swag."

"It listens mighty well, even if it is the old dick stuff," Henry agreed. "Let us go and see what Luce thinks of it."

What Luce thought of it was evident from the fact that after the briefest of colloquies beside the waiting car Henry returned to the guarded room upstairs and presented to Solo Dan the bundle containing his clothes.

In less than five minutes that worthy was slinking stealthily down the stair, doubtful still of his good fortune and fearing a new frame-up, yet when he shot the bolts and slipped out of the side door of Pink-Eye Mike's, no car was visible and no human figure met his practised scrutiny of doorways and alleys in the fast graying dawn.

"For the luva Gawd, they meant it!" he muttered to himself. "They're bug-house, the lot of them!"

Like a gaunt, gray cat he slunk through an alley, emerged behind a shanty, climbed a heap of rusting old iron, dodged behind a warehouse and through a short passage-way between two houses, to emerge upon the "avenoo" whose every haunt to him was familiar. At this hour it was deserted except for an occasional dray, and only the rattle and rumble of the Elevated road over his head disturbed the silence.

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Once again he peered cautiously about him, then, finally convinced that he was not being trailed, he struck off to the south and eastward. Habit made him weave his way in a zigzag course through the side streets, but his thoughts were busied with the coming tryst.

Here it was Tuesday night — or rather, Wednesday morning. He was to have been there at midnight, and it would go hardly with him to arrive empty-handed, let alone five hours late! Would his story be believed, or had it really been a frame-up?

He did not dream that behind him, now near, now blocks away, but always keeping him in sight, a silent, sure-footed figure shadowed him relentlessly and still farther back a carefully muffled car, gray as the dawn itself, trailed in their rear.

At length he reached a narrow, noisome street close to the river, the dank odors of which mingled with those of tanning hides, street refuse, garlic and stale malt. Close to the water-front a taxi was drawn up before a low wooden shack, its cornice still gay with the tarnished gilt of a brewery sign, and Solo Dan gave an audible sigh of relief at the incongruous sight. He wasn't too late, after all.

The taxi was empty of passenger and chauffeur alike, but its wheels were significantly locked and Solo Dan grinned slyly to himself as he pushed aside the battered swinging doors and without a backward glance disappeared inside.

Three minutes later Rex Powell cautiously crept up, not to the swinging doors, but to a chink in the blinds through which a low light rivaled the dawn, and glued his eyes to the aperture. The silent motor-car glided half-way down the block and stopped, its occupants alighting and slowly approaching that stooped, watchful figure.

"Wonder-what's going on in there?" George muttered to Henry. "Something pretty lively, or Rex wouldn't—"

He broke off in astonishment, for Rex had turned and was speeding toward them on light, noiseless feet. When he reached them they saw that his eyes glittered strangely, and his usually impassive face was alive with an emotion which they could not fathom.

"What is it?" Lucian asked quickly.

"Come!" Rex's voice sounded as though he were slowly strangling. "Come, all of you, and see with whom Solo Dan is keeping his appointment!"

CHAPTER XXV.

PHIL HOWE'S PASSENGER.

IN the early afternoon of the previous day any one who chanced to pass the northern corner of the Fitzroy-Lennox might have observed a resplendent taxi glistening in new paint drawn up comfortably under the single shade tree which grew upon the curb at the opposite side of West End Avenue. Its flag denoted that it was engaged, and the trim chauffeur sat very straight behind the wheel, his eyes fixed unwaveringly on the entrance of the ornate apartment-house across the way, yet the motor was dead, the meter remained at zero, and hour after hour passed while still his fare made no appearance.

The inquiring policeman who came along was properly snubbed by the production of a brand-new license and an order permitting independent taxi number 06439 to stand at that particular corner until it disintegrated, if its owner so willed.

A stray dog came and investigated the rear lamp and number, but a sleek cat upon a near-by stoop diverted his attention, and a lone chauffeur, chugging garageward, paused to pass the time of day. More than that was passed when he learned that this strange upstart driver belonged to no union, but Phil met his recriminations with such a vigorous flood of underworld invective in retaliation that he decided to continue on his way.

Thereafter peace and boredom reigned. The afternoon was very hot and the warm, enervating breeze rustled the dry leaves on the branches above him in a restful, soothing way. In spite of his mission Phil began to nod over the wheel and his thoughts were growing nebulous when all at once a sound pierced his consciousness which aroused him to instant alertness.

It was a whistle, mellow and dulcet, but unmistakably a command. Straightening,

he glanced across at the entrance of the Fitzroy-Lennox and observed the majestic doorman in all the panoply of his gold braid and brass buttons beckoning to him in a lofty, dignified manner.

Phil was in a quandary. Should he point to his flag and shake his head, thereby losing a chance of gaining the fare he sought? The odds were strongly against the possibility that Mrs. Fraser, out of all the occupants of that vast establishment, should be the one to require a car now. He glanced up at her windows, but their dainty curtains were closely drawn and blank.

What should he do?

Another blast of the whistle, exasperated and not so mellow, smote upon his ear and he darted another swift look across to the entrance. A woman, slender, and clad in black, stood beside the doorman; a veil was loosely draped about her large, flat hat and as he watched a traitorous puff of that warm little breeze lifted it. Surely that was a glint of red beneath!

With a speed and dexterity which would have done justice to the celebrated Hair-pin Turn, Phil threw the wheel over and brought the car up with a swirl before the entrance of the Fitzroy-Lennox.

"Look sharp, my man!" warned the doorman haughtily. "You'll get little trade around here if you loaf on the job. Careful of the door, Mrs. Fraser. It don't hardly look as though the paint was dry."

Phil growled something deep in his throat at the doorman, but he could not help the little thrill of elation which ran through him as the mention of her name put all lingering doubt at rest. Until that moment it had not occurred to him that some other of the many tenants of the Fitzroy-Lennox might have been endowed with red hair and the possibility, now that he had escaped it, made him cold.

The lady had said something in a lowered town to the doorman, and now the latter observed superciliously to Phil:

"0501 Fifth Avenue. Down through the park."

With a mental resolve to fix that doorman before he was through with him, Phil turned the car sharply and swung across town to the nearest entrance to the park.

He had almost reached it when he suddenly remembered that he had forgotten to turn the lever of the meter, and with the thought came a sudden inspiration.

How could he make Mrs. Fraser look for his car when she wanted to taxi about, and prefer it to all others? By altering the meter and lowering the rate, of course!

Phil could have laughed aloud at the simplicity of it. He knew that instinctively all women looked upon the money paid to taxi drivers as sheer extortion, and the shrewd-eyed fare he carried was no fool. She was always complaining to the management about one thing or another, the house employee had told him that morning; well, he would please her or die in the attempt.

To one of the most expert safe-crackers in the country, the alteration of the simple mechanism at his side was but child's play, and in another moment they were bowling merrily through the leafy park with the meter registering a trifle more than half the regulation rate. He warned himself that he must not lay it on too thick, lest she should suspect an ulterior motive. He must be just a simple boob who didn't know the value of his own services—

A light tapping on the glass of the window drew him abruptly from his musings, and instantly he brought the car to a halt, and was standing beside the door, cap in hand.

"I have changed my mind, chauffeur. I won't go down-town to-day. Drive me slowly around the park, please, instead."

"Very good, madam," Phil responded in his best manner, and took his place again behind the wheel. Could it be that already she suspected him and that she had decided not to trust him to take her to her destination?

Then a swift revulsion of thought came. Why should she suspect him or any one? Why should she consider herself under espionage?

She had been merely a guest, a bystander, at that singular affair on Sunday night which had ended in a near-tragedy. What had she to fear?

He drove slowly once around the park, and then, as no further directions were

vouchsafed him by his passenger, he started around once more. Half-way up the east drive, where a secluded path wound off between tall clumps of shrubbery, he heard again that light tapping on the glass of the window.

"I want to get out and walk a little way. Wait for me here, please."

Phil assisted Mrs. Fraser, to alight, and watched her graceful figure disappear up the winding path. She did not stroll, but walked briskly, as though with a definite purpose in view. Could it be that this had been her ultimate destination? What if she had never intended to go down Fifth Avenue at all, but from the first had made for this rendezvous?

Remembering Lucian's instructions, Phil stopped his motor and moved off cautiously in the direction which Mrs. Fraser had taken, not without misgiving lest he bungle this unaccustomed task and around some turning come unexpectedly face to face with his quarry and—in his own mental phraseology—gum the game for fair.

After a hundred yards the path straightened and he saw her far ahead of him, pausing irresolutely beside an empty bench. This, then, must be the place of meeting, but why should it have been arranged in such a clandestine manner unless there were something wrong about the whole affair, something which must be concealed from even the employees of the apartment-house and her own servants?

Mrs. Fraser was no schoolgirl, whose possible sentimental affairs must be carried on *sub rosa*; she need account to no one for her actions, and could receive any one in her home unless—and the thought made his breath quicken—unless the business upon which she was bound must be kept secret for some sinister reason.

There was no shrubbery near behind which he might conceal himself, but a wide-girthed old oak stood upon the lawn not a dozen feet away and he stepped quickly to it and peered around the trunk. Mrs. Fraser was walking up and down now before the bench with hasty, impatient steps, but glancing ever in the direction opposite to that from which they had come.

Ten minutes passed, twenty—a half hour,

and still no one appeared. Twice she had flung herself down upon the bench, only to rise again almost immediately and recommence her restless pacing, but at last, with a defiant shrug, she turned and started directly toward him.

Phil, caught unawares, dared not leave the shelter of the tree and precede her to the waiting taxi; he could only watch her approach and circle about the trunk of the tree, timing his movements to keep out of her range of vision.

He might have saved himself the trouble, however, for as she came abreast of him he saw that he might have stepped directly before her and she would never have been aware of his presence, so engrossed was she in a preoccupation in which rage was obviously dominant.

Her eyes flashed, her delicately pretty face was twisted and distorted, and her lips moved as though she were mentally anathematizing the person who had failed to put in an appearance. She was evidently not in a mood to be easily appeased if she should reach the taxi and find that the chauffeur had disobeyed her instructions, and she was walking at a rapid gait, stamping her small feet with each step upon the graveled pathway as if for some outlet to her consuming anger.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE NIGHT.

PHIL did some tall thinking in the space of a few seconds, then turned and darted off straight across the lawn in the direction of the spot where his car waited. He felt sure that he could beat her to it providing that no park bull intercepted him, for the pathway wound so tenuously that it more than doubled the distance.

Nor were his calculations wrong, although the margin of time was a narrow one, for he had scarcely reached the taxi and settled himself in the driver's seat before he heard Mrs. Fraser's high heels clicking along the path, and in another moment she appeared around the turn.

She had evidently regained control of

herself, for the rage had given place to an expression of listless boredom, and she walked more slowly, as though she had indeed been upon a mere aimless stroll. As she reached the car Phil started the motor and the sudden sound seemed to bring her to a realization that it had been shut off. She glanced at the meter and then as Phil descended to open the door for her, she said:

"Isn't there some mistake? I walked farther than I intended and your meter registers less than I thought—"

"Oh, no, madam." Phil smiled respectfully. "You see I've just gone into this business as an independent, and I can afford to cut under the rates charged by the regular companies, in order to work up sort of a private trade of my own. I charge a little more than just half of their price, and my taxi is better than most of them. Where to now, madam?"

But Mrs. Fraser hesitated.

"You have taken up your stand opposite the Fitzroy-Lennox?" she asked thoughtfully.

"Yes, madam. I figured on getting quite a lot of trade from there."

"What—what hours can you be found, either there or at your garage?" Her interest seemed to be definitely increasing, and Paul stifled his elation as he replied:

"All day and until after the time for a theater call, unless I have a fare. I'll go out any hour of the night, too, if I get a call at the garage; I live right close by. Perhaps you'll let me give you a card, madam, in case you should want a taxi in a hurry any time."

He proffered one of those which he had had struck off on the previous day in hopeful anticipation of just this contingency, and Mrs. Fraser dropped it into her purse.

"I shall perhaps be able to use your car frequently." Her eyes had narrowed and she spoke absently, as though her thoughts were not upon her words. "Now drive me back to the Fitzroy-Lennox, please."

As he obeyed Phil chuckled to himself, and his confidence rose. This detective business was a snap, now that he was on the inside looking out. Any boob could work it! This dame with the red hair had fallen for his game right off the reel, but—and

with the thought his face sobered—it had its disadvantages.

If she took it into her head to walk abroad and he had to follow her afoot she would most certainly recognize him, and the whole thing would be off. Still, the chance must be risked, and at least he had succeeded so far beyond his wildest hopes.

When Mrs. Fraser alighted and paid her fare she added a generous tip far out of proportion to his charges.

"You drive carefully and well," she observed. "I shall need you quite soon again."

Phil pocketed his money, murmured his thanks, and as she entered the apartment-house he turned and for appearances' sake took up his stand once more under the tree on the opposite side of the avenue.

He was sure Lucian would approve of his progress, and even old Rex would not kick at his acting upon his own initiative in purchasing the car and assuming a new rôle without orders if he could discover anything which might help the case along. It certainly looked as if the dame across the street had something on her mind, and if it should happen that she was connected—

"Taxi!"

A stout, choleric old gentleman stood upon the stoop of a house farther down the block, waving imperiously with his cane, and Phil's heart sank. It wasn't likely that Mrs. Fraser would leave the house again so soon after her return, but he couldn't be sure, and Lucian's orders had been emphatic.

Still, he could not afford to arouse suspicion in the neighborhood as to the legitimacy of his station there, and, taking a chance, he backed slowly down the edge of the curb to where the old gentleman waited.

To his relief the trip was a short one, marred only by the fact that he had forgotten to put his meter back to the regular rates. He stopped at a lunchroom for a hasty bite and then drove back at top speed to his stand. The windows of Mrs. Fraser's apartment were brilliantly lighted, to his great relief, and once he caught a glimpse of her shadow as it moved across the filmy curtain.

He waited at his post until ten, and then

satisfied that his subject could safely be left without further espionage until the following day, he drove to the garage and put up his car. He was anxious to get down to the offices of the Shadows and make his report, but the chauffeurs and helpers hanging about the garage were disposed to be friendly and in order to establish his new character he thought it wise to stop for a smoke and a chat with them.

It was fortunate that he did so, for scarcely twenty minutes after he had arrived the telephone rang and the man who answered it called him.

"Some one for you, Fred." It was the name he had assumed, and Phil hastened to respond. Only to Mrs. Fraser had he given that number, and his heart beat quickly at thought of further adventure.

The voice which came to him over the wire was that of the pretty maid whom he had encountered in the drug-store on the previous day. Would he bring his taxi at once to the Fitzroy-Lennox? The lady whom he had driven that afternoon had been summoned to the home of a sick friend and must reach there without loss of time.

He responded with alacrity, and hanging up the receiver got out his car once more. The night was warm, but the female figure which awaited him at the apartment-house entrance was heavily veiled and muffled in some dark, filmy stuff which even in the bright rays from the door lamps rendered her unrecognizable.

Phil identified his passenger of the afternoon, however, by the voice in which she directed him to drive across town to Madison Avenue, and south until she told him to stop.

Remembering the maid's injunction as to the need of haste, Phil drove off at high speed with a wary eye for the lights which would betray the presence of a motor-cycle policeman, but he had scarcely gone a half dozen blocks when Mrs. Fraser tapped upon the window.

"You need not drive so fast; I—I am not in such a hurry as my maid led you to believe."

Phil's spirits soared as he started off once more at a more moderate pace. The sick

friend had been a fabrication, then, designed for the benefit of the maid herself, perhaps. Mrs. Fraser was off to keep a second rendezvous and she had placed herself in his hands!

What could take a swell society dame like her out of her own home alone within an hour of midnight, and muffled up so that no one should know her in spite of the heat?

Not a love affair, surely. She was too coldly calculating to permit sentiment to lead her into such an indiscreet move. Her secret might have nothing to do with the mysterious affair at the Punderford's, of course, but he was at least obeying instructions, and the adventure promised excitement.

He reached Central Park West and turned into the transverse road which bisected the park. Save for a street-car, which rumbled through, the road was deserted, and he had traversed it half-way when there came again that light, imperious tapping upon the window.

Expectantly, Phil alighted and opened the door. Mrs. Fraser had raised her veil in the stifling heat of the closed interior, and by the wavering light from a near-by street lamp he thought that she looked ghastly pale, although her eyes seemed to glimmer with some suppressed excitement.

"I want to speak to you." Her tones were low and tense. "I believe you are a man to be trusted—trusted to be discreet. I will pay you well—"

"That's all right, madam." Phil tried to make his voice sound nonchalantly reassuring. "I don't want any extra pay, and I never ask questions—or answer 'em. I'm here to take you wherever you want to go, and I don't discuss my calls with any one."

There was silence for a moment while his fare seemed to be anxiously studying his face in the half-light. At last she said:

"I believe you. I wish to be taken to a strange part of town and I may need your protection. For that I shall pay extra whether you require it or not. Please drive over to Third Avenue and then down the avenue until I tell you to turn, then east to an old wooden shack on the water-front."

During that drive, and the long wait of hours which ensued, Phil wondered mightily,

but his companion vouchsafed no information. She barely spoke after requesting him to enter the deserted, ramshackle building with her, but produced an electric night-lamp, which she placed on the sagging bar and then fell to pacing the floor much as she had paced before the park bench that afternoon.

Phil did not know what to do with himself. The silence, the low, steady gleam of the lamp, and that mute, restlessly moving figure, got upon his nerves. Confound the dame! Why couldn't she at least tell him what to expect!

He surreptitiously felt for his gun, pursed up his lips to whistle, but repressed the impulse in time, wished fervently and profanely that he might smoke, and ended by leaning against the wall with folded arms, studiously staring at nothing, but waiting for a step outside and a movement of the swinging door.

"Sit down." Mrs. Fraser had halted in her interminable walk as if suddenly aware once more of his presence, and pointed to one of the rickety chairs which stood about in all stages of dilapidation. "You may smoke if you like; it is quite all right, I have not the least objection under the circumstances, and I may have to keep you here for hours."

Hours! Good Lord, they had been there for hours already! The darkness was lifting and there was a perceptible light in the east. It must be nearly morning! What could have brought this woman from a swell apartment-house to the most notorious part of the slums and keep her waiting here through the night?

The answer came at last. Came with a shock which almost made Phil betray himself. A slinking, sidling tread upon the broken sidewalk outside, the silent opening of the swinging doors, and a man entered whom Mrs. Fraser whirled upon in a cold, repressed fury.

"Well?" That was all she said, but there was an element in her tone which made the newcomer cringe before her like a whipped dog.

Phil had scarcely heard that pregnant monosyllable, however. His brain was whirling and his jaw dropped in utter stupe-

faction. If that shabby, cringing, evil-faced creature before him were not a ghost, it was the man who had lain unconscious on the floor of the Punderford's library!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CONFERENCE.

ON the following morning five very grave-faced men were seated around the council table in Rex's inner office. For once the lugubrious lines in George's countenance were unstudied; Lucian was twisting his light blond mustache nervously, Clifford's sensitive, tapering fingers were drumming on the table, and Henry Corliss cleared his throat from time to time with unnecessary vigor. Only Rex himself sat quietly expectant with his eyes upon the sliding panel which led to the outer office.

"He warned us, you know," Clifford broke the momentary silence. "He told us all when the proposition was first put up to him to join our organization that he wouldn't double-cross a pal. Maybe he knew this Solo Dan in the old days—"

"I have heard you express a bitter opinion, Cliff, of the injustice of judges and the obtuseness of juries in condemning a man unheard, simply on circumstantial evidence," Rex interrupted, with a touch of sternness in his tones. "Isn't that what you are doing now to Phil?"

"Then why isn't he here to speak for himself?" George asked gravely. "He hasn't reported since Monday afternoon. And what the devil has happened to Ethel? What did she say when you called her up, Luce?"

"That she would take the subway and come here at once. I believe from her tone that she has something of importance to tell us. Sure your bird is safely locked up in your laboratory, Henry?"

"Sure thing, but I don't believe after the reward you promised him that you could drive him away from here with a shotgun, especially since he is assured of immunity from the police. Here's Phil now!"

A sigh of relief went around the table and the faces of all of them brightened as

the panel slipped aside and Phil, in his smart chauffeur's outfit, smiled breezily in.

"Hello, you fellows! Meant to get here before, but I overslept. I'll tell the world I had some night of it last night! Phew!"

"You have news for us?" Rex asked quietly, motioning to a chair.

"News? Say, I've got the greatest— But you're a fine boob, Henry, to let your pet yegg get away from you!" Phil turned to Henry in fine scorn. "I could have collared him for you this morning as easy as shooting, only I had the dame on my hands and Luce told me to stick. Say, what the hell is the joke?"

For a relieved chuckle had run around the table, developing into a general roar of laughter.

Rex clapped the astonished young man on the back affectionately.

"It's all right, Phil, only you did look such a boob yourself, standing there in that shack with your mouth open and your eyes popping out when Solo Dan came to make his explanations to the lady who had hired him to turn that little trick up at the Punderford's!"

Phil looked from one to the other in unmitigated disgust.

"You guys give me a pain!" he announced gloomily. "Here I think I'm *Sherlock*, the boy wonder, and you beat me to it! Where were you, for the love of Mike, when that stunt was pulled off?"

They explained, and Phil listened thoughtfully.

"What happened to the yegg?" he asked when they had concluded. "As soon as he showed up at the shack the Fraser dame told me to go out and wait in the taxi for her and I had to, because it was getting lighter every minute, and from where she stood she could see right into the driver's seat.

"She came out in about twenty minutes, with her face as black as a thunder-cloud, and told me to drive her straight back to the Fitzroy-Lennox, and when we got there she gave me a ten-dollar tip and told me to keep my mouth shut, or words to that effect."

"Oh, we surrounded the shack as soon as that taxi of yours had turned the corner,

and closed in on Solo Dan. He's in Henry's laboratory now, mad as a hatter because your fair passenger didn't keep her part of the bargain with him. He was to have five hundred dollars if he succeeded in his undertaking, and fifty if he failed, and Mrs. Fraser held out on the fifty," Rex explained. "He has told us all he knows."

"What is it?" Phil cried eagerly. "What was the dame after from Punderford's safe?"

"A brooch set solidly with pearls, in the shape of a stork, with a pink beak." It was Lucian who replied to him. "The same brooch which Scaynes told George about and which Mrs. Punderford declared, if you remember, was a mere trifle that her husband had picked up in Germany years ago and that her daughter had lost."

"What she wanted it for Mrs. Fraser will doubtless explain when George brings her here, as he will shortly. But tell us how you came to turn taxi-driver, and what luck put the lady into your hands."

"Luck! I like that! It was the cleverest bit of detective work that has been pulled off in this town in many a day, if I do say it myself," Phil retorted warmly. "I'm a genius, and I never knew it!"

He described his adventures in detail and added, with a grin:

"I'm a taxi to the good, even if you fellows did crab the fine little story I had all cooked up for you this morning! What else have you been doing besides gum my game?"

They were in the midst of a general recital when there came a light tapping on the panel and it slid aside, disclosing a demure little figure with very yellow hair pushed up decorously under a modest little black hat, and eyes dancing with mischievous elation.

"Good morning, everybody!"

They chorused a greeting and Rex himself made a place for her at the table.

Ethel removed her hat without ceremony, and ran her fingers through her outraged fluff of hair.

"Believe you me, I'm glad to get out of that bug-house for a while!" she exclaimed. "It 'll be better, though, now that that old nut has gone."

"Scaynes?" Lucian asked quickly.

She nodded.

"He got sore because he couldn't get in to his twin soul—that's what he called old Horace, can you beat it?—and pray over him and cure him. He told Mrs. Punderford that there were too many disturbing elements in the house, but for her to send for him when peace had descended again and he would return. He's dippy for fair! Just wait till I tell you—"

"Then Mrs. Punderford knows where he has gone?" Rex asked.

"And so do I." Ethel nodded affirmatively. "I heard him arranging over the phone to go and stay with some friend of his that he calls 'Swammy' something, who lives in that big studio building on Fifty-Seventh Street. You know, it's all full of artists and composers and people who use all that bunk that Mr. Roper has in there."

She indicated George's sanctum with a wave of her hand, and that gentleman shuddered at her unconscious candor.

"Swami," he repeated. "That must be the Swami Abadenarath. You, my brethren, may look him up when the spirit moveth you. As for me, I knew him as Bill Saunders out in Battle Creek fifteen years ago, and he'll remember my face because he doesn't like it. He has reason not to. But continue, my child."

Ethel giggled.

"If he's a fakir, you can bet that animated string bean doesn't know it!" she remarked. "He almost salaamed into the telephone receiver! He's terribly good-lookin', though, that Scaynes man, isn't he? He's got the grandest come-hither voice, and when he puts his hand on you it makes you feel all warm and tingle—"

"Did Scaynes—" There was a new note in Rex's tones.

"Sure. Put his hand on my forehead and blessed me when he was leaving; I hope it wasn't any Indian sign he handed me, but I haven't lifted a thing since—"

"I shouldn't worry, if I were you," Lucian interrupted dryly. "Please tell us what happened up there since you were installed yesterday morning."

"Well, nothing much happened, but

there were a lot of queer things I noticed; little things that perhaps don't amount to much, but I'd better tell you, anyway." Ethel wriggled forward in her chair and rested her elbows comfortably on the table. "In the first place, did you ever see so many telephones in any house in your life? Half of them are not extensions from the central wire, either; they've direct connections, and the wires outside the house run in different directions, too.

"There's a phone of one sort or another in every room in the house. There isn't a place in the neighborhood that has a high, spiked iron fence around it like that, and it can be electrified; it's supposed to be every night, Mickens told me, as a precaution against burglars. Did you notice the locks on the doors and the catches on the windows?"

"My dear girl!" Clifford began impatiently, but Lucian interposed.

"Let her alone. I think I understand. What about the locks, Ethel?"

"That house would be safe in a raid!" Her tone was awestruck. "You couldn't get in unless you used the soup, and then your luck would have to be runnin' strong. The locks are a new heavy kind I never saw before, and the window catches, too. Every door has a bolt on both sides, high up and hidden in some scrollwork so you can hardly see it.

"You can take it from me, if a yegg did get in there last Sunday night it was an inside job. Do you know what I think? It looks as if somebody in that house is scared green of unwelcome visitors."

"Bully for you, little girl!" Lucian beamed enthusiastically upon her. "That was just the touch I needed, and we none of us observed it but you! Now, what else?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ETHEL REPORTS..

ETHEL hesitated.

"We-ell," she replied at length. "you told me I needn't bother about the kid—Miss Mildred, I mean—but that boy of hers has got something on his mind

besides that college haircut. Has the old lady that's sick got any money that she might leave to Miss Mildred in case she married this young Alan?"

She shot the seemingly irrelevant question so suddenly at Rex that he stared.

"We haven't made any inquiries in that direction as yet," he responded. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because if the old lady was his own mother he couldn't be more upset. He called yesterday morning before I had been in the house half an hour to find out how she was, and he hung around her door till Mrs. Punderford herself drove him downstairs. She said she appreciated his kind interest in her poor sister, but he was really in the way, and he had better take Mildred out for a little run in the car.

"But Miss Mildred didn't seem to be goin' very strong with him yesterday; he seemed all wrapped up in the old lady. I came on them once in the music-room when Miss Mildred was coixin' him to tell her what the trouble was, and he just sat there with his head in his hands and kept groanin' 'Don't ask me!'

"If it was the old aunt he was grievin' about, why in the world couldn't he have told her? I meant to watch that young Alan more closely, but I had a—a flirtation of my own on my hand, and you can't very well do two things at once."

"A flirtation!" Phil cried reproachfully. "Ethel, don't tell me you are fickle!"

"With a nice old man named Mickens," Ethel continued imperturbably. "We were gettin' on fine, considering the short acquaintance. He told me all about the robbery and what happened in the night—

"Do you know," she broke off with maddening irrelevance, "when I was a kid at school after the truant officers got hold of me, we had a little story in the Second Reader about the teacher telling the kids that if they caught each other lookin' up from their books they must tell, and sure enough, one little rat of a snitcher told on the boy next him and the teacher said 'And where were your eyes when you saw him; were they on your own book?' I always remembered that because I thought the teacher was such a bum sport."

"Ethel." Rex's tone was as near exasperation as she had ever heard it. "What on earth has that to do with what happened at the Punderford's that night?"

"Everything," she responded blandly. "I let Mickens hold my hand last evening in the servants' dining-room and he got real confidential. He said that after the house had quieted down from the excitement over the robbery and both Mr. Punderford and Miss Punderford had been taken to their rooms and every one else had gone to bed somebody got up and crept down-stairs and tried to open the library door where the safe was, and when they couldn't they got down and looked through the keyhole."

"And who do you think it was? A lady guest that was in the house that night, a Mrs. Fraser! I thought of that old Second Reader story right away, and I asked him how he knew, was he tryin' to look through the keyhole, too? He let go my hand and turned sort of green around where he shaves so close and I don't guess he's as crazy about me as he was at first."

"Did he make any excuse?" Lucian demanded.

"Said he had heard somebody prowling around and it was his duty to see who it was and I was an impudent young hussy." Ethel grinned. "When I go back I'm going to keep an eye on him, if I have one to spare. About the only person in that house that I'm not watching is the cook's cat."

"Oh, Mrs. Punderford, for one, needn't give you any trouble," Rex remarked.

"She won't," Ethel retorted with grim significance. "She was about as glad to have me there as I would be to say 'Good morning' to the matron round at the station-house, but that isn't goin' to get her anywhere."

"She was watchin' me yesterday as much as I was watchin' her and, honest to Gawd, it was funny to see us sneakin' up on each other. It was almost as if there was something she didn't want me to find out. If that isn't a private lunatic asylum—"

Lucian glanced meaningfully at Rex.

"Did you see much of Scaynes?" he inquired.

"Not till afternoon. I'd been out in the courtyard talkin' to the chauffeur and at the

same time giving those telephone wires the once-over, and when I came in I started up-stairs to have a look around Mr. Punderford's room, for she and Miss Mildred and the Alan boy were having tea in the drawing-room and I knew the coast would be clear. I passed that closed door at the head of the stairs—you know?" She addressed Lucian, who nodded affirmatively.

"Well, I thought I'd just see what was behind it and I got the scare of my life! I opened it real softly, and there facin' me, sittin' cross-legged on a cushion was a man in a purple silk kind of a bathrobe thing, with more purple silk wound around his head. His arms were crossed, too, on his chest and he was staring straight right into my face and yet he never seemed to see me at all! His lips were moving, but there wasn't any sound coming from them and he just squatted there like a graven image."

"Scared? I'll say I was! I backed out and shut that door just as quick as I could and went away. I met the housemaid in the hall and asked her what Exhibit A was doin' in there, and she laughed and said that was Mr. Scaynes, a great friend of the family, and that he held séances for them and brought people back from the dead and got messages from them."

"I asked if she had ever heard any of them and she said she had listened once, and peeped in on one of their parties and saw somethin' like a white light floating around his head in the dark. There was nothin' to that, of course, she was just scared, but it was gettin' dark in the hall where we were talkin', too, and I let her go on her way."

Rex laughed.

"Did you see Scaynes again last night?"

"Yes, when he came out of his room to go down to dinner. He was dressed like a regular guy then. He stopped still and looked at me and I—I stopped, too, I don't know why. It seemed as if his eyes sort of held me."

"They were kind of dreamy and puzzled, like he was just recognizin' me, and he said: 'Where have we met before?' It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him that I didn't know. I hadn't ever lifted anything in a gent's furnishing store, but instead I mum-

bled somethin' about havin' butted into his room a while back.

"He put his hand to his forehead as if I'd given him a pain and said: 'No, no. Centuries ago! You were a handmaiden in the court of Nebuch—' something. I've never been in court in my life! Not as a star performer, I mean, and as soon as I find out what a handmaiden is, if I don't like it, I'm going to hunt up that mut in the studio building he's gone to and let him know where he gets off!"

Clifford coughed and even Rex stared very hard at the opposite panel, but Lucian's face did not relax a line in its earnestness.

"Was that all?" he asked.

"Yes. He went down-stairs shakin' his head as if he was still worrying about our past acquaintance and I ducked into his room; I wanted to see what he took to get that way."

"What did you find?" Lucian bent forward eagerly.

"Well, besides his regular clothes, like any gentleman would have, there were lots of those silk kimono things in different colors, like the purple one he'd had on when I first saw him, and heaps and heaps of queer books. The printing in them wasn't in letters but in funny marks like a Chinese laundry-ticket, only different, and some of them looked as if they had been done by hand.

"They weren't all on paper, either, but on some thin, dry, rattley stuff like oil silk. I didn't come across any lay-out, nor hypo, nor snow, though, so I guess he must be just plain dippy."

"Did you look everywhere?" Rex's tone showed a shade of disappointment. "Not for drugs of that sort, I mean, but for anything strange or unusual that you might find?"

Ethel stared.

"I wasn't exactly lookin' for trouble," she remarked. "I didn't know when he might come sneakin' up-stairs again so I just went through things in a general way. There wasn't any bed in the room, just a pile of cushions in one corner and no other furniture except a chest of drawers.

"They were all unlocked except one and

I opened that with a hairpin. I might have saved myself the trouble, though; there was nothin' in it but some old odds and ends, maybe left by some lady guest that had visited the Punderford's before he came."

"What were they; do you remember?" Lucian picked up a paper knife from the table and weighed it absently between his fingers as he spoke.

"Oh, just an old jar of paste rouge and some knotted-up cord and a pair of soiled gray silk gloves and a nail file and a pair of scissors, both rusty. I shut the drawer and left the room for I'd seen everything that was there and, besides, there was a funny smell like joss sticks that made me feel sort of woozy.

"I went back in there this morning after he'd gone and, sure enough, I found a lot of half-burned joss sticks in a jar in the bath-room; I'd forgotten to look in there last night." Ethel wrinkled her small nose. "After dinner, though, when they were all in the drawing-room I went down and peeked in and listened to them talkin'—at least, I listened to *him*, for he was doing a regular monologue.

"Mrs. Punderford was drinkin' it all in, but Miss Mildred was yawning behind her hand and young Alan—who'd come over again right after dinner—was holdin' his head in his hands. You couldn't stop Scaynes, though; he was goin' strong and the craziest lingo you ever heard, all about cosmos and auras and things. They broke up pretty soon; the Alan boy went home and Scaynes to his room and Miss Mildred to hers and her mother to see how the old gentleman was gettin' along.

"After I'd had my little talk with Mickens I went up-stairs, too, but I didn't go to bed; I had a hunch that something was going to happen, and it did. It was 'way past midnight when I heard a sort of subdued commotion down on the second floor near Horace Punderford's room. I got down in time to hear Mrs. Punderford telephoning to you that her husband was conscious at last.

"I took care that she didn't notice me hangin' around, but she went straight to Horace's room, sent the nurse away and locked the door. I listened, of course, but

she spoke so low that I could only catch a few words here and there—she seemed to be urging him to something and once she cried out: 'Pray God that your brain is clear enough to understand! Everything depends upon it now! Oh, why did you ever—'

"I didn't get the rest of that, but in a few minutes I heard her say something about 'absolute discretion' and 'not a trace.' That was all that happened before you came, and after you had gone the house was quiet for the night."

She paused in sheer exhaustion from her breathless recital and after a moment Lucian turned to George.

"Isn't it time for you to keep your appointment up at the Fitzroy-Lennox?"

George rose.

"I'd almost forgotten all about it. I'll have her down here in half an hour or so. Keep an eye on that yegg of Henry's while I'm gone."

"Oh, who is it?" Ethel turned round-eyed to Rex. "Who is Mr. Roper going to bring down here? Maybe I shouldn't ask—"

Rex laid his hand lightly over hers in friendly fashion.

"You're one of us now, my dear, and you have earned the right to see this through. The lady who is coming is the person Mickens told you about when he reminded you of that Second Reader story; the lady he found looking through the keyhole of the library door last Sunday night."

CHAPTER XXIX.

FACE TO FACE.

TO the excited girl the minutes seemed to drag interminably while they waited for George Roper's return with Mrs. Fraser. Lucian and Rex were talking together in lowered tones, Phil and Henry Corliss were comparing notes as to some event of the previous night concerning a shack by a river somewhere of which she knew nothing, and Clifford had wandered off to his own study.

Ethel felt furtively in her pocket, produced a stick of chewing gum and, with this

for a solace, she leaned back in her chair and tried to compose herself to patience. The last twenty-four hours had been filled with excitement and she had had very little sleep the night before. In spite of her lively anticipation of the coming scene her lids began to droop, her thoughts grew nebulous and in a few minutes she was sound asleep.

When at length she opened her eyes it was with a start and for a moment she gazed wonderingly about her. Where in the world was she? How had she got into this room? It was utterly strange to her, yet more beautiful than anything she had ever seen before.

The walls were draped with damask of a warm shade of old blue, and hung with French prints of a type which to her worldly young eyes did not need the explanatory verse beneath to convey their subjects. A luxurious chaise longue covered with the same blue drapery and heaped with gorgeous cushions stood near, and there were more cushions everywhere, piled upon the floor and overflowing from every chair. A blue scarf embroidered in gold covered the table upon which stood a low bowl of glorious deep-red roses, a few of which had fallen and lay like blotches of warm, crimson blood upon the delicately bound books which were scattered here and there.

The room itself was bathed in a ruby glow from the floor lamps with their crimson shades which, blending with the cerulean draperies, produced the hue of some rare, exotic, purplish orchid, and the very air was impregnated with some tropical, cloying perfume, heady as new wine.

Ethel came gradually to herself as the details impressed themselves upon her senses. She had heard about such rooms as this, read about them in a certain kind of lurid literature which she occasionally affected, but to find herself actually in one—

What was she doing here, anyway? Only a little while ago she had been in Rex Powell's office—Rex Powell—

Ethel sprang from her chair with a bound and nearly swallowed her chewing gum, but managed to retrieve it by a convulsive gulp. She was about to voice her almost overwhelming astonishment when she heard a

low laugh behind her, and whirled about to find Rex himself regarding her with amused eyes.

"Why—what—how did we get here?" she stammered.

"You are right where you were when you went to sleep, my dear," he reassured her smilingly. "This is still my office, but I have made some changes that it may be more attractive to the lady who will be here any moment now. I will show you later how it is done. Do you like it?"

Ethel looked about once more and slowly shook her head.

"It—it's very beautiful." She strove for words to express her thought. "But isn't there sort of too much about everything? Too many cushions and roses and low lights and too much perfume? It sort of makes you want the sunshine and fresh air."

"For you, perhaps." Still impersonal, there was a gentler note in Rex's voice. "But the lady we are expecting will appreciate it, because I think it is somewhat in accord with what she is accustomed to. But get your note-book and pencil, Ethel. I may want you to take some notes."

Scarcely had she complied when a buzzer of warning sounded from the outer door, and they heard it open and George's diplomatically suave tones reached their ears.

"This way, please, Mrs. Fraser."

The panel leading to Clifford's study slipped aside and he appeared with Solo Dan in tow, just as the corresponding panel which opened from the outer office disappeared in its casing and Mrs. Fraser stepped daintily over the low sill.

For a moment her eyes swept in amazed pleasure about the voluptuously arranged room, then as if drawn by a magnet they met the sullen, lowering ones of Solo Dan, and with a little cry of dismay she turned to escape, but the tall, gaunt form of George Roper barred her way.

"What does this mean?" Her voice was low and vibrant with passion. "Why have you brought me here, Mr. Roper? Who are these—gentlemen?"

The pause before the last word was pregnant with studied insult, but Lucian rose with a smile.

"Come in, Mrs. Fraser, and sit down. We shall keep you only as long as you yourself determine. My colleagues and I would like a little information from you as to precisely what part you played in the Punderford affair last Sunday night, and after you have told us what we desire to know we shall not detain you."

"The Punderford—" Her big, blue eyes had turned a steely gray. "But this is infamous! Who are you and by what right do you presume to question me?"

"You recognize our friend here, do you not?" Lucian gestured toward Solo Dan, who drew his wizened frame up and met her cold stare with a defiant one.

"Certainly not! I—I never saw him before!" Her tones were shrill now with swiftly rising hysteria. "If you attempt to keep me here I shall call for the police!"

"Do so, madam, and we shall hand you over to them as accessory before the fact to an attempted robbery!"

"Robbery!" she shrieked, and her dilated gaze fell for the first time on Phil. "You—you, too! It was a trap, then, a trap!"

She sank into the nearest chair and covered her face with her hands, but in another moment they had fallen to the arms of the chair and she faced them tearlessly, her cheeks ghastly beneath the rouge.

"I shall not answer one question, speak one more word until you tell me who and what you are."

"We are private investigators in the employ of Mrs. Horace Punderford." The reply came tersely from Lucian's lips.

"Private—" Mrs. Fraser stared at him as though hypnotized. "And Luella Punderford suspects—"

"She does not, Mrs. Fraser. No one outside this room knows that you hired this man Cronin, known as Solo Dan, to rob Mr. Punderford's safe of the pearl stork, and at a time when you knew that the house would be dark and the family engrossed in a spiritualistic séance. No one need know it if you are sensible and will give us the information we require."

"You mean—" Feline she moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue. "You mean that you will say nothing to Mrs.

Punderford? That I shall not be socially ruined?"

"Why should you be?" Lucian's tone had grown softly persuasive. "Your vicarious attempt at burglary failed; your henchman fell unconscious before he had an opportunity to approach the safe. I do not think you will make such a desperate effort again, and it is not our intention to prosecute if you will be perfectly frank with us."

"You appear to be too sensible a person, Mrs. Fraser, to go to such lengths for the mere possession of a bauble like the stork brooch; what induced you to make an attempt fraught with such risk to yourself and your good name?"

"Do you know anything about that brooch? Its value, its history?" she asked nervously.

"Do you?" he continued.

"I only know that there is a certain man in town, a collector, who will give forty thousand dollars for its possession and no questions asked." She had cast dissimulation to the winds and her tones rang out metallically hard. "I shall not tell you his name, for he had nothing to do with this affair."

"Mr. Punderford, himself, showed the brooch to him some time ago and he offered to buy it at any price, but Mr. Punderford refused to sell. The collector made the statement as to what he would give for it in my presence and I need money to maintain my position. I hired that creature there to obtain it for me and he failed, or pretends to have failed."

Solo Dan stepped forward.

"You don't believe what I told you last night, lady; you don't believe what happened to me, but you just ask the doc here, and he'll tell you it's Gawd's truth! Them hands come out at me from the dark and I went dead to the world."

Mrs. Fraser's lip curled.

"You surely cannot hope to insult my intelligence—"

She had turned to Henry Corliss, but he nodded gravely.

"Cronin's story is literally true, madam. I am a toxicologist, an expert—if I may say so—on poisons, and I had him under my observation and care for more than twenty-

four hours. He had unquestionably been drugged to the state of suspended animation, and had I not taken him under my charge his body would have been sent to the morgue and eventually he would have been buried alive."

Mrs. Fraser shuddered.

"I can scarcely believe—" she murmured.

"How did you meet this man Cronin?"

Lucian took up the interrogation.

"That is my own affair!" Mrs. Fraser bit her pale lips.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHO WAS IN THE LIBRARY?

"I'll tell you!" Solo Dan cried viciously. "She's breakin' into society now, but she ain't no swell dame like you think she is. Her father gave her good schoolin' and all that, but he was just a Bowery saloon keeper and all the older guys that hung around his place knew her when she was a kid."

"When she wanted this trick turned she went to one of them, and he put me next. I fell for it! Fell like a damned sucker, and now she's welched!"

"That will do, Cronin. Cliff, take him out," Lucian ordered peremptorily, then, turning to Mrs. Fraser, he added: "Now, will you tell us all that you really know about the affair last Sunday night?"

"But I have told you already," Mrs. Fraser protested. "I do *not* know why Miss Hornbottle screamed and fainted nor what caused Mr. Punderford's sudden seizure. It seems incredible that any one should have been in the library when the—the man I had hired entered. I had decided upon that night because I knew Mr. Punderford's extraordinary precautions against burglars, and I would be there to unfasten the window and make it easy for Cronin to enter."

"Just before the séance Mrs. Punderford ordered Mickens to close up the house and go to bed, and after he had gone his rounds I slipped into the library and slid back the catch on the window. Then I joined the others and the séance commenced. You can

imagine how I felt when I heard that awful thud in the library there in the dark.

"I literally did not have the courage to even glance in at the doorway, but when Mr. Leacraft or some one cried out that the safe had been rifled and no mention was made of any man dead or alive being found in there, I naturally concluded that my—my plan had been carried out.

"Still, I could not understand why Mr. Punderford should suddenly have gone stark mad, even over the loss of a ten-thousand-dollar brooch. He is a rich man, of course, and jewels are his hobby. He had thought too much of the brooch to sell it to my collector friend at any price, and yet men do not lose their minds over such a thing.

"I was nervous and unstrung and I felt, I don't know why, that something had gone wrong. I did not know that Mrs. Punderford had locked the library door and toward morning I could endure the suspense no longer.

"I put on soft slippers and a dark robe and crept down the stairs and through the dining-room to the library. When I tried the door and it wouldn't open I was in despair; I felt that I simply *had* to know whether Cronin had succeeded or not, and when I could not get in the room I stooped down and tried to look through the keyhole, but I could see nothing in the semi-darkness. The dawn had not yet come.

"When I crouched there trying to pierce the gloom I thought that I heard a noise behind me, as if some one were approaching stealthily. It was too much, after all I had gone through that evening, and I turned and fled back to my room.

"Mrs. Punderford had insisted upon all of us staying there for the night, you know, but I felt that I could not get away quick enough, so I invented that trip, and the train that I had to make; I hadn't really the slightest intention of leaving town, for naturally I expected to meet the man Cronin and conclude my bargain with him, yet all the time there was that anxiety in my mind that things had not gone well. I could not forget that sound as of some one falling there in the library.

"I tried to convince myself that Cronin

had merely stumbled over something in making good his escape, but the premonition still clung to me."

She paused and Lucian asked:

"Where were you to meet Cronin, and when?"

"On Monday afternoon at the same spot in Central Park to which this man of yours drove me yesterday." She cast a withering glance at Phil's complacent face. "I walked there and waited hours, it seemed to me, and when he did not come I returned to my home in a state bordering on nervous collapse.

"I did not know whether anything had really happened to him or whether he had broken faith with me and meant to take apart the stork brooch and sell the pearls for his own profit. I had made him solemnly promise that he would take nothing from the safe except the brooch, but the terrible thought came to me that he might have stolen other and far more valuable things, and I would have been instrumental in doing greater harm to the Punderfords than I had ever intended!

"I—I'm not really a bad woman, a criminal! I was just simply desperate for money!

"When I realized to the full what I might have been guilty of in letting a thief into the home of people who had entertained me, whose bread I had eaten, I was almost mad! I could think of nothing but to reach Cronin in some way and wring the truth from him, but I didn't dare to go then to the place where I had met him first, that dreadful shack down the river. Instead, I waited until the next day—yesterday—and decided to go to the same place in the park, hoping that Cronin might come.

"I was so weak that I concluded to take a taxi in spite of the risk, and told the doorman at my apartment house to get me one. Was he in league with you, too?"

She turned fiercely on Phil, who shook his head smilingly.

"No, Mrs. Fraser. I managed the whole thing by myself; just bought a taxi and waited around for you to come out. I knew when I juggled with the meter and reduced the fare that you would be looking for me again."

Mrs. Fraser glared at him in unrestrained animosity and contempt, but his pride in his achievement was impregnable, and with a shrug of disdain she turned again to Lucian.

"You have finished with me, have you not? I have told you all I know—"

"Not quite." His tone was persuasive still, but there was a ring of authority in it. "When Cronin failed for the second time to meet you at the rendezvous, what did you do?"

"I was desperate. I dared not appeal to the man who had arranged for the affair with Cronin for me, because he had warned me that he wanted nothing to do with the matter and would not be drawn into it. Cronin and I had agreed that if anything should go wrong with the plans we had made to meet in the park, I was to go to that shack on the waterfront at midnight last night.

"You know how easily I was duped into engaging the same taxi, and what happened when I got there and Cronin finally appeared. Naturally I could not without proof believe such an extraordinary story as he told me to account for his inability to produce the brooch, and I thought that my worst fears were realized.

"I went home and passed a sleepless night, and when Mr. Roper called me up this morning and asked me to come down here with him later and help to identify some of the things which had been stolen from the safe, I was completely deceived. I thought he was an old friend of Mr. Punderford, you see."

She rose wearily to her feet and turned her ghastly rouge-patched face from George to Lucian once more.

"You know everything now. What are you going to do with me? Tell your client the truth and have every decent door closed to me, or hand me over to the police?"

"You have absolutely no knowledge of the cause of Mr. Punderford's condition?" Lucian had risen when she did and now he advanced until he could look straight into her eyes. "You had no other accomplice than Cronin?"

"None! I swear it!" The hardened,

steely look vanished from her eyes and they opened wide in unmistakably candid surprise. Then a look of almost superstitious fear clouded them. "Who could have been in that library with Cronin?"

Her voice had sunk to a whisper, and Ethel, listening with all her ears, shuddered in sympathy.

"That is what we mean to find out." Lucian's tone was very grave. "As I assured you before, Mrs. Fraser, we have no intention of betraying you to the Punderfords or placing you in the hands of the authorities as long as your plan was never consummated, and you are willing to be frank with us.

"One more question and we shall not detain you any longer. Do you know the origin and true value of the stork brooch?"

"No. I have no idea as to the origin of the brooch or its history, but I do know a little about pearls, and if that brooch were broken up I do not believe that the pearls themselves and the coral which forms the beak of the stork, together with the silver in which it is mounted, would bring over fifteen or sixteen thousand dollars," she replied, in evident sincerity.

"I saw it once by accident a year or so ago, when Mr. Punderford was showing us some irregular pink and black pearls which he had picked up in his travels. I exclaimed over it, it was so odd and lovely, but Mr. Punderford's manner was so peculiar that I did not express my desire to see it more closely.

"If my collector friend was willing to pay forty thousand dollars for a thing, the intrinsic value of which is less than half that sum, I must conclude that some greater interest attaches to it, but I haven't the slightest conception of what it may be. I may really go, and you will say nothing?"

Lucian bowed.

"You have my word, Mrs. Fraser."

"Oh, how can I thank you!" she cried. "When I came in here to this lovely room and then saw Cronin and my chauffeur of yesterday both facing me, I thought that I was lost! I shall always be grateful to you and I—I have learned my lesson!"

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.

Oblivion

by Jeremy Lane

Author of "The Fragrant Web," etc.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A FLICKER OF ANGRY HANDS.

HUMAN relationship was lost; huge elemental forces held sway like an invisible and silent tornado; the battery of three minds depolarizing the luckless one had merely set the circuit for their purpose. An esoteric door to power had been opened by some sesame of the ages. Kajadeva's old eyes seemed unremittingly to drink the very soul from the half-caste who was moveless before them. Fentress had requested the old king to prepare Branglan, who had once known the subjective side of this experience, with as much as possible of the method, while she delayed coming with Jaborshi.

The same potency, turned differently through a worker, could quicken his mind, stimulate the perceptions, and act in a full blessing; it was in this way used with the seekers who went into far-away cities and countrysides to find young genius. But, as Flyer-Branglan had discovered one rainy evening in America, this voltage could be reversed, made to draw instead of supply. Just at present he must needs glance down at a diagram upon vellum, one of the records from the archives in Kajadeva's keeping, handed to the American for this emergency.

It indicated certain nerve paths in the human organism, best reached at a point along the spine by the act of touch and through the eye in the act of seeing. Branglan was referring to instructions, which were quite simple, once the puzzling

principle was grasped. Then he looked up again, straight into the Indo-British eyes that were glassed with terror, and growing vapid as the hypnotic effect increased. Fentress glanced aside to see Branglan's lips move with the words given him by Kajadeva to add the corresponding sound-vibration to the process. As if Kajadeva sensed the lack of concentration in Branglan, his own voice began to sound between the six human stars and their one withered moon—a chanting that must have seized the innermost self of the victim. Minutes lengthened. Jaborshi slipped back in his chair, his jaw sagging, his wretched eyes wide open.

"We can stop now," said Fentress.

Her softly uttered words came like a thunder-clap. Branglan started sharply and was heard to take a great breath. Kajadeva spoke to him, as if nothing had happened, and Fentress interpreted. "Your head aches. You are sorry for him."

The American nodded, with the reply, "But to-night will be simpler because of this."

The battery was broken up. Jaborshi, like an enchanted marionette, began to babble, and Fentress arose and moved away from the senseless hash of Madras talk. Kajadeva clapped his hands twice, and two blacks appeared. He gestured them to remove the gibbering entity from the chair.

They led Jaborshi out by the gate to the archway and the road. They faced him toward the city, and gave him an initial urge to proceed—all decently done. He shambled down the black road and out

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for March 27,

of sight, but, mingling with the subdued murmurings of the gardens, his high-pitched noise came back. The old king relaxed upon his narrow bed. Fentress covered her face with her hands. Again she knelt beside him, and his phrases were patient reassurances. She was not weeping.

"Try to speak in the English, father, please, so he can understand."

"Ah, yes," he said, as if correcting himself.

Not the first sovereign to feel slave-sown poison in his veins, he turned on his pillow of woven grass. Fentress's heart beat forebodingly.

"I should not have asked you to act with us," she said regretfully.

"Do not accuse yourself, my Fentress," said the white-bearded one in careful English. "He has told me the circumstances of to-day, and of your mother. These trials are but the beginning. I cannot help you more. I have lived long enough, according to the Great Will, but I fear much to leave you. My great surprise, you see, to find my food drifted with fever by those younger hands that had learned from myself the gestures of bounty and blessing. Reports brought to my bed. My people on the hillside and in the jungle and in the city, rotting by the same sickness. Servants died or disappeared. Our friend has told me how he is commanded to take my death. The doctor came also to taunt. My young priests have stumbled into the twilight swamps of desire. We meet the Will of God."

While the old man had been speaking, Branglan stood at the head of the couch, and his eyes held a dull, unusual light. Then he stared out beyond the low garden walls, seeing between trees a bit of the yellow city lying far below. The sea and the reefs and a wink from the gods had hidden it away from men. That the recollections of Noah and his sons had omitted the ancestry of Kajadeva was not an accident. The mightiest treasures are those forever sealed. It is perhaps a Fatherly kindness that man should persist in the delusion that the earth is fully known.

Branglan had come too late to see the secret bloom. He must imagine his way

back to all that through the present infested fruitage. In a look such as a man gives only in poignant emotion, he conveyed to Fentress Eastney that she was for him the one cup of beauty from all these immemorial vintages. And Fentress, beside the narrow couch, glanced away toward the same fragment of city showing through the trees, wondering if Kajadeva could read her heart just now.

Until the sun had set they remained with the king. Branglan mentioned that this estate was said to be his own particular property by purchase from Dr. Verenz, and that their stay of an hour would not cause any serious annoyance to the doctor. The ex-flyer appeared rather distressed by these fictitious rights. For a time he left the porch and moved along the inner garden wall, smoking, bareheaded, obviously restive.

Fentress was finding a renewal of poise in body and soul. While Branglan was away, pacing there, the old man's hands reached very slightly toward her. They hesitated, but she had seen, and impulsively closed her fingers upon their brown strength. Kajadeva uttered curious little sounds, half-muttered phrases of tenderness—and poison. His hairy lips smiled. Fentress reassured him that her mother was in good health. She patted his hands, and suppressed a sigh that was like a tormenting thing in her breast. Branglan was coming toward the porch.

"Shall we go back?" she asked of him.

"You have a guest for dinner," said the American.

They left the old man as reluctantly and yet as briefly as possibly. Seated again in the double carry-chair she knew an ebb of energy that was dizzying.

"Do you think I can go on?" she whispered.

"Yes, you can do the next thing; don't try to look ahead. One of the enemy at least is finished."

"But you are disheartened," she urged.

"I admit that. It would be bad enough for any woman, but it's you; that's how I'm caught. Kajadeva is right. But you can't stop. It isn't all over yet."

Now she regarded him at close range,

as if she had not been fully conscious of his presence until the present moment. His emotions had burned through the invisible shell of her dream—a personal warmth that brought in a rush the return of thoughts that had been intimately her own in recent weeks. There was no joy in the fact, but rather a greater burden of responsibility. She saw the quiet keenness of his pain—a manly and well-contained despair that dwarfed any attempt at optimism. Fentress was somehow, by the knowledge of this, stimulated to say, rapidly—as if the black rummers might hear and betray:

"If necessary, will you please take Jaborshi back to America? He will know how to find his friend, a woman, I think, who is holding everything over mother's head. Jaborshi will tell the woman to do whatever you have taught him to say. He will obey you. You may be able to manage it, since you are of the enemy. That will be the end of his threat."

Branglan nodded. "Surely. But don't talk as if you were finished. We are not done fighting."

His words made her think of the knife resting in the front of her dress. "Your being with me has compromised you with the doctor—"

"No, I'll tell him I was compelling you to act upon Jaborshi. He will be saved the trouble of removing his old fool."

Her eyes were bright with the hazards of the immediate future. "And I shall show you the way to deal with the young panthers. You may need that. We'll work early this evening, as soon as I can send the doctor away, and before the dances are supposed to begin. After dinner you walk away with the doctor, but return. When the kittens are a year old, my little method is useless. Some of them are now of nearly a year's growth. The priests and the workers, too, would prefer to be eaten rather than kill one. You can't change them. If I thought you could get away, get off the island, I should have no successor, but let the panthers grow. But you cannot."

She spoke with a rising tang of purpose. Her thoughts were bitterly clear, especially with reference to the narrow knife, during

these minutes along the lifting road, but the languor of resignation, only just past, hovered closely.

"I've been thinking about that," he answered quickly, as if he dared not linger upon the fact of her wishing him safe. "The Carolin hasn't been seriously damaged, though there were some bad fights on board. The captain made a final stand in the engine-room. There are sails, anyway, if I can round up enough men. Maybe six or eight are not too drunk or too pleasantly entertained. I know a path with steep way down to the shore—you know it, too—and I'll take you out in a boat as soon as it's dark."

Branglan did not try to convince even himself that this would be simple. Fentress did not smile. "No," she said, "every one will be out and ready to stop us. I am not free to go about."

"I will get some sailor's clothes for you to put on, and we can start before the festival really begins."

"Dr. Verenz will watch or some one will spy for him."

Branglan admitted, "Yes, we haven't been alone this afternoon."

"I can scarcely believe that all my friends are gone," she mused almost abstractly. Her pale hair held the last smooth color of day's end. The eight servants were mounting the stairs in barren rock—a climb that seemed to have little to do with earth or even with the darkening sea, spread far around and away. She was the young queen of a legend. "This was a joyous place."

Again they had reached the highest twist of stairs, rising in gray light before the tumbled outer mass of the palace, yellow-roofed against the open sky—a castle whose ramparts were of the volcanic slant, its foundations broadening to the core of the planet, a shadowy ring of jungle for its gardens, where were apes and black panthers and rainbows of orchids, the wide ocean for its domain encircling now like a desert of indigo chalk. Fentress was silent, all color gone from her, a living twilight.

Dr. Verenz was waiting in the dais-room. He spoke first. "The old king was too ill to rise; what a pity! But he was able

to do a little talking; yes, even in English." Verenz paused with a grin.

Branglan replied with the same perfect absence of excitement: "Yes, your man was crashing around in the garden. He ran back to the other seven carriers every two minutes."

The espionage bureaux of Europe and America were not more bald than this. Reference to Jaborshi, therefore, was mutually considered unnecessary. Fentress startled both her guests with a laugh. She flung aside her outer robe and turned to them. The laughter was low and full of pain, echoed now by the doctor.

"Shall we go into the other room?"

As she spoke, she clapped her hands and a pair of torch-bearing servants scuttled forward from the dark wedge in the background. They led the way across a corridor that was still radiating the warmth of the day into a high-walled banquet-chamber.

Here long tables had been planed from the black and yellow rock. The floor was monstrosly tessellated. Chairs and woodwork were massive, unpainted, but seasoned and stained by ages of use—a dark dull green. A little firmament of torches was ignited at the ends of a certain table in the center of the room. In the golden dimness about the walls stood the tapestried figures of the great past.

Fentress went to the head of the table. Three covers had been laid. Men-servants stood back at the edge of the light. The colors of her gown became soft and suffused as smoke, like something formed of the shadowy murk of the hall. Her pearls rubbed and clicked together strangely, and tiny salamanders of torch-color darted through them, along her arms and her throat. The great loneliness of the place was shattered by her laugh—now a ringing, perilous note.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE QUEEN OF THE PANTHERS.

"**B**E seated, Nels, and doctor."

Verenz said, "I've had my dinner, thanks, but I'll sit with you and chat. How do you feel now?"

"Rested, ready for anything," she declared with animation.

"Have you been making a champion of our friend Nels here? Has he got designs on me? Why is he so glum while you're so gay?"

Other servants had brought wine. Fentress drank hers swiftly. She knew Branglan was trying to get her attention with a warning look. She had a side glance at the rather feverish color in his face. It was patent to all three that he was considering the advantages and the disadvantages of killing the doctor. The latter refused to taste his wine.

Verenz's face had remained as white and moist as on the occasion Branglan had first met him in the Western Hotel. The black hair and large head seemed to shadow and dwindle his entire personality. His bond with the false priesthood was comprehensible, for he was a tyrant in realms of the senses, and these rebels were but newly won by temptation. Verenz had much to teach them. They would avenge his murder promptly and with imagination.

"This is my night," cried Fentress, the same strange tension in her voice. "I am the last of the old order. To-night is the consummation. It was a dream anyway. Yes, it is better this way, the new way—yours, doctor."

Hurriedly, and trembling a little, she tasted the food that was served to her. Branglan seemed in too complex a state to eat. The doctor glanced from one to the other and was amused. "I understand that you dance barefoot," he said. And still Branglan refused himself the satisfaction, and the mistake, of a violent act. Fentress leaned back in the tall throne-like chair. She appeared to have difficulty in breathing. The glittering light held in her eyes. Even during the preceding difficulties with Jaborshi she had not lost herself as now, she was not then this confused hectic person. The sensation of a trap was stifling. Branglan arose quite casually and mastered himself to the extent of leaving them alone at the table. He did not look back at her, but strolled out.

"You didn't want your old fool in the ceremonies?"

"No. I saw him mooning along the road. My compliments to you; but why didn't you do that to him in America?"

"He met me there only in a public place, and then ran away," she answered. "I did not think you and Nels would return here, and I felt I could manage him without troubling mother, once I got him here. It was true, as you see. I'm not a crying little girl."

"What are you—your present opinion of yourself?"

"A dancer, only that."

"I thought you would say a virgin. Their education is intensely interesting to me."

Her laugh was only a brave sob. She flung herself forward, across the corner of the table, and the sudden movement of her right arm ended with a shock. Dr. Verenz, without rising, had caught her wrist. He forced from her fingers the small blue knife, and, against the table, snapped the blade in two. Fentress shuddered back into her chair.

"Don't try that," said Verenz steadily. "I'll tell you why—"

Branglan was at the table again, his eyes insane with restraint. The doctor gazed up at him and continued: "The priests aren't afraid of anybody but me. If I'm gone, they will be much less delicate where you are concerned. I'd as soon you would finish me as anybody, but for your own sweet sake, you'd best wait a week or a month. What do you say, Nels?"

The little black-haired man arose, a species of malefic dignity about him. Across the table, the two men were close to understanding each other, though Branglan still had the lead of a few facts relative to himself. A chill came into the yellow gloom around them. Fentress had bowed her head upon her arms on the table. The doctor reached one hand behind him and at once a servant poured for him a bowl of wine. This he drank down. The stolid black man refilled the bowl.

"The first was to clear the dust," he announced with characteristic smile toward Fentress, who did not look up, "but this one is a health to our Queen Maiden."

His impatience took on this form of

expression. Doubtless he had held himself in severe check for many days, arranging toward this end. At last he felt it safe, as well as pleasurable, to relax and drink deeply. The wine was remarkable. "One or two details—I'll leave you for a little. I don't trust Nels, but I do trust you. I'm going to start the dancers on the east porch. I told you that the quarantine was off."

Neither Branglan nor Fentress replied, and he left the banquet-chamber with a very deliberate step. His shadow bobbed small and grotesque across the great black and yellow squares of the floor. Two of the servants followed him out, but six remained fixed in the uncertain fringe of the torch-lights. Branglan, however, did not heed them.

He passed to the end of the table where Fentress still hid her face, and bent over her outstretched arm. He spoke her name. A torch sputtered, then was silent again. The figures in the shadow were moveless as those in the tapestry behind them. Branglan placed his hand on hers. The pale sheen of her hair was near his lips as he said: "We must try now. Go with me, any place, at once, where there will be no listeners—"

Already a pair of the blacks, their features betraying a primitive attempt at nonchalance, had come to the table to clear an imaginary dish or crumb. Fentress stirred as one coming up from sleep. She drew a long breath and seemed to hold it. She was thinking of the one room in the palace in which spying would be most unlikely, but she had no interest in what Branglan's plan might be. The snapping of the little blade had robbed her of all courage. It is hideous to listen to the smooth, ordinary words of a man one has just striven to kill. Dr. Verenz, in leaving the room, remained the more vividly in her mind. She stared into Branglan's eyes, and he seemed startled at something in her eyes.

"Come, then," she said, rising.

"—where we can be alone a moment," he repeated.

Behind them as they left the big golden-dark hall sounded the brushing of invisible things. They crossed the corridor, entered

the lighted dais-room, where numerous servants made obeisance, but a restraint, an expectancy was about it all. Fentress led him through her own apartment and on through the less illumined passage to the stout, narrow door of the animal quarters. Certain shadows seemed to persist behind them, not their own. Branglan peered down the dark laterals, or paused just beyond some dim-sucked torch at an intersection, but arrived at the door with his uneasiness unfounded. Fentress waited in the deep-set arch of the door, holding a torch that appeared to make her whiter and more fragile against the rock and the ancient timbers.

"The panthers are in there," he observed.

"Yes, we will not be overheard, I think."

"But I don't want you to take the time to show me about the animals."

She turned to the door, and he helped her swing it. Within the area of befouled air, the torch gasped and flared as if the flame were trying to tear free and escape the dense gloom. Branglan shut the door behind them.

"It's this," he said hastily and low, amid the noises from the cats, "I want you to go down to the beach anywhere possible along the shore, right now, before Verenz begins to feel his wine. I'm going to Kajadeva's and get a few men we can trust. We'll manage to run you out to the Carolin. There's absolutely no one on board. We can make sail in the dark and get away from here. We've got to do it."

She seemed irresolute, almost indifferent. The panthers were annoying her. Perhaps she had not heard all his intense whispering. Strangely impatient, she wheeled to the nearest row of cages and cried out. Branglan did not know her voice. It gave a vibrant, indrawn call of anger, not entirely human, shrill, yet humming and pervasive. The beasts were instantly quiet as if frozen.

"Don't mind them now," he urged.

"It's only the start of my work. They're afraid of the sound. There was a great bird long ago, a murderous creature with scales instead of feathers—the one thing feared by a panther."

Branglan had taken both her hands in his, and he drew her forcibly to him. "I've

heard of it. But Verenz and the fellows in the green robes are not scared by it. Look at me! You must listen! Surely you know some way of reaching the shore, even if you need to slip into some sailor's clothes or anything like that. In an hour the chance may be gone. Fentress! Don't give up. We'll let the wind take us anywhere—away from this."

The torch, held to one side in her right hand, which was enclosed in his left, reflected now silently in many pairs of flat, yellow gems from the two rows of cages. The stillness trembled. Fentress was maddeningly slow to respond to his importunity. Then the interruption. The treacherous atmosphere seemed to embody itself suddenly.

The narrow door had opened. Half a dozen tall, green-robed figures rushed into the cage-room to surprise the secret of her mastery. Their fanatical eyes held to Fentress. The whinings began again in the cages on either side. The priests were not content to find no mysterious ceremony in progress. Their passion drew like lightning to the American. They came to take him.

Branglan swept Fentress behind him and retreated down between the cages to keep the six from closing around him. The nearest priest, a stalwart, dark-faced, angular man of forty, shouted loudly and rushed to strike Branglan. The cry brought three black servants squeezing in at the doorway. The panthers wailed and coughed in nervous discord. The glow from Fentress's torch came over the American's shoulder, full in the faces of the investigating party. The first blow had fallen short. The other men exclaimed loudly and came to finish the errand that was so disappointing. Branglan was back as far as he could go, with Fentress crouching behind him against the rear wall of the den. The angular leader went down in uncalculated collapse, with no further outcry. The rage of man and beast broke now, a terrifying deluge of sound.

Branglan groped back with one hand to make sure of Fentress. The torch was erratic. The blacks had shoved their way to the front of battle; their lords pitched forward with infuriated and futile thrusts

at the American, whom they regarded as one source of their failure and a negligible human at best, while the servants confusedly jostled each other in boxing savagely with him.

The group was solidifying. Dull blows made an odd rhythm above the drowning din from every throat but two. The white man, with scant satisfaction in smashing his fist into one dark neck, stopping the moist black arms that drove at him, a flicker of angry hands, or fending the shadowy thing that momentarily flitted for his head, was being deviled full length. Two of the priests were crawling at him on the floor. He dared not kick out or stoop. He could not hold.

One of the blacks was hugging like a wooden trap. Branglan was stifled. He wrenched desperately to send a tearing hand up across the hot, smooth face just higher than his own. An agonized cry bellowed in his ear, as the hugger let go. Dizzily he swayed with the shock of another black man's enclosing grip. His own frantic blows had no further effect. The noise was now a mad fusion of the animal and the human kingdoms.

Fentress felt the concussions through Branglan's body. The deafening tumult gave her the illusion that these marauders struck without noise. The torch was knocked from her hand. She attempted to regain it, but caught a raking blow intended for the American. She crouched back. The torch-flame died upon the floor under a trample of feet. In the darkness she came fully to herself.

She knew by the unleashed vigor of Branglan's movements how ready he was to die effectively for her, and how that might be required in a moment. His breath was a hurried, panting rasp. The life in his body, spending itself tellingly, was the screen between herself and the hours of horror that had paralyzed her thoughts in prospect. She did not picture back over the special moments of their acquaintance, but the immediate present was enough, vividly clear to her, and accusing, too.

He was the one man in the world.

This fact had meant too much to her to have been faced directly while he had

seemed so impossible of attainment. His face, the clear, gray-blue eyes, the honor and the definiteness always there, were formed into her own soul, a part of her so completely integrated as to be rescinded in her own personal defeat. In resigning her life to the destructive forces, she had instinctively yielded up the love of this man. Now, deep within her, a primitive, unquenchable energy was touched. The bitter dream had dissolved instantly.

She moved along the rear wall to the right, out of the shelter of his body. He called warningly to her. She went on, forcing her way between the rock and the straining legs of combatants who were entirely concerned with finishing the American.

Reaching carefully out to the sill that ran before all the cages on this side her fingers found the long, thin rod which locked the front bars of all the cells on that ledge. The pin and hasp yielded. Some one had come close up behind her in the darkness.

She backed along the wall. The clank of iron bars was added to a changing clamor. Then the scratching, padding sound of leaps from that row of cages. A man's scream trailed like an invisible rocket toward the heavy door at the further end of the chamber.

There were frightened cursings and snarls and a groan in the gloom. Fentress found Branglan leaning against the wall, but half aware of the reason that had taken the concentration of battle away from himself.

"There is an animal door, low to your left," she told him huskily.

Some of the young beasts were snooping about in the middle of the dark space, growling preparatory to a fight of their own, while others had clearly gone snapping after the men who had come to learn a secret. Branglan permitted himself to be partly led, partly pushed down through a small wooden door that swung like a curtain. He held to her dress dumbly, as she followed him into a region of nether blackness. Richer odors smothered them, yet there seemed promise overhead of the open night.

"Can you walk?" she asked strangely.

"I'll sit down here for a second," said Branglan.

Fentress hesitated. "You are so—"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

STARLIGHT SILHOUETTES AT THE BRINK.

ABOVE them was a murky sky, seen as from the depth of a well. The quiet was oppressive. Fentress was bending toward Branglan, who arose quickly, muttering in impatience.

"Is there any way out of this without going back?" he asked.

His voice was jerky, as if some one was continuing to pound him.

"A ladder—usually—" Fentress was groping away from him. "Yes—"

"I can't see you." Then her arm came out of the blackness.

"Are you badly hurt?" she insisted, close before him.

"No; we're going on to the shore. Those year-old panthers will make trouble, slow up the other dancers, draw everybody's attention maybe. Where does the ladder take us?"

"Out upon the open mountainside."

Doubting the tensile excellence of the loosely braided vine that swung down the rocky side of this pit, Branglan went up first alone. She followed safely. There were convenient loops and joints to aid the climber as the vine twisted dizzily out, then came clumsily bumping back to the rock again. He lifted her out upon the solid footing at the top.

The night was overcast smokily, and wind-still. No stars were visible. "I thought they were killing you," she said.

"They were. What made you think of turning loose the cats?"

Fentress knew clearly why she had done this. It was less simple to put in words. Yet she was done with indefinitions and melancholy. "I wanted you to live," she replied. She felt that he got much from her words. Perhaps she blushed, or perhaps the exertions a moment since had quickened her blood.

"It's a bad dream," he averred. "Wait!"

He seized her arm and drew her to the right. A cleft in the rocks before them opened a view down the steep sides. Three torches were moving irregularly upward in their direction. The priests had not lost their enthusiasm for her. Branglan lifted himself rather stiffly upon the boulder and peered back across the tilting jungle of rock. Two torches in a different, almost opposite direction, showed distantly. "They're in earnest," he said to himself.

"We can go down the ladder," she said. "There are several ways through the palace, out to the road."

"Somebody will be waiting for us at the door to the cage-room," he said.

"We cannot go down the outside from here unless we meet them. There are no other paths. But we can go up to the top."

"What good is that?" he demanded.

"A stairway down to the Brink—that is the part of the palace farthest in."

"There must be some other way to get down from here to the woods and the shore—"

"No, even the panthers can't do it."

"Then we'll work up a way."

The two searching parties were considerably nearer on either side. Fentress drew her torn robe closely about her and went ahead, knowing the ascent in the dark. The air was clean now, but the whole sky seemed dead as a vault. A shadow suddenly moved before them and walked away—a black beast. "Too large to be one of the untamed," Branglan said.

"If we get down to the water, and can really go away in the white ship, you may never know how to tame them," she said guardedly as they neared the highest elevation.

"I'll sacrifice my curiosity," he answered behind her. His thoughts returned at once to their plan. "Suppose you go to Kajadeva's with me first, while I get the men together. I don't want to leave you alone anywhere."

It seemed to Fentress that she had always known him, that in a curious way he had only just returned to her. "I'll do as you say."

Even at the top of the mountain, with

the night-ocean everywhere around, there was no breeze. Fentress pressed back abruptly. Beyond, within the crater, was a pale jumping of torch light. Branglan crawled up ahead. He wriggled back to her.

"They are going down," he whispered. "They have been looking in there for you."

The honeycombed mountain was alive with green-robed enmity. The three and the two torches had met below near the outlet of the panther-shaft. "Shall we wait for this interior party to go away?"

"Yes," she said. For the first time she noted that his shirt was stained. "I would not have brought you into this—" she began. Remorse and this peculiar tenderness were new emotions to her.

"I wouldn't have missed it," he said, "but I wish it was over. I don't like to go through the palace to the road."

"There are connecting side rooms and passages little used, and a path up around the top of the forward courtyard, so we shall not need to cross it."

Far down the slope, bonfires began to appear, in the clearings and beside the curved road. Where the shore was visible from this altitude, it was beginning to be marked with torches and pyres. Night was the Tarmoyan day. The islanders who had been snared by Dr. Verenz's plague, which is to say those who did not oppose him, had taken the first meal of their day after sunset, and were now renewing ancient customs. Through the obscuring sultriness, and very low in the west, was the new moon—a thin, brick-colored wound. From the road came the tinkle of stringed instruments as parties of jungle workers climbed the terraced road to join the festivity at the palace porches.

This was a yearly event, and on this occasion doubly important to the members of this isolated world. Some of the survivors felt new power coming into their hands, others doubtless were aware of the ascendancy of sterner lords. Over them all was the staining sorrow of the plague, and the greater need for to-night's symbol of happiness. The festival had been declared as usual. With the fount of leadership mud-

died by passion, the joy of other years was tainted now. But very probably the singers and players along the road were too simple to comprehend that they, the untrained and the non-consulted, were the last of a vanishing beauty.

"The price of our getaway is endangering them," said Branglan, "and they can't know it—in time."

"Some of those cats had a full year's growth," assented Fentress. "Oh, this is all so different!"

"I'm wondering if those five torches down there are stuck in the rocks, while those fellows in the green robes are maybe sneaking up this way," suggested Branglan. "The crater is dark now."

"What was that?"

"Not a gun-shot—"

Somewhere below and toward the road the echoing crack of a rifle or pistol sounded, and a second and a third time. Down all the ages, these shots were the first. The dread charm was broken. "The doctor—no one else," Fentress said excitedly. A fourth report, more muffled, seemed to come from the forward court. Bonfires now picked out the yellow stars of an inverted sky, but all singing had stopped.

"We can't stay here," Branglan insisted.

She led the way between the smooth rocks at the crest of the mountain and started down the ledges that seemed at certain turns to be suspended over a black, bottomless nothing. Branglan retained her hand securely, and braced each step of the descent. Deeper in, the clinging ledges widened to a stairway.

"The shooting will break up the festivity—if it was that," she said.

"Take us out of here in any direction," Branglan was saying, "so we can get down to the trees."

She was disheartened again to observe the effect of circumstances upon her friend. Before the daylight had gone, he planned to arrive in some safe country. At dinner he had calculated only to reach the Carolin with half a crew of natives. Now he asked only to gain the questionable security of the jungle. But she felt also a responsibility to sustain his courage. She refused to sink again into the hysteric mel-

anchoy. "We have all night to do it," she said.

From the lowering way before them, birds started in beaten clouds of dust, and strange winged mammals made a sort of blacker dazzle about their heads. But there was no menacing torch. The steps permitted their walking side by side. Unaccountably she drew against him, and placed her hands in his. The twilight-colored veils that made her gown were torn, and the pearly edges dripped against her skin. Her blood coursed in a peculiar tumult. But Branglan was fully occupied with the changing plans.

The broadly hewn stairway curved into a blacker cloud that proved to be the end of a tunnel. "Do not step back," Fentress warned. Ahead, like little silver particles in a mine, glimmered the rays of a torch. They came to a widening of the tunnel, still encountering no one, no living thing but the torch in its bracket over a high couch. The rock floor and the couch were covered with fabrics and woven strands of feathers—a midnight rainbow of color, seductive to the touch.

"Don't you think," she paused to say, "that I had better go on from here alone, and pretend at least to go through the festival dances—"

"Certainly not," he interrupted, taking her arm to lead her onward into the mountain passages. She held back. The torch flame disclosed to her eyes a disheveled young man with a cut on his jaw. On one shoulder some furious hand had taken away a patch of cloth and left certain parallel deep scratches. One hand he instinctively put behind him as she swiftly studied him. And Branglan saw an intensely serious and purposeful expression on her face, the blue eyes wide and keen and shadowed, a grace of shoulders, arms and body meant to shake a man; but there was no thought of personal play between them.

"They will kill you," she was saying, "and that will leave me hopeless. As it is now, they will not harm me if I am alone, if I dance for them, and ride."

"We'll go on," he said. "We're losing time. One of the searching parties will come in here from some direction."

She did not release her hold upon his one remaining shirt-sleeve. Her face seemed nearer, just below his own, her voice very earnest:

"I'm sure I can manage alone—except just here, when the ceremonies close. You do not know the festival?"

"What has that to do with our getting off the island?" he insisted, endeavoring to be stern.

"Out there, in the dances and songs and marches, everything depends upon me. The people are near, all around. I won't be in any danger. The new priests will be patiently waiting until there is a better opportunity to compel me to tame the panthers in their presence. The doctor, with or without a gun, will not harm me. He will be satisfied to have you out of it. I shall tell him that you are dead, if they have not already told him so. Really I shall be quite safe—until the festival ends in two or three hours—in this room."

"Safe!" Branglan said, smiling oddly.

She continued: "The cats we turned loose will make them realize all the more that they need me. Perhaps they will seize the person with that gun, as breaking their dearest law. I want you to stay here, concealed, because when I return I shall have no attendant—only the king—the man—"

Branglan grasped her by the shoulders, as if to convince her as he replied:

"Not at all. The priests are losing patience. They are not used to drinking. The whole situation has gone to their heads, and our young, snapping cats won't help any. Neither will that gun. Two hours—I won't let you go for two minutes. We've got to make for Kajadeva's, and then for the Carolin. Next they'll sink the white ship just as they beached the other. The crew of the native craft that brought you are in irons or contracting the fever already. Now show me the way through the unused rooms and passages, out to the courtyard and the road. Keep us out of the way of anybody."

His will was stronger than her intention of taking all the immediate risks upon herself alone. Beneath the streaks of dirt on Branglan's face showed a comprehension

of her motive—a revelation to him that appeared to replenish all his powers. Fentress turned to lead on. Their objective, the forward courtyard, with its possibility of outside descent, was perhaps a quarter mile distant, with the burrowed length of the palace now lying between. The free ends of her veils drifted back as they ventured on, subtly fragrant.

Again the tunnel widened, and they trod across an empty chamber sown with petals, a yielding rug freshly placed for bare feet. The brass lamp of this room dimmed out behind them. Faintly another one ahead brought them to a deep, shadowy cleft in the rock floor within which was a descending stairway. They hastened on.

"But these parts are almost public," Branglan made objection in a whisper, "somebody has been through here to light the torches—"

"Just a little farther there is a turn that will take us through the former quarters of the servants—rooms that were abandoned because part of the roof shifted," she replied.

"What was that stairway?" came his whisper again behind her.

Fentress seemed to shiver. At least she hesitated to answer. "That leads down to the Place of Veils and Sacrament," she said, hastening on. "The turn is just ahead."

Two empty wicker cages hung on either side of the corridor in the next torch glow. "Here," said Fentress. "The Portal of Birds, where my girl servants take leave of me, in the rites, that is, and the king follows me alone. With Kajadeva I was very happy. We came hand in hand. He made the inner meanings so bright and wonderful and—impersonal—by his own purity. The symbolic marriage at the Brink meant no more than the counsel of a father or a great teacher—"

Her last word choked short. A figure appeared within the glow of the Portal of Birds, just beyond the birdless cages. It would be impossible to gain the turn that would take them to the deserted regions to the right. The figure was walking backward, his narrow shoulders slightly crouched as he seemed to be withdrawing

from something inimical down the dark reach of the corridor. It was the doctor, with a revolver in his right hand clutched by the barrel. He was evidently out of ammunition and in retreat. A pair of yellow, glassy eyes glinted near the floor a few paces down the passage.

Verenz backed into one of the cages and started with a curse. Then he saw Branglan, who was standing beside Fentress, a rather grim look of humor on Branglan's face. Verenz whipped his own eyes back to the four-footed menace that was following him warily. Other panther-eyes showed, staring and apparently hesitant in this their first night-of-prey. Three half-grown cats were trailing the doctor. His wine-thickened phrases in regard to this circumstance were revolting. He continued perforce to retreat backward.

"Hold still," breathed Fentress, close to Branglan's shoulder.

"Coming to you in a minute," declared Dr. Verenz, rather out of breath. "I got two of these, but damn the rest, and damn your faking methods. I knew you couldn't tame anything. Oh, we're lookin' for you!" His speech was deflected abruptly into a frightened tirade at the beasts. One of them sniffed at Branglan's knees, but passed on with the other two, as if they preferred a creature that was in fear and already in retreat. Perhaps they had not approved of the doctor's use of the gun in the forward parts of the palace. Soft snarls came back to the two who held motionless beside the empty cages.

Then, as if doubtful, one of the beasts returned with quicker step and a growl. It lowered to a crawling crouch, thinking better of passing Branglan. It may have scented blood. Fentress did not let go of her lover, but bent down beside him, toward the animal. Quickly from her lips came the curious indrawn cry, guardedly now, but the same in its unearthly potency as her previous use of it in the room of cages. The investigating young panther left only a black blur of himself as he sprang away, in a panic to rejoin his brothers that were stalking the doctor. Branglan sighed shakenly.

"Fentress!"

The doctor was calling, an echo of abject distress. His voice came like the very substance of darkness, a wavering clutch at her from down the corridor. "Don't—don't send them at me, Fentress! Take them away!"

They guessed that the doctor was striking at the beasts with the butt of his revolver, for his words were viciously punctuated—now a mere desperate babble mingled with growls—diminishing. The torch at the Portal of Birds became a steady jeweled glow again. Fentress felt her heart-beat like faint thunder in the enveloping rock. She drew away from Branglan, moving after the doctor and his slinking tormentors toward the Brink.

Back past the narrow chasm of the stairway, Branglan, too, followed. Twice he had called her name, cautiously, but she did not turn to him or give a sign that she heard. She went on like a fair silent ghost, and did not falter even when Verenz's voice came in a shouted echo of terror. In fact, she hastened onward, through the petal-sweet chamber, on to the lighted area of the feathered room.

Dr. Verenz, at the further edge of this room, braced himself drunkenly and hurled his weapon at the nearest of the beasts that were moving close against the floor. The panther snarled sharply, doubled and leaped like a glistening shadow. Voiceless, the doctor seemed to be holding the animal in his arms a moment before he flung it, snapping, from him. These cats were not yet crafty spoilers of men, but the old enmity had never been bred out of their line, and these three were hungry, much annoyed, and rapidly losing their fear. There were no further sounds from the doctor. His arms were flailing, his steps chiefly a stagger of dismay and alcohol. The largest of the beasts was forcing him beyond the ring of yellow light. His gray-white face seemed rocking, the mouth shapeless. Then Fentress was staring hard at the empty darkness there. A straining moment of silence lengthened.

A soft whimper of wonderment came from the cats. They were disappointed. Their prey had made a vanishing plunge.

Like a great swooping bird, Fentress

rushed toward the crater's edge, and the shrill jungle-sound of ancient days vibrated from her lips, a sickle of fear. Two of the panther kittens were blotted out. The third flattened himself sidewise on the rim, clawed thrice with quick straining motion, then also disappeared over the Brink.

The stillness was unreal again. In another moment she was sobbing in Branglan's arms.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE EARTH-CREATURE SIGHS.

BUT at once they hurried in return through the chamber of soft iridescences, where the torch showed her cheeks still wet, again along the corridor to the room of petals, past the cloven depth of stairs, even beyond the Portal of Birds. They moved almost at a run, meeting no one. In the passage to the right they could see nothing at all. Fentress was leading by memory, attested by momentary failures and collisions with the wall. The number of turns was baffling.

"Do you know for sure?" he asked.

"Yes," she panted.

There was a dim shaft of light to the left. The sound of voices was, unmistakable. Perhaps she had missed one of the right turns in the dark, for they were coming out upon the corridors of the palace in daily use—a section just farther in than her own apartment.

They came thus to the lighted room in which three white men, unshaven and half dressed, were engaged in the raucous pleasure of watching the movements of a person upon the floor. The object of their glee and jeering speculations was held by a short chain to the leg of a black panther. The beast, an old drowsily perturbed female, tightened its black lips and drew back its long, stiff whiskers, holding a nightmare of teeth toward its strange partner—a clatter-tongued gentleman from Madras who fumbled and struck at the iron on his ankle.

Fentress turned away, clutching Branglan's arm. She did not see the two green-robed men who entered the room just now

occupied by the Carolin's sailors and their entertainment; but Branglan drew back with her, whispering the fact. He did not understand her exclamation; it was like a prayer; the words belonged to the island.

"The place is accursed!" he said.

"Perhaps—"

Again, unwillingly, at the oasis of illumination beside the two empty bird-cages, they paused to choose their direction. The priests, ignoring every issue except the recovery of their Queen Maiden, had evidently been acting under a sort of generalship. Small groups of them had gone out in various directions, not aimlessly, but, as was now apparent, with the plan of reassembling in this main corridor through the mountain palace. Their net was to be closed and lifted here. Torches in the direction of the Brink sent a warning of this intention. The fugitives had reached a point near the descending stairs. They could proceed no further, forward or back.

"Let me go to them!" she whispered.

"Not at all," he replied, not hearing his own words.

Silently, and in choking haste, Fentress led down the stairway. There was no element of judgment in their thoughts. They were not in the realm of thinking. Deep, human laws of instinct carried them. The narrowing margin of life did not appal them as it must have done only a few minutes or an hour back, had they foreseen. They acted together without exchange of words, no sentiment in the touch of their hands or the guiding nudge of bodies. They did not look back as the tilting stairway seemed to close when they had passed, always deeper, from landing to twisted landing, from one torch to the next light—a feeble lamp in a niche. The dusty, uneven flight altered to a sinking defile, moist and cold. Branglan appropriated a torch, which was but a little lamp upon a silver stick. In another turn of descent it glinted upon water below.

At the edge of this subterranean flume had been dropped a pair of men's button shoes and a briar pipe. These homely articles cleared away the film of half-conscious action in Fentress's mind. "The tide—" she said.

Between sharp banks of rock the inky flood moved slightly. "It is called Night River," she added; "it had a significance, too, and this little bridge."

Only perfect equilibrium had been accommodated in the plan by which a slab of rock had been placed across the chasm without a hand rail. Fentress crossed; he followed. There was an archway to the left.

Weakly their light extended over the hewn walls of this place on the other side of Night River. It was remotely like the chamber of a cathedral in which choir robes are kept—tinted veils hung at one end of the room, and straight, white gowns on another wall. She had gone to a ledge across the room, and raised the cover of a chest. Branglan saw pearls heaped within the silken lining of it—the wealth that had enabled Ellen Eastney to carry on the idea in the United States, until the changing fate of Tarmoya had denied her.

Fentress was removing her own fragile ornaments. These, together with a double handful of pearls she swiftly parceled into a veil and thrust the soft packet into his hand. She pointed to the nearest white linen gown. Branglan took it down and put it on over his head, taking his gaze from the archway of entrance as little as possible.

"You are already tanned," she said.

She had simplified her own apparel, all in an instant. The tattered pearl broideries were gone. Her veils now were a yellow-rose twilight, infolding her gently. She seemed smaller, less of this world. "You will need your hood," she was saying, "so—" His hand that held the torch was curiously unsteady. But it tightened at the sound of masculine voices from Night River. And the shyness vanished from her eyes. She was leading on again.

Branglan balked at another arched low portal. A different murmur of voices reached them through it—a subdued and blended tone. Fentress took the torch from his hand and snuffed it underfoot. No word was said. She clung to his arm, but forced him forward through the doorway.

He comprehended the part, now, and

played well. A priest in white sacramental robe, tall, leisurely, sun-darkened as any native, led at his side a virgin whose feet twinkled white in the lanterned glow of this sunken paradise. He passed a dais upon which several figures slept in drug and drink, and turned aside to a long, vacant couch of silver cloth. A three-horned lamp burned near by, hanging from the low, rocky ceiling. Across the uneven acreage of rock floor were numberless mats and low thrones, slanting terraces, areas of shadowy color and gilt and wavering wicks. Its further boundaries were vague, as if the realm of yellow, misty lights was endless beyond. The atmosphere was drifted with incense and the dry taint of *koresh*, with momentary incongruity of pipe-tobacco. The drone of voices, with occasional gruff punctuations, seemed to come out of the ceiling in deceptive echoes. Here and there were the slow, harmonious movements of the seminude servitors. The place was godly or bestial, but not human.

Sleep had overtaken many within these indistinct, submerged horizons. Shadows were long and languid through the dull golden fog. The dreamy melancholy of the feminine voices was remote and eerie. The newly arrived priest knelt upon the rug beside the silvered couch of a maiden in yellow-rose veils. His hood was properly adjusted. He did not glance behind on round about him. The maiden closed her eyes, but her lips moved slightly. "Pretend—" she whispered.

A number of priests in haste, without maidens in attendance, entered the vast, low cavern now. They had not stopped to exchange their green robes of the out-of-doors for the white garb of sanctity, but upon this point they were not more negligent than the Carolin's sailors lounging in the haze. The searching-parties had merged in the corridor far above and had come down here in a body, doubtless very skeptical of discovering their queen, but also at a loss to look elsewhere just at present. They were talking among themselves. They paused within the rounded portal.

The vista of disorder seemed not to trouble them; they were not concerned with the white men's importation of drugs and

rank tobacco into this region of age-long purity; they were intently scanning the terraces for two fugitives. They paid no attention to the maiden closely veiled in yellow, nor to the tall and mildly affectionate son of the newer interpretation kneeling beside her. They agreed to separate once more, and now set off in different directions quickly, two of them passing close to Branglan's heels. They peered behind every dais, questioned at random, and hurried forward, combing the dark paradise for two they wanted urgently. No one paid much attention to them.

Fentress felt Branglan's hand upon her cheek, and from half-shut eyes saw him glance after one and another of the receding figures. She thought of the crimsoned years of Ellen Eastney, her mother, who had known no such reverent touch as this, no Branglan to suspend breathing, almost, in her presence. In the dimness of these shadows, Fentress was blushing, but Branglan did not see the deeper color of her cheeks, and the blush was not caused by him. Her heart was hammering as vividly as if the silvered couch had moved with her, as if the rock that encompassed them had a pulse. Branglan remained bending over her. He looked into her eyes. "So far," he whispered lest their drowsy neighbors should overhear, "I am not pretending." Then he shuddered, as if remembering that his hands had been through a battle and should not be touching her. He drew away. All emotion left his voice as he asked: "Can they get out of here, except by coming back to this door?"

"No, this is the only stairway," she answered.

With some display of laziness and indifference, the tall priest near the outer portal got to his feet and caused his young, slender partner to arise also. He went with her toward the arched doorway. The priests in green, making an angry, baffled search in the further portions of the cave, were not interested in this pair. Branglan reached into his white gown, awkwardly, to make sure of a silken parcel there. Fentress followed him out. Again in the antechamber of hanging gowns, their movements were suddenly rapid and decisive.

"Do you feel a trembling underfoot, or is it merely myself?" she asked, putting on her pearl-edged robe of twilight-blue over the transparency of the yellow-rose veils.

"Yes, and I think we are not alone in feeling it now," he replied. "Do you hear them stirring about in there? I've been noticing it—like the beat of an engine below-decks."

The shake in his voice disturbed her more than the jar. She was eager to clear the pervasive scent of *koresh* from her breathing. Now a changed note ran through the hum of voices from the cavern behind them. Dimly a panic was beginning in there, its action clogged with the drug. Branglan ripped the white robe from himself and ran with Fentress toward the slab of rock which formed the only bridge across Night River. Their human enemies were not pressing, yet the need for haste seemed intolerable.

He caught her in his arms and carried her across the chasm in half a dozen strides, permitting her to hold aloft the silver taper they had regained and lighted. Down beneath them the black water stirred as if the river was about to boil thickly, or a monster serpent was shifting its position. The earth swayed slightly, then stopped with a dull, far crunch. With a deep-gorging suction, the flood in the chasm sank from sight, rattling hollowly. As Branglan reached the side of the stairway, the taper's light flickered down into the crevice left empty—an awesome depth. Her lover did not release her, but rushed to the beginning of the stairs.

"Let me down. I can run."

"Go!"

They fled up the fantastic stairway in the rock, with no heed of bruises against the turnings, no wasted breath when they stumbled. The world rocked again—a sickening sidewise draw that brought down a sifting of dust from upper rock-sides. A grunting barrier formed above them—a section of rock fallen across the stairs. Branglan lifted her by both ankles, and followed with difficult clutchings over to the safer side of the obstruction. A roaring gust of wind came up the stairs behind them, whisking out their torch, and then a cold,

mighty breath. The water had returned below, with momentum, rising swiftly under the cone of old Tarmoya. The black serpent of Night River flooded up and up, hissing along the rock. The stairway, in darkness, quivered like a living thing. The gods of the deep earth were grating their teeth.

Already it had ended. There was silence, save for the invisible lapping of the under-world tide at the new false level. The cracked walls were moveless again. They dared to look back. Branglan discovered that the water was receding by a slower magic, leaving an odor of the sea on the wet stairs. He returned to Fentress immediately. There was a sense of enormity in the perfect stillness.

The Earth-Creature had perhaps sighed in her sleep, shifting a little, to dream again.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE UNENDING PATTERN.

BUT they could not have run any further up the stairway if all the trouble of Noah had been loosed in the caverns below. Fentress stopped as if the darkness were a net about her feet. Branglan was leaning against the wall, his arm around her waist. Significances spread through their minds—Tarmoya was done.

They were near the top of the stairs. Some one ran by with a weak shout. The same running steps returned and passed again oppositely. Fentress was holding fast to Branglan's arms. Her face was white. "Take me out in the open. I do not think there is any to follow."

In the palace were fewer lights than before, the ancient splendor still further dimmed. In places the roof had tumbled in, and a gusty rain was blowing down into the rooms. Near the apartment of the Queen Maiden were huddled a number of servants, in hysteria. They seemed even less comforted to see Fentress and the American, who should be dead. The palm-curtains to the room of the dais, where the seven masculine visitors had been received only a few hours since, were torn down; the

rug was wet with spilled wine and again with a darker stain. A young black panther had dragged itself to a corner and died—evidence of the doctor's gun work.

At the archway leading to the forward courtyard was a fallen figure—the large bulk of a man in royal robes, face downward, the right arm bare and outstretched ahead, still grasping a sword. It was Kajadeva.

Branglan carried Fentress to the dais. She had collapsed, pallid and lifeless. He went back to the dead king, who, with the last energies of the body, had come up the iniquitous mountain with the bared weapon of rebuke and sovereignty. Perhaps his righteousness and the hastened sacrifice of his life had failed. Perhaps not. Branglan, in confusion and alone, recrossed the room to Fentress. He chafed her hands and spoke to her urgently. Great weariness broke down his resistance. He said all that was in his heart. He was gripping her shoulders. Hoarsely he whispered her to revive, to take hope, to hear him. The color came back to her cheeks. She did not immediately open her eyes. He did not know how much she had heard. He grew silent at once. Servants appeared in the wedge of doorway, then flitted away again.

"He was beautiful," Fentress said faintly.

"The two of you—" Branglan faltered, "were—real."

"I can go on," she said.

"In a moment," he said; "no hurry."

"You are spent—"

Presently she called to her servants, and after a delay four of them appeared. She questioned them, and gave comments concerning Kajadeva and his servants. Some of the latter had been overpowered by the men of the green-robed committee. When Branglan went out with her into the courtyard, the king's body had been taken away. The rain was falling blackly in rushing sweeps over the mountain. They heard through it the low voice of the surf.

Even the inverted sky of yellow bonfires was gone. The island seemed inexplicably smaller and less secure. A strange wind plunged irregularly through spaces obscure.

"The rain is good," she told him.

He agreed. It was a restful drenching they took, passing out the zigzag way to the road. Here a few random figures flitted, crying out to companions. They learned by fragments that the swift tidal monster had taken the life of the city. Two breathless runners passed with a purring torch. The roadway was made gray-white in patches by flowers that had been dropped there. Small, unseen rivulets guttered between the stones at the side. Fentress and Branglan were going, by her wish, to the house of Kajadeva, for the remainder of the night. They went slowly, their hands tightly clasped. The rain cooled and soothed—and erased.

They turned in through the old king's garden, entered the inner court, and saw a light burning. Faithful women were waiting in the house. The sounds stopped when Fentress appeared. Hands of kindness cared for her, while Branglan sank into a chair and stared at the wall. Then the same brown old hands took charge of him, and he did not offer to resist. They rubbed him with wine and wrapped him in fresh sun-fragrant linen. He slept.

The old women sat between the rooms of the two sleepers and whispered in night-long monotony of the olden days and things and men. They sat together, away from the torch-light at the door, and remembered the signs and strange beginnings of destruction. Without bitterness they spoke of the lust of man and the frown of God. They did not know what to think of Branglan. They waited until the dawn.

The morning sun gilded a scene of chaos—the sea pounding in blue fury at the beach, churning jungle bits and dead floating objects—the Carolin lying on her side in the yellow market square of the city near the triple arch, one side of which had been shaken down—and the ship of Tarmoya's own that had been beached with its panther-sail now veering strangely away from the island, released by that devastating hill of water in the night, unmanned and adrift, its dark sail hanging useless. The rain had ended, and the wind was a breath of steam. Fentress saw from a window the panther-ship moving uncertainly and slowly out to sea. It made a feeling like fire

in her breast. She cried out for Branglan. He came in a moment, looked as she directed, and understood.

The only craft that had lived through that midnight surge of ocean was the native ship from Elopura. It had shifted anchorage; it was full of water; it floated obstinately before the city.

The body of the king had been brought down from the upper palace. Kajadeva's own mansion became now the instinctive rallying point of those who had survived—less than a hundred. Toward noon, Fentress was willing for Branglan to go down into a city of moist death, where were only silent, broken walls and a number of black panthers feeding with hideous nonchalance. He returned with a grave, haunted look. Even France had not prepared him. But he simply told her: "Those fellows from Elopura know pearls, but they don't care for this—"

He placed beside her a soaked packet of United States currency. For the price of three pearls, he had arranged passage to Elopura with some natives of that island. They would set out as soon as possible. "It will be crowded. They won't ever come back for a second load," Branglan concluded.

She nodded, thinking of the pestilence that would follow, this time not the work of Dr. Verenz, but from the unburied in the jungle and along shore.

Later in the day she looked up from her reflections and said to him: "You know I came here for mother. You know what they held over me—over her. Now—Jaborshi's friend in the States—what can we do?"

"Perhaps we can find that friend," suggested Branglan thoughtfully, "and deliver Jaborshi's last message—or something equally convincing."

He was able to cheer her a little. They talked for an hour, and he led the conversation away from any connection with Ellen Eastney. In fact, he managed to make the talk intensely personal.

But the story is told.

There were weeks of sea-transit, of crowded discomfort, of insufficient food half spoiled, of clattering native voices always at

too-close range—even on the monthly packet that carried the two of them away from Elopura and toward civilization as it is commonly known. Yet Fentress regained her strength. Her cheeks tanned delicately. She did not sleep very much, for there were many consecutive nights spent on deck; in moon shadows, while a beloved voice beside her said the same thing in a variety of ways. But she was up again early the next morning, possibly to hear something that needed saying again. Branglan, who had met all the tests in the game, did not fail her now in the details. Perhaps, chiefly, he was anxious to keep her thoughts from turning back. He succeeded.

Ellen Eastney comprehended a great deal when first she saw them, yet much of their story had to be put in words again and yet again.

The mysterious woman, ally of Jaborshi, had not waited to determine whether or not the half-caste's mission would prosper in the midst of the Indian Ocean, but had, soon after the sailing of the freighter on the 11th of June, turned loose all the venom that Fentress had tried to avert. Press-writers had ferreted out Ellen at the new and temporary address, and the "tips" they had received "in confidence" were so misleading and garbled as to amuse the mother of Fentress.

It seemed that this woman, who also had a strain of Asiatic blood, was well known in the city courts as a purveyor to the carnally deluded gentleman of the city. The press wanted to make, if possible, a humorous feature story. Ellen Eastney did not seem to serve that purpose. Owing to the jumble of glowing indecency in the mind of their informant, nothing like an effective scandal could be launched, and the papers had nothing to print. Jaborshi had forgotten the social degree of his friend. Had Fentress waited a week before going on her voyage, and had she confessed the threats to her mother, she might not have gone to Tarmoya at all. Yet Jaborshi had shown a certain sagacity in reckoning upon the thrall of her girlhood fears, and he had not approached her until the day before the freighter was to clear.

Late in the autumn, the two who searched

through the city, the State, and other States for a certain unfortunate person, were rewarded. Fentress and Branglan found Nels Faulkner in a madhouse.

To satisfy the law as well as the doctors in charge, Ellen Eastney was introduced as a non-professional alienist who had spent years in studying the curative methods of the Far East. In a tiny, windowless room the blank-faced double of Miles Branglan was placed before his callers. Six unblinking stars shone upon him—a few minutes only for the first day. There were subsequent calls, and an improvement that the doctors claimed to understand quite exactly.

If Faulkner, when released from the asylum some weeks later, ever went to call upon his friends at the addresses they had left upon the office register, he must have been disappointed in discovering that there were no such numbers upon the streets given.

The small panther-skull is no longer used when official calls are made. Branglan had a better idea.

There is a point unfinished, concerning Glasby, the stockily built man with short

gray mustache. Of the group, Fentress and Branglan had been the last to see him, as he hurried away after Basty and the car. Neither the car, nor Basty, nor Glasby ever came back. No one knew. In every moment of life there lurks the invisible seed of oblivion; yet, as in the passing of holy Tarmoya, this darkness, however unexpected, seems to come only in its due season—and it may not be final. It is a change of horizon.

Whatever the weather, Fentress and a tall person who understands her ways and moods very intimately, go about the less suspicious neighborhoods of America, certainly with nothing like the icy inquisitiveness of social investigators, nor yet the sirupy intonations of blue-book slum-workers; but rather with interest in a great game, as perpetually thrilling as only ordinary humanity can be—seeking out the ragged promises of the saints and singers and builders of to-morrow, the artists and leaders of a new generation, many of whom begin this world-visit in malodorous localities, and none of whom will ever fully appreciate the human cost of their benefits.

(The end.)

VIOLE

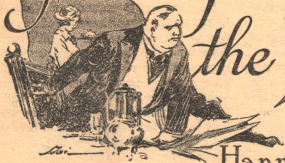
BY MILTON RAISEN

VIOLE—

Are you Viole?
Some one I named, and claimed
To love?
Or are you the soul
Of a cloud-lustred dove?
Of the violet?
Or the gleam-visioned sprite
Of a dream-visioned night
One cannot forget?
Do you exist?
Or are you the mist
(The sweet flower mist)
That hovers about
A field shower-kist?
I doubt—but am ever devout,
Heart, body and soul
To my own Viole.

The Turning of the Worm

By
Hannah Hinsdale



ON the morning of October first the Stacy dining-room was a very comfortable place. It had been designed by the interior decorator of the Stacy stores and was in the best Tudor mode with tapestry walls and dark oak furniture. There at the hour of 8 A.M. sat Mrs. Stacy. She wore one of the most expensive of the pink negligees of the Stacy Woman's Shop stock. On her head was a very elaborate cap of real lace and many rosebuds that sagged dolefully about her thin face and from the fluffiness of which her poor worried, pointed nose emerged as if for air.

She was fretting at the large round blond maid who was bringing her tea. When Mr. Stacy appeared, large, round and blond himself, she motioned him to her, pettishly, and turned her cheek for his maternal peck. He really kissed the lace, but had no expression of having been thwarted as, that function over, he sat himself down to read the morning paper.

"I wish, father," said Mrs. Stacy, "you would let me see the society page. I want to read about the party given for Margaret and John last night." Mr. Stacy looked at her with a grim dislike.

"Woman," he said, "for twenty-three years and several months you have lived with me, and you ought to know by this time how I hate to split a paper. Here, take it all." He fairly threw the sheet across the table at her. She grasped it with her thin hand.

"One would think you would be cured of your selfish bachelor ways by this time," she told him. "Heaven knows I have tried hard enough to teach you politeness and consideration." Mr. Stacy turned to the maid, who stood at his elbow with a plate of toast and a steaming cup. He broke off a piece of toast, seasoned his beverage and began to drink.

"What," he demanded, "is the matter with this coffee? It tastes like hell." Mrs. Stacy started. She was used to her husband's manner of speech, but she intended to let him see that it always shocked her.

"Roger," she said, "you are the father of a daughter about to be married to one of our most clean-mouthed young business men. You should apologize." Roger Stacy looked up and saw his daughter Margaret enter, dressed for shopping.

"I'll be damned if I will," he said stoutly. The maid giggled and left the room, Margaret kissed her mother and gave her father a hug.

"What are you cussing about, dad?" she asked. "You sound like my husband-elect when he misses a putt."

"Your father is only complaining," Mrs. Stacy said, "because this morning I told Alma to give him some catnip tea. Coffee is making him irritable. My mother used to make my father drink it every spring and fall—it's soothing." Roger Stacy put down his cup, took a long breath, and looked bravely at his wife and daughter.

"I won't need soothing much longer," he said. "The morning you and John are married I am going to live at the club."

His tone had something final in it, but he shifted his gaze to the window through which he could see the gardener pruning his favorite rose bush.

"Yes," said Stacy, "I am going somewhere where I can drink all the coffee I want morning and night, where I can wear the clothes I like and smoke a pipe in bed and burn up the house if I care to. Where I won't have to take off my summer underwear the first of October and put on damned itchy flannels, and where I don't have to wear a belt when I'm built for suspenders—where I can have three morning papers all to myself, and live the few remaining years of my life as I want to!"

His wife and daughter looked at him speechless.

"Don't pretend to be so all-fired surprised; you know, mother, I'd have gone long ago if it hadn't been for Margaret. You always used 'our child' as a club to keep me amenable to your silly old notions. Now she's going to marry and make another spineless, crawling insect of a red-blooded manly man."

"Father!" exclaimed Margaret.

"That's what you'll do—your mother before you did it, but I don't care—your victim doesn't know what he's getting into and thinks he wants it—gad! But it opens the cage door for me."

"Is this what twenty-three years of marriage does to people?" Margaret gasped. "I thought you and mother were settled for life."

"So did your mother," said Stacy, "and she has imposed on the hard terms of the contract."

"What about me?" Mrs. Stacy wailed. "I've lived all my life for you!"

"That's just the trouble. Ever since our marriage you have lived all of your life and three-fourths of mine." For once Mrs. Stacy was silenced. She sobbed on Margaret's shoulder and her daughter, without glancing at her father, led her from the room.

Mr. Stacy looked a little uneasy and then, after taking a long breath of decision

called belligerently to Alma, "Take this sickly concoction away and give me some coffee."

When Margaret appeared she found him firm in his purpose.

"I want you to understand, Margaret," he explained, "that I never loved any other woman but your mother. What's more I never want to. There is no woman whom I respect more or whom I abhor so much. I have got to go away, Margaret," he looked at his daughter appealingly, "or I shall hit her. It's terrible, but you know sometimes I long to beat her like you used to beat your dolls when you were a fiery little tyke of a towhead."

He reached out timidly and took Margaret's hand. "My daughter, if you have any hope of happiness for your married future, don't nag! Find something else to make John miserable, almost anything, but don't nag! Remember it's the little annoying things that nip the flower of happiness in the bud; big crimes he can forgive and love you just the same, but nobody can live with a nagger and like it."

"I understand, dad," said Margaret, solemnly. "I will never correct or suggest or complain to John about anything."

Mrs. Stacy's bridge club, composed of three tables of her girl friends of forty, was assembled and waiting for her and Mrs. Kenny the day before the wedding.

"Have you heard," one woman was saying with horror, "that Mr. Stacy is going to leave his wife? My cook told me. Alma, that big fat blonde, told her, and—"

Here Mrs. Kenny burst in hurriedly, her furs flying and her hat on at a right angle.

"Girls," she exclaimed, "I have something perfectly awful to tell you." They gathered around her in pleasant anticipation. "Mr. Stacy is going to live at the club and desert his wife, after all these years."

"You don't say so," said one, smiling.

"The beast," said another. "I always suspected this. Roger Stacy belonged to too many uplift movements."

"You never can tell what a man of fifty is going to do," continued Mrs. Kenny. "I think he has an affair with their blond maid."

"No," interrupted one large handsome woman with a knowing leer, "no, as a matter of fact he has been looking after that buyer at the store for years. She dresses altogether too well to fool people."

And so Roger Stacy's moral status was fixed by his wife's friends, and when Mrs. Stacy arrived late and weakly apologetic she was greeted with a sympathetic pitying interest unmistakable in its meaning which made her want to rise and protest hotly, that her husband was a wonderful and good man, and that if he had left her to live peaceably at his club, it was her own fault for not making his home more attractive to him.

The night before the wedding John Hammond was given a bachelor supper. Sam Dix, a lifelong friend and admirer of Margaret, was the chief participant. He was one of the ushers and his little heart ached over Margaret's marriage, which only added zest to the festivities, for Sam became thoroughly and unpicturesquely drunk.

After supper he sat himself in the window and sang and nearly fell out of the second story of the club by punctuating every verse with a whoop and leaning over backwards. He was pulled back from certain death by the heels once, when he almost disappeared, and then tried high jumping, ending by banging his head against one of the beams of the chimney corner and coming down with a crash, all bloody forehead and shirt front. John, who was rather happy himself, wept over the spectacle. The two rode home together singing the wedding march at the top of their voices.

Before the wedding Mrs. Stacy took Margaret aside for a short talk. Mrs. Stacy said, "Sam, whom I used to think you cared about, would have made you a good husband, but you chose John and there is only one thing I want you to promise me. Promise you won't ever nag. It was my habit of worrying your father about trifles that—" Here she stopped and wiped her eyes.

"I promise, mother dear," said Margaret. "And speaking of good old Sam, I got the nicest note from him to-day. He says"—and she showed the note to her mother—"My dear Margaret. This is to wish you

all the happiness and to tell you that I myself have never changed my feeling for you. If ever I can be of any service to you in any way, it will be my greatest happiness to be yours to command."

The wedding was a brilliant affair, all roses and lilies and pretty girls. During the wedding Sam was a model, a grieved and discarded suitor, a pale and romantic object for all the bridesmaids to pity. But after the champagne was once started he cheered up visibly.

Mr. and Mrs. Stacy occupied the same pew in the church for the last time that night and when they came down the aisle they attracted almost more attention than the bride and groom. It was like seeing marriage in its true perspective—before and after taking.

At the wedding supper, Stacy and his banker were having "theirs" in the library and the banker took occasion to speak seriously. "Stacy, if this gossip is true about you and your wife I wish you to know that, purely as a business matter, I disapprove heartily of your action. Why, it's a blow at one of our most cherished institutions—marriage. Remember history, man, think of Napoleon and Josephine. If Napoleon hadn't divorced Josephine there's no telling what might have happened."

"If I were in another business but that of selling women's clothes," Stacy said, "I might hesitate, but when the women see the new winter styles, they will forget that the proprietor of Stacy's stores is living at the club and all will be forgiven."

"I only hope so," said the banker solemnly.

Upstairs, in the room where the presents were on exhibition, John Hammond was waiting for his bride, who was getting into her traveling things. There was her suit case on the chair, lying open, packed full of the dainty necessities of the trip. John regarded them with a great puzzlement and tenderness. There were her little mules of pink satin, the whole array of toilet articles in ivory and all the impedimenta of the bride. A little scrap of paper lay on the floor in front of the chair where the suitcase was and John stooped and picked it up, thinking it was a message with some

wedding gift. It was Sam's note to Margaret. John read it angrily and tore it up. Just then Alma came in and took the suitcase away. Margaret came in dressed for her trip and looking so pretty that her husband drew her close.

"Aren't we going to have a beautiful home, John dear," she said "with all the lovely things people have sent us?"

"I don't care," said John, "if we had to go housekeeping with a thrift stamp. You're all I want in my home." And they went down stairs in a shower of rice.

Their destination was a secret. Mr. Stacy insisted on going to the station with them and that same night took up his abode at the club.

He looked about his bachelor bedroom with a pride of possession that was pathetic. He flicked ashes over the floor and deliberately rumpled the smooth counterpane of the bed. He took off his coat, displaying his badge of freedom—suspenders—he then took off his boots, elevated his feet onto the dressing-table, lighted his pipe and, crowning defiance of all, ordered three cups of coffee. When it came he sat with a peaceful smile on his face and uttered the one word, "Free."

At his home, meanwhile, Mrs. Stacy sat among the ruins of her daughter's marriage. Kenny had insisted on staying all night with her to comfort her.

"There is some woman in this, I tell you," she said, as she wandered among the presents. "If I were you I'd get a divorce."

"Oh, this is the same bowl I gave that Gallagher girl a year ago and now she has sent it to Margaret. I think she is the worst."

Mrs. Stacy looked tired, but some of her peevishness of expression left her. "You can say all you like about me, Kenny," she said "but Mr. Stacy is a good man. When I asked him what people would think, he said, 'What can they say about our reputation? You have an unblemished record and I have been busy with philanthropy all my life!'"

"Camouflage, my dear," said Mrs. Kenny. But Mrs. Stacy stubbornly refused to listen.

"It is not," she said. "He was a good man, and I nagged him out of my life."

Forthwith she began to weep. Alma, the blond maid, brought her things for the night, and she went to sleep with the real lace cap about her faded cheeks while Mrs. Kenny regarded Alma with bitter suspicion. "That maid is too good looking to have around a man. She'll be leaving next," she said cryptically to her friend, who was trying to sleep.

Jennie Nelson, lace buyer at the Stacy stores, was a black-eyed little spitfire. She made a big salary which she spent as soon as she earned it. She bought stunning clothes and dressed like a movie queen. Consequently, all the women whose husbands put them on low dress-allowance were very bitter about her—and while they consulted her about laces they made mental note of her clothes and said caustic things about her reputation after they left her.

Mrs. Kenton saw her riding one Sunday with Roger Stacy, and with much gusto regaled the bridge club with the incident. The girls in the shop who knew better were no less bitter than the fine lady friends of Mrs. Stacy and gossiped glibly themselves about Jennie's affair with the boss. One young woman took especial pains to inform Jennie's best beau, James Smythe, who traveled in neckwear and who was in town over the week end.

He was a fiery tempered young man and when he took Jennie out for dinner Saturday night he told her what he thought of her and the boss. "You are too nice a girl, and too wise," he said, "to fall for any old gink like him. I thought you and I understood each other, Jennie, and here you go playing around with that old fossil. He can't marry you—there's only one answer."

Jennie was furious and told him if he was so evil minded she didn't care to have anything more to do with him. They parted at her home without even a good-by.

The next morning, when Stacy went out for his horse-back ride, he found Jennie Nelson had gone on without him. He was a little surprised and maybe a trifle lonesome. Now that he was completely foot-loose, he felt strange—there was no one on

whose time he had any lien. He couldn't demand his wife's company, however irksome, and other folk, even Margaret, felt free to keep or break engagements as they saw fit. So when he saw Miss Nelson's horse a half mile ahead of him coming down the road, along the edge of the cañon, he hurried toward her, pleased just to have some one to talk to. To his surprise she reined up angrily at the sight of him. "Good morning," he began smiling.

"Don't you 'good morning' me," she said. "You old idiot. I may lose my job for it but I am going to tell you what I think. The place for an old man like you is home with his family instead of getting girls talked about by his attentions."

"Why—" he began, at a loss.

"Don't you 'why' me either," said Miss Nelson, and started on, giving her horse a cut, which sent him rearing. To her employer's horror they both went backward down the shady slope of the cañon. When he dismounted he found her a huddled heap by the water course.

There was the matter of the rescue to be thought of and he lugged her to the top of the hill, looking for a passing automobile. Some one hove in sight. It was Mrs. and Mr. Kenny and while they gave the girl a lift to the hospital, he had a very uncomfortable half hour bringing up the rear of the cortège with the two horses. He somewhat felt that Mrs. Kenny's air of haughty righteousness was unfriendly and not called for.

Jennie Nelson was laid up for three weeks with a sprained shoulder and broken ankle, and the day after her accident the papers ran the account of it. The bigger journals with which Roger Stacy advertised extensively only mentioned the fact that she was hurt, but the smaller fry, which had no special interest in the matter, put out loud headlines about Stacy's lady companion being hurt in an accident. All through, Roger read the inspired version of Mrs. Kenny.

That afternoon he had a caller at his office—a very haggard traveling man, James Smythe, his customary flippancies forgotten in the wrath of a lover. He strode into Mr. Stacy's office and told him what he thought

of an old fool who got young girls into such messes.

"She isn't anything to me any more, of course," he said, "but although our engagement is off I want you to know there is some man who is going to look after her anyway. You've wrecked your own wife's happiness and here you go—"

"Sit down, young man," Stacy began. "What do you mean? I have raised that young lady ever since she was a cash girl. I gave her every chance to develop in this store because I knew she was clever and could make money, not only for herself but for the firm. I never was in love with her, and I never cared for any woman in the world but my wife. All this damned insinuation about me has got to stop. All I am doing is living my own life, and I won't be taken to task by any whippersnapper of a drummer who thinks he has been injured. You go marry that girl, and here's a thousand dollars for the honeymoon or to furnish the flat and don't come to me blathering about what I have done."

"Honestly, then, you weren't pulling any stunts with her?"

"Don't be a fool young man—after you have suffered as much from matrimony as I have, you wouldn't want any woman nearer than across the counter. They're all hell! But of course, you are young and won't believe me. Once they get you, they vamp your life away. They won't even let you have your hair cut the way you want to! I've nothing to say against your Jennie but you take a tip from me—from the moment you start on your wedding journey, be firm, and never let her get to managing you." After a moment he rose and faced the younger man. "If she ever begins—you're done for! And the worst of it is, after you get used to it, you sometimes hanker for it back again."

When the astonished lover left he found himself remembering patting old man Stacy consolingly on the back and walking out with the check in his hand.

A honeymoon is apt to be a very trying affair. Margaret's was made wretched by a rival she had never dreamed of—golf. For the little seaside resort, where they spent their honeymoon, the honeymoon of roman-

tic rambles on the beach, of fishing parties and swims, of heart-to-heart talks and tender glances, was changed to a golf widow's waiting, for a husband who was always late for meals and talked golf over the card table at night with his fellow criminals of the day.

Margaret read novels until her eyes ached and longed to tell John what she thought, but her mother's words came back to her and she only smiled sweetly if somewhat plaintively when he came in for a hurried luncheon or ate his breakfast, with one eye and his entire mind on the first tee.

Sam was ordered to the seashore by his doctor. He had chosen, without knowing it, the honeymoon spot of his adored one, the same Seacrest where John and Margaret were. When he came in on the early afternoon train, Margaret, lonely and miserable, was frankly glad to see him.

"Where's John?" he asked her and was greeted with the answer. "I'm not on a honeymoon any more, I am just a golf widow."

And they spent the afternoon together.

That night there was a strained meeting between John and Sam. "Where did you come from?" John demanded of Sam in the hall, as he was hurrying up for a hasty shower before dinner.

"Don't be so glad to see me—it unmans me," said Sam, and joined Margaret.

When John came down-stairs he found his wife and Sam laughing joyously over something and quite indifferent to his arrival. He left immediately after they had dined and went to playing cards. Sam, who had letters to write, left Margaret in the lobby and was busy with his papers until midnight. Returning for his key he was startled to see Margaret still curled up before the fire; she was reading, apparently interested.

"Where's John?" he asked her.

"Playing cards," she answered, on the defensive immediately.

"Why aren't you in bed?"

"Because this book is very interesting," she answered.

He held up the Rules of Golf and snorted at the sight of it.

Sam went back to his room but at one o'clock something led him to the lobby

again. There by the empty hearth, crouched in her chair, sat Margaret, half asleep. She had been crying.

"Why don't you turn in?" he asked tenderly.

"Because John has the key and—the clerk's gone and, there is only one."

Sam strode away and went into the card room. It was misty with cigar smoke, moist with beer fumes. John was staring fixedly into space and when Sam put a hand on his shoulder he started as if he had been hit.

"John," Sam said, "Margaret is waiting for you."

"Well, tell her to go to bed, I'll be along soon." John looked at his cards angrily.

"I think she wants you."

"It's none of your damned business if she does!"—John's jealousy rising.

Sam shook him.

"You have the key—I'll take it to her."

John threw the key angrily onto the table.

Sam took it and walked out. Margaret after she got to her room threw herself on the bed.

"I promised, oh, I promised, but I was never so furious in all my life. To think I should be treated so!" And she beat the pillows with her fists and then laughed as she remembered her father's story of the little girl she used to be, with her fits of temper towards her dolls. None the less, she cried herself to sleep. John coming in very guiltily at five A.M. was expecting a well-deserved scolding, but found her asleep, and was a little piqued. The next morning when he woke up Margaret was gone. He was decidedly cross and felt neglected.

"I suppose she's having breakfast with that lounge-lizard Sam," he muttered.

The door opened and his wife entered, bringing him coffee and toast, with never a question as to his whereabouts the night before and no mention of his defection.

"She doesn't care what I do—she's got Sam," he thought. For several days Margaret and Sam were together a great deal and John decided to ask Margaret to play golf with him. It was a great condescension on his part, only born of necessity. People were beginning to talk about Margaret, and he felt as her protector he must shield her

from gossip. Margaret played badly and they had to let so many people go through, that he despaired of ever getting around and lost interest in his own game. She wept quietly behind a bunker while he holed out, and that ended their golf together.

Back in town again they went to live with Mrs. Stacy and John found much time to spend at the club and worried his father-in-law not a little by his visits there. Meanwhile, Sam was always around to fill any deficiencies. If John left his wife in the theatre to go for a drink between acts, Sam was always beside her when he came back. Mrs. Kenny was quite interested also and told her friend that people were talking. Mrs. Stacy took Margaret to task but that young lady only laughed at her.

"Sam isn't in love with me, mother, and Mrs. K. is an old gossip."

But Margaret's heart was sore just the same. She loved her husband; she wanted to be pals with him, but her vow, never to complain or correct him, made her as chatty as a tombstone. She suppressed her natural resentments until she became practically only "yea" or "nay" to him, and he found in her a great change from the spirited woman he had married. So he left her alone more than ever.

They were going to a dance together and John, who did not care for dancing, sat gloomily in the smoking room most of the evening. None of his friends were there and he felt very cross. He wandered out into the conservatory and sat by a palm, throwing ashes to the goldfish in the fountain and silently swearing to himself. He had been drinking a good deal and had been warned by his doctor that afternoon. The doctor's wife, a young butterfly, just married, was talking to some one behind him, among the plants.

"Don't you think it is perfectly morbid," she said, "about the way Sam is waiting for John to die?"

"I don't call what he is doing waiting," her companion returned, "he is with Margaret enough now, I should say."

Margaret and Sam had entered the conservatory, at that moment and had heard the remark too. John had not seen them, nor had the doctor's wife and her friend.

"Yes, Sam has always been in love with Margaret, you know, and he never pays any attention to any of the other girls. He is waiting, they all think, for John to drink himself to death."

John got up and left the room. He stumbled against a crony in the hall, who had come in in a hurry. "Just in time," the friend said, "we're making up a party for the lake, three days of rioting—shooting, fishing and bridge, plenty of bridge. Will you come?"

"Sure," said John, and "I might just as well begin the end now," as they left the room together.

Margaret sat down in the seat John had just left, Sam beside her. The doctor's wife turned and saw them and nudging her companion left the room.

Margaret looked at Sam in dismay. She was aghast and afraid as only the thoroughly good woman is afraid of scandal. She turned on Sam, regarding him for the first time with a look of repugnance.

"This is due to your dreadful scheme—you told me you really wanted to help me."

"I do—I love you, Margaret—always—" She stopped him.

"A man who gets a woman talked about is in love with only himself. Please find John for me, I'm going home."

Sam left her without a word and Margaret sat, a heap of chagrin in her ball frock of gold, and impatiently pulled the fronds from her feathered fan.

Sam came back almost triumphant. "John left the party in a car with Tom Fielding fifteen minutes ago. Destination unstated. Here is a wire for you."

Margaret opened it with misgiving. "Your father here with me, badly hurt, come home at once," and Margaret, forgetting everything else for a moment, begged Sam to take her in his car.

"I'm a coward to bring in my own troubles now, Margaret, but this has got to be faced by us both," he told her as they were driving home. "I wouldn't say anything if I thought you were a happily married woman. Here I love you and have to see you neglected and mistreated and unloved by a husband who doesn't appreciate one of your little finger's worth, and ever

since I was a kid I've loved you with all my heart." And he reached out and took Margaret in his arms. She felt awfully sorry for herself and for Sam. She cried a moment on his shoulder, long enough for the headlight of a passing automobile to strike them fully. John, who was at the wheel on his way to the lakes, saw his wife in Sam's arms. He jammed his foot vigorously on the accelerator. The other occupants of the car swore at him.

Margaret was explaining things to Sam between sobs. "John does care for me," she insisted, "even if he is selfish about golf and staying out nights. He does love me, a woman can always tell. And that's where I've been so wrong. I've known you cared and I've let you do nice things for me, just because it gave my vanity something to live on. A woman whose vanity is dead is so lonesome."

"Poor kiddie," said Sam and put her gently on the pavement, beside her door. "What do you want me to do for you?"

"I'd hate it awfully," Margaret acknowledged, "but the best thing you could do for both of us, is to get married. Could you go that far?"

"Even to the world's end," said Sam and he kissed her hand.

Mrs. Kenny was a persistent woman of one idea and that idea was generally about some one else's affairs. She had decided early in the Stacy separation that Mr. Stacy was possessed of polygamous instincts and she was possessed with the idea that Mr. Stacy should think so too. She had maligned Miss Nelson to her and when that theory fell through and Jennie Nelson was happily married to her salesman, Mrs. Kenny took in charge the idea that the fat, blond Alma was a vampire.

Alma had been a great comfort to Mrs. Stacy and had often acted as a go-between, between her and her husband. Alma did Mrs. Stacy's shopping and reported to her how Mr. Stacy looked when she saw him. Mr. Stacy bribed Alma to tell him how Mrs. Stacy was getting on and insisted on weekly reports from her and in return gave Alma gloves or ribbons or whatever she wanted from the store. He was at heart a kind man and even if he did wish his own way

in the matter of eggs and B. V. D.'s he didn't want his wife to suffer.

Indeed, bachelorhood was proving not so attractive after all. He had one or two attacks of his old trouble, sore throat and rheumatism, and the men at the club were very unsympathetic. Their only prescription had been to offer him a drink which he didn't want. Mrs. Stacy noticed Alma's new finery and asked her about it. Alma evaded her. She felt a little disloyal in accepting them as if she had gone over to the enemy, but she did want to appear beautiful in the eyes of her new beau, Ned Olson, a husky chauffeur she had met at a dance recently. He was taking her to the movies every time she had a night off, and they were getting very fond of each other.

Alma's finery worried Mrs. Kenny, and one day when she saw Alma coming from Mr. Stacy's office with a large package, and later appearing at Mrs. Stacy's ready for the street, wearing a feather boa, Mrs. Kenny told Mrs. Stacy of her suspicions. That lady questioned Alma, and when the poor girl admitted the boa had been given her by Mr. Stacy, Mrs. Stacy cried, and under the eagle eye of Mrs. Kenny told Alma she could go.

Ned Olson overheard the story of Alma and her boss while taking Mrs. Kenny home with his employer's wife. Alma later wept out her sorrows on his shoulder. He doubled up his fists and swore vengeance.

He watched the club that evening, but Mr. Stacy did not appear. The next night he went up to Stacy's house to have it out with Mrs. Stacy. Now it happened that Mr. Stacy, like most criminals, found the scene of his crime magnetically attractive. He had fallen into the habit of going every evening for a walk in his old neighborhood. He had always been proud of the grounds around his home and had always taken a personal interest in every shrub or tree that had been planted there, especially the rose bushes.

Now fall was coming on again, and he wondered if the gardener was taking care of things for the winter and if the rose bushes were going to be protected from the cold, and, well—he felt he liked to look at the place anyway. He'd caught a glimpse of

Mrs. Stacy down town the other day with Margaret and she looked better than he had seen her in years. The truth was that Mrs. Stacy, having no one to fret over, had regained her youth. To be sure some beauty treatments may have helped, but without a doubt she was becoming an attractive woman again. She found nothing at home to interest her so she had taken to books, politics and fancy dancing.

There was a class made of the women of her bridge club and it was interesting to see what women of forty could do. Mrs. Stacy was thin enough not to need it, but she looked better than the others at practice and the exercise made her prettier than for years. So Mr. Stacy began to take nightly rambles about his old place, and the night watchman, knowing him, said nothing but grinned as he passed him and Mr. Stacy somewhat shamedfacedly grinned back. Living your own life was becoming a lonesome job.

This night Ned Olson, coming around the bend of the drive met Mr. Stacy, and Mr. Stacy seeing he had been drinking asked him what he was doing there.

"I've come," Ned said sternly and firmly, "to have it out with the old woman."

"What old woman?" Mr. Stacy asked.

"Mrs. Stacy, that discharged Alma for nothing and ruined her reputation."

"Mrs. Stacy discharged Alma?" asked Mr. Stacy in dismay.

"Yes, Alma, and who are you?" asked the chauffeur.

"Why, I'm Mr. Stacy."

"Then you are the cause of the whole thing. What do you mean giving a good girl like her gloves and feather things for?"

And forthwith, he, more primitive than the drummer, made a rush for Mr. Stacy and that gentleman found himself struggling and calling for help.

When the watchman came running the chauffeur fled, but left Alma's late employer's husband bruised and bleeding on the gravel. The watchman whistled softly, undecided for a moment, then took Roger Stacy up to the house and rang the bell. He delivered him to Mrs. Stacy who opened the door herself. "It's where he belongs anyway," he said.

Margaret found her mother almost happy when she came home.

"Your father is hurt, not badly, the doctor tells me; but he had to stay here for a few days. I am afraid I would annoy him if I waited on him so I'll get you to sit up with him to-night. He doesn't need a nurse."

Now the reactions of the human heart are curious. Mrs. Stacy had prayed to heaven on her knees every night to have her pearl above price restored to her, and when he was providentially brought back she found herself regarding his countenance with the eye of an art critic as she washed the blood from his middle-aged face.

His chin was rather flabby, and his nose, even if it were not gory, never was exactly classical, she remembered, and she had to gulp down a little sob of penitence at her own disloyalty. When he revived he looked at her, recognizing her and their old room, and with a peaceful smile and little pat of her hand he turned and went to sleep.

Later he woke and looked up into the face of his daughter. "Where's your mother?" he asked.

Margaret went to get her.

"I guess I had it coming," he told his wife, "and I saw another light than stars when that man hit me. Mother, don't you want to make me some catnip tea?"

Mrs. Stacy cried over the gas range in the kitchen as she prepared it. She did care for him even if he wasn't as young as he used to be.

John, to Margaret's intense worry, was missing three days. She was no longer her father's nurse, her mother having taken full charge at her husband's plea. Mrs. Kenny coming over for morning gossip was overcome to find Mrs. Stacy too busy to see her.

"Your mother always was a sentimental fool," she told Margaret, and sniffed her way out.

Margaret sat up two nights waiting for John, and the third day went to bed so tired that she did not need the sleeping potion her mother insisted on her taking. Mrs. Stacy did not tell her husband about John and he was still too bruised to be interested in any other than his own adventure.

The third night, Margaret, getting up

about eleven o'clock heard voices outside and a taxicab. John's friends, hauling him up between them, rang the front door bell. John was limply drunk but Margaret opening the front door, a tiny figure in her pretty negligee, looked nothing but surprised sympathy at the sight of him.

The men were sheepish—John has been sick, they told her, and shall we help you get him up-stairs? Margaret nodded, and led them to the bedroom. They placed John, still limp and silent, on the bed. Mrs. Stacy came in.

"John is sick, mother," said Margaret, "and these gentlemen"—the men winced—"have taken care of him and brought him home."

Mrs. Stacy looked at her daughter's husband comprehendingly.

"Oh, dear," she murmured. "Isn't it too bad?"

The gentlemen stalked out. They were all still in their evening clothes of three nights before.

"John is a dear boy; what a pity he should be stricken like this!" Mrs. Stacy was cooing in distress.

"Yes," Margaret agreed so the men filing down stairs could hear her. "But he has a bad habit of following other dogs off."

"Remember you mustn't scold him," said Mrs. Stacy, as she helped Margaret to get her spouse to bed and brought basins and catnip tea.

Margaret was all gentleness when her mother was in the room but when she left she turned on her prostrate spouse.

"John," she said fiercely, leaning over him, "can you understand what I say?"

John groaned in assent.

"It took a beating to make dad sensible," Margaret hissed at him, "and I think you need one too."

So she gave him a thump on the stomach with her tiny fist. He turned painfully and groaned.

"Here goes!" said Margaret, and forthwith turned into a fury. She beat at his face, his hands, his knees, his chest. "I'll teach you to neglect me the way you have. I'll show you how much of this sort of thing I can put up with. I'm tired of being meek and standing anything you choose to

do. I married you because I wanted to live with you (thump), I wanted a companion (thump) and a friend (thump, thump, thump), and I only got a—" Here Mrs. Stacy came in and Margaret turned to her.

"Margaret, what are you doing?"

But Margaret's hand was resting tenderly on John's brow.

"Leave the tea, mother dear, John is too sick to drink it. You go to father."

And when Mrs. Stacy left the room Margaret began her ministrations again.

"You golf fiend—you poker-playing fool—you don't know how to treat a wife, but I'm going to show you."

John managed to get into a sitting position. "Is this the method you advise?" he began. Margaret burst into tears, exhausted. John held out his arms.

"Honey dear, I'm a damn fool—why didn't you beat me up before—then I'd have known you cared." His arms closed about her. "Gad, but you've got a peach of a punch, Margaret—some muscle!"

The morning of October first dawned. Roger Stacy was sitting up in his old room, drinking his morning coffee and reading his newspaper all by himself. Margaret and John came in to inquire about his health. They were arm in arm and grinning over an announcement in the *The Review* to the effect that Sam and a Miss Georgia Fish had been quietly married the day before. Miss Fish was Sam's stenographer and had worshiped Sam for years.

"I wish, John," Mr. Stacy said, "that the first time you are able to go out—er—that is, I mean the first time you're down town, you would stop in the club and get my clothes, I want to get up."

John indicated he would have Mr. Stacy's wardrobe there before dinner time. Mrs. Stacy came in with the steaming coffee pot in her hand.

"Here it is the first of October mother," he looked at his wife guiltily, "and I'm still in my B. V. D's." Mrs. Stacy only smiled as she poured him his second cup of coffee.

Mr. Stacy took the cup and sighed. The coffee smelled good and he was grateful, but he felt that something had gone from his marriage never to return.

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



IN your copy of ALL-STORY WEEKLY next week you will find the opening instalment of one of the most amazing stories we have ever published. It is like nothing else that ever has found its way into print; a tale so astonishing, so out of the usual path of fiction that only a master of the art of writing could so use his materials as to make the story convincing. We are convinced that this five-part serial—

SARA WAS JUDITH ?

BY JULIAN HAWTHORNE

Author of "A Goth from Boston," "The Cosmic Courtship," "Absolute Evil," etc.

will before long become a subject of conversation—perhaps of controversy—from coast to coast. Presented by the author in the form of a biography written by Martha Klemm—whom our readers will remember for the parts she played in "A Goth from Boston" and in "Absolute Evil"—it tells of the career of one of the most remarkable beings who ever have visited the world. But to any but a master pen even an outline of the story is impossible; you must read it for yourself.

Julian Hawthorne needs no introduction to ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers. His work universally is acknowledged to be of the highest order. In this, his latest story, it is our honest opinion, he has made a contribution of real and lasting value to American literature.



OUR novelette for next week is the second part of

SPARK OF THE FLAME

BY EVELYN CAMPBELL

Author of "Nobody's Bride," etc.

Readers of the first part of this splendid story have found by this time that we did not put too high an estimate on this powerful picture of desert life. The second part is even more tense and dramatic than the first. We will be anxious to learn your estimate of this "Spark of the Flame."



READERS to whom the art of a story-teller is scarcely second to the story he tells will be immensely taken with an exquisite bit in next week's magazine, "THE SEA," by Kathryn White Ryan. This is an Ibsenesque etching which the Master would not have disdained. Incidentally, it is a highly dramatic story as well. Don't overlook this little masterpiece.



"INCURABLES," by Earl H. Emmons, in next week's magazine is a he-man's story which your

wife or your sister will chuckle over as much as yourself. No doubt in the world that *you* will chuckle because the author has merely consented to show the portraits and tell the story of two rangers who must have traveled the Black Hills with him. This story is a safe bet for any man.



THE COVERS TRULY BEAUTIFUL

TO THE EDITOR:

It has been quite a while since I have written and stated my appreciation for your unsurpassable magazine. I first read the *Cavalier* in Indiana, then the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, which followed me to Delaware and has again come to Indiana with me. The stories are written in such an absorbing manner that, as the hours glide by, I find myself living the life of the characters portrayed in the stories.

I think James B. Hendryx's masterpiece, "The Texan," was great, but why not give us a sequel to it? Max Brand's "Children of Night" and "The Untamed" were far above par. J. P. Copp's "Pug-ly-gug-lo" and "Allatambour" were thrilling. E. R. Burroughs's "H. R. H. The

Rider" was excellent. Isabel Ostrander's "Suspense" was some mystery. Hulbert Footner's "The Owl Taxi" and "The Substitute Millionaire" were marvelous. H. Bedford-Jones's "The Threefold-Cord" and "Four Quarts of Rubies" showed the pep. J. U. Giesy and J. B. Smith, in their "Semi-Dual" stories, hold one spellbound. Frank L. Packard's "From Now On" was a winner. They are your best writers. Ah! I almost forgot E. K. Means and Edgar Franklin, we couldn't do without them. "Little Crooked Master" and "People of the Golden Atom" promise to be good. Let us hear from "Janie Frete," too.

Your covers are truly beautiful. Typical of the contents of the best magazine published to-day. I will never have a kick to make, as I always find your magazine so absorbing; in fact, the hours spent in reading a thrilling Western story or a deep mystery are the best part of my life. I must conclude, for I fear that I have consumed too much space. With an earnest desire for the success of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, in the future, that you have enjoyed in the past.

Indianapolis, Indiana. RALPH BROUGHMAN.

"TH' RAMBLIN' KID" A WINNER

TO THE EDITOR:

May I add my thanks and compliments for the wonderful magazine you publish, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. From the beginning, an accidental acquaintance in 1917 fast became a steady, looked-for visitor to my home. Who reads it here? Well, I suppose "yours truly" is one, but it really is a scandal to share a magazine like yours with a family like mine. The only way to solve the problem was to read your stories out loud in our family circle, and I can assure you that each author receives his due share.

For lovers of adventure the story "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" certainly will stand out as a mile-stone for years. What a wonderful imagination and a thorough knowledge of Irish and Scandinavian folk-lore, paired with action, passion and humor does this story contain! Mr. Merritt truly knows how to make the impossible seem possible, and we will be glad to meet *Larry* and golden-eyed *Lakla* again, as I feel we will.

Once in a long while a writer strikes a really new idea—take, for instance, Mr. Ray Cummings in "The Girl in the Golden Atom." In its conception this story was one of ten thousand, and would have been best off if Mr. Cummings had left the ring in the glass case in the museum, for the rest of us to wonder and speculate over.

"Eastward Ho!" was also good. Certainly our hero had the time of his life in New York. The story went strong all the way through until the last chapter, when the author plainly showed us that no matter how much he knew about adventure, he knew nothing about love-making. No, that is where Mr. Earl Wayland Bowman showed strong—and I am speaking very seriously now—in "Th' Ramblin' Kid." Let every one of the large family of ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers read

the last two chapters of this fine story over again. What an undercurrent of primitive passion and a strong womanly love—the spoiled rich man's daughter willing to come down in her demands on life for his sake—and he, the *Kid*, refusing her sacrifice, going away to make a better man of himself to be worthy of his *Carolyn June*. That was classic, beautiful English also. Please feel assured that your good work is appreciated, and then—just stick to it. Good luck to ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

ADOLPH M. P. NISSON.

Eltingville, New York.

WHISTLING DAN IS ON HIS WAY BACK

TO THE EDITOR:

May you and the beloved ALL-STORY WEEKLY live a thousand years and never grow old. Why? Because each in their way are "one out of a thousand." ALL-STORY WEEKLY can not be beaten in any respect, and her editor—(bless his poor, bald head), has the patience of Job. I notice some of the readers are suggesting taking a few of the authors by the ears and bringing them back on the job, but I say, kick out a few bonehead knockers (who would grumble if they had the world), then we will all be a happy family again. Gee! but I get sore when I can't get my ALL-STORY WEEKLY every week. I would rather pay more for the magazine than to fail in getting it, and I know a good many others would, too.

Now, I wish to thank the editor for steering a previous letter of mine safely over the dreaded waste-basket and into the good old Heart to Heart Talks. In my previous letter I begged with tears in my eyes for Max Brand to bring *Whistling Dan*, *Black Bart* and *Satan* back from the South—but—well, I guess he can't find them. them doggone geese are leading them a wild-goose chase. Even though A. S., of Bronx, New York City, didn't tell us his name, still I'd like to have the pleasure of patten' him on the head just once. For at least that head is full of good common horse sense. Didn't you notice who his favorite author was? Edgar Rice Burroughs, of course. Only he made the mistake of setting him up beside H. Rider Haggard. Well, guess we can overlook a few flaws in an otherwise fine head. I won't even say one word of praise for "our" staff of authors, nor "our" many fine stories—for I think our finest feelings are unexpressible, and are more reverent when left in silence. I am always an ALL-STORY WEEKLY booster.

Denison, Texas.

MELLIE HAVNIEAR.

"DIFFERENT" STORIES THE BEST

TO THE EDITOR:

This is one and the only magazine that I feel that I cannot do without. For one year I bought this magazine from the news-stands and on trains, and managed not to miss an issue, although at times I found it necessary to go to the next town, twelve miles from here simply and solely to get the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, as I could not obtain it

from the local dealers, and would try the news "butcher" on each train through here Thursdays and Fridays, and then if I failed to land my copy I "beat it" to where there was one for sale.

It would be very hard for me to name my favorites among such an excellent staff of writers as are supplying the fiction for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, but will say that your "different" stories are my favorites.

In this connection, wish to say the "Girl in the Golden Atom," was great, and so also was the sequel, "The People of the Golden Atom," although it seems to me the latter part of this story, was rather disappointing, perhaps because it winds up with the conventional happy ending, and nicely disposes of all the characters. Looks like Mr. Cummings, after straining his imagination to such an awful extent as he did to produce this story, would have left a little of the final part of it to the reader's imagination. I greatly enjoy Mr. Means's negro stories, and also Chalmers's, Lee Thayer's, and Carolyn Wells's mystery series.

Hope the editor will not let any of these writers get away from him, for they are some of the best ever.

Unlike many of the readers, I am not asking for a sequel to any of the stories, for somehow, seems like no matter how interesting the characters are, they never seem to be so interesting when they are brought back in another story.

Yours with best wishes,

Chaffee, Missouri.

EARLE GIBSON.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

I am not a regular subscriber to your magazine but have been a constant reader for a number of years and I like the ALL-STORY WEEKLY the best of all. I am partial to sea and Western stories by Captain Dingle and Max Brand. His "Untamed" was fine; also "The Texan" by James B. Hendryx. But the "Moon Pool" was the best story I ever read. I am now reading "Th' Ramblin' Kid" by E. W. Bowman, which is some story itself. In fact they are all good but some are better. As this is my first attempt I'll stop. Wishing the ALL-STORY WEEKLY long life and prosperity.

Ranger, Texas.

CHAS. S. CRAWFORD.

I have read ALL-STORY WEEKLY for two years and find it the only book that interests me. I have no kick to register against any of the stories I have found so far and I read it from cover to cover, omitting nothing, even to the advertisements. I enjoyed "Petticoats and Uppercuts" by W. R. Hoefer in October 25th magazine very much, as I once belonged to a family of "box fighters." I read it to my husband and he also enjoyed it greatly, though he hardly knows a boxing glove from a punching bag.

I am also much interested in "Eastward Ho!" "Don't Ever Marry," and "A Man Named Jones." I could wish for no better Christmas

present than a chance to read ALL-STORY WEEKLY during the holidays. This is my first time to express my opinion of your magazine to you, although I always rave about it to my acquaintances.

Peckenpaugh, Wyoming.

MRS. L. B. M.

Enclosed find fifteen cents in stamps for which please send me the March 6th, 1920, ALL-STORY WEEKLY. For some reason or other I missed it. I surely have nothing against your magazine. It is a magazine full of "pep." Your short stories are fine. I liked the series of stories, "Brown: Benefactor-at-Large," being different from any thing I have read. Talking about your serials, they cannot be beat. I like Western stories best. That is why I am so anxious to get the magazine so I can read the conclusion of "Th' Ramblin' Kid." It's great so true to life. Hope we will get some more stories from Earl Wayland Bowman. Well, enough said. Hope you and the ALL-STORY WEEKLY a continued success.

HOLGER C. EKHOLM.

307 London Ave., Rockford, Illinois.

I think it is about my turn to get in your Heart to Heart Talks and try to tell you how I, for one, appreciate your magazine. The first copy I got sent to me in a parcel to the front-line trenches in France, something more than three years ago, and I was so taken with your stories that I at once sat down and with a stub of a pencil, not more than one inch long I wrote, asking my brother, who sent it, to save every issue till I got home to read every story. This I was lucky enough to be able to do, so that this winter I had the pleasure of reading almost all your back numbers and now I am counting the days till it comes along again, for, like most soldiers, I like something with a kick. So for my treat I will order an ALL-STORY WEEKLY and I think it has just the right amount of kick for most of us. Here's hoping it is as good in the future as it has been in the past. An ALL-STORY WEEKLY admirer.

Sask., Canada.

ERNEST PASSMORE.

Enclosed please find thirty cents in stamps. Kindly send me three copies of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY dated January 21, February, 14 and February 21st. I missed getting these copies during my recent illness and cannot consider myself well again until I have read them. I have been a constant reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for nearly two years, and to say that your publication is good would be putting it mildly. So here's hoping I receive my back numbers soon and that the ALL-STORY WEEKLY continues to be the success it is to-day. I might add that I also find your Heart to Heart Talks, and Little Heart Beats very interesting, and never lay a copy aside until I have read all of them. Yours for success.

Bronx, New York City.

O. V. ESSER.

I am not a subscriber but I have read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for over a year, and I think it is the best magazine I ever read. All the stories are good, but I like some better than others. I see in the Heart to Heart Talks that the ones I don't like are the favorites of others. I think we should have a sequel to "The Gold Girl," by James B. Hendryx, and "Th' Ramblin' Kid," by Earl Wayland Bowman. I like the Western stories best of all. I think "Th' Ramblin' Kid" is the best Western story I have read yet. I don't think that or "The Gold Girl" ended right. I could not do without the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Long may it prosper. I am ever an ALL-STORY WEEKLY reader.

BERTHA MAY RIDDLE.

Okecotah, Oklahoma.

weekly magazines, but these no longer sufficed, so my wife bought at least a dozen magazines for me to choose from, and I decided that the ALL-STORY WEEKLY was just what I wanted. These stories of adventure brought me back again to my far-off boyhood days. I agree with others of your readers that most of the different stories are a bore, and that the imagination displayed in them is of a very puerile type, but there are so many good things that one can forgive even *Wah* and *Ga*, as long as one is not compelled to read about them. I think the very best story that I have read in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY was "Ashes to Ashes." Thanking you for many pleasant hours.

H. C. ELSING.

Spruce St., Lakewood, New Jersey.

I am a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I was greatly impressed by the Western story, "The Gold Girl," by James B. Hendryx, and I, as well as my husband, enjoyed reading it. We dropped everything to read it. I being at home during the day, read the story first, then my husband would read it at night. We want a sequel to "The Gold Girl." We want to hear more about the little cabin with the porch, and want to have them set on the porch evenings and watch the lights fade away on the distant snow-covered mountains. We also want our hero to find *Monk Bethune* and *Microby Dandelion*, as he says he would do, when he sends his wife back to town and leaves her alone on the trail. Hoping to see this in print in your Heart to Heart Talks, as there never has been any published from Friars Point.

MRS. W. L. CARTER.

Friars Point, Mississippi.

Enclosed find check for two dollars. Kindly renew my subscription for six months beginning with the issue of February 21st, 1920. I first became acquainted with your magazine some months ago, when I became an invalid, unable to take exercise, and with no amusement but reading. I had subscribed for years to some monthly and

Enclosed find ten cents for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, dated March 6, 1920. I have been a constant reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three or four years. There are so many good stories in the books that I couldn't say which ones I like best. "Th' Ramblin' Kid" finishes in the March 6th issue and I think it is a wonderful story as far as I have gotten. All of the Western stories are what my father and I look forward to. I hope to see my letter in the Log Book or Heart Beats before long.

St. Mary's, Ohio.

MISS RUBY MINCKLEY.

I have just finished reading a letter to the Heart to Heart Talks from a Mr. Thos. W. Haslam, of Atlanta, Ga., asking for a sequel to "The Conquest of the Moon Pool." I wish to join Mr. Haslam in this request and would like to ask why we cannot get one? I am one of your oldest subscribers and feel that I am "sorter" privileged to ask this question, you know, as I am distinctly interested in securing this story. I am an admirer of Mr. Merritt's, and would enjoy reading more from his pen. I have nothing but sincere praise for your most worthy magazine and wish it the best of continued success.

Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

VERNON E. NANCE.

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