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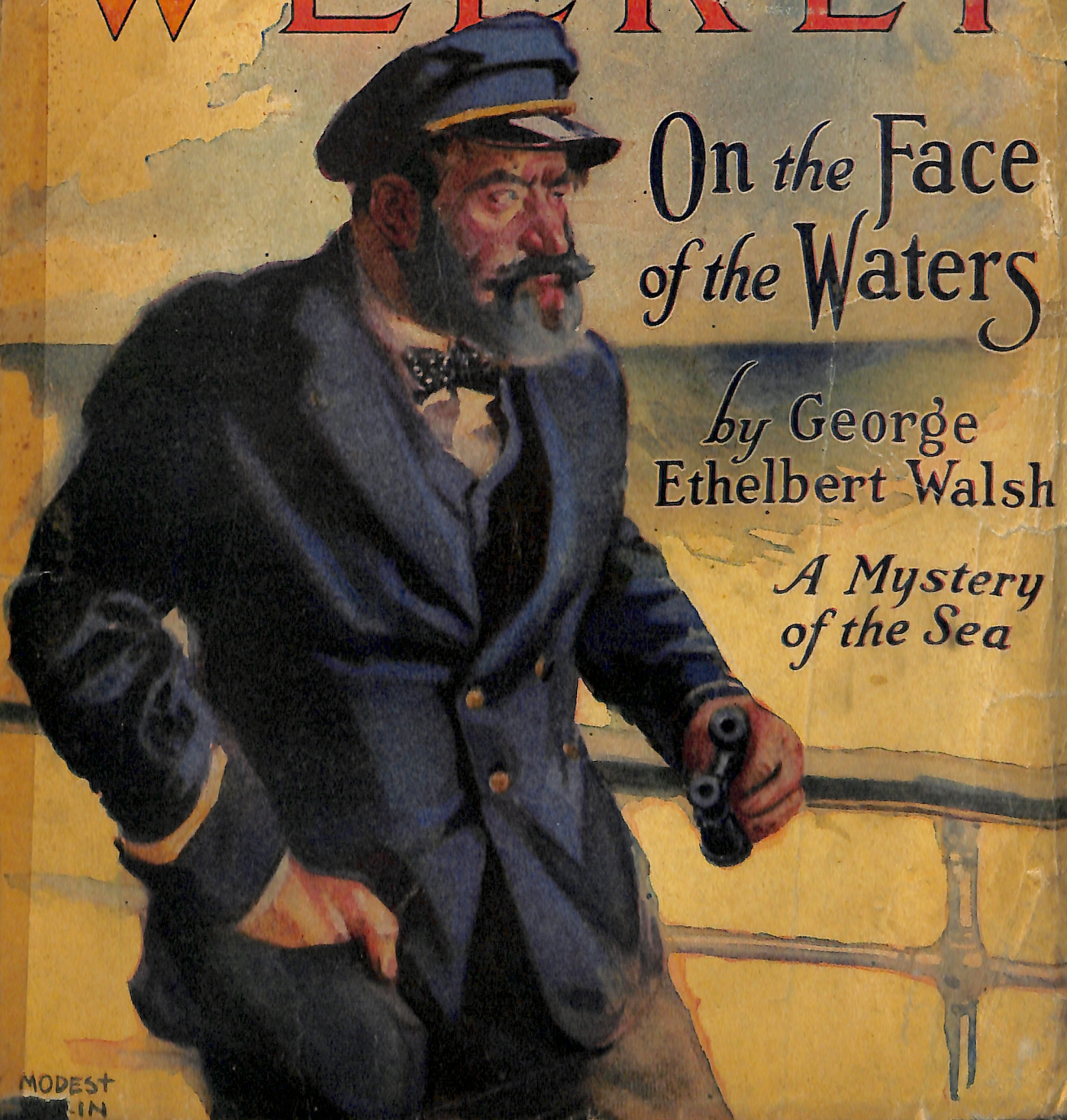

On the Face of the Waters

by George Ethelbert Walsh

A Mystery of the Sea

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CX — NUMBER 1

CONTENTS FOR MAY 8, 1920

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FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

On the Face of the Waters . . . . George Ethelbert Walsh . . 1
A Three-Part Story — Part One

Sara Was Judith? (*An Enigma*) . . . . Julian Hawthorne 26
A Five-Part Story — Part Two

Blackmail . . . . . Hulbert Footner 64
A Six-Part Story — Part Four

Clung . . . . . Max Brand 84
A Six-Part Story — Part Five

The Shadowers . . . . . David Fox 106
NOVEL No. 1—THE MAN WHO CONVICTED HIMSELF (*Concluded*)
A Six-Part Story — Part Six

ONE NOVELETTE

The Roof of the World . . . . . Frank Blighton 45

FIVE SHORT STORIES

The Whispering Shell . . . . . Herman Howard Matteson . 18

The Best Horse Wins . . . . . Ernest Edward Nelson . . 103

One Way Out . . . . . Frank Gillooly 125

D. C. Service . . . . . Charles Magee Adams . . 127

Very Clever, But— . . . . . Jim Egan 135

VERSE

Love's Alchemy . . . . . Margaret Rohe 25
In a Garden . . . . . Bliss Carman 44
Love's Eternity . . . . H. Thompson Rich 83
Old Songs Modernized . Corinne Rockwell Swain 124
Your Mother's Gift to You . . . . . Olin Lyman 140

Heart to Heart Talks . . . . . The Editor 141

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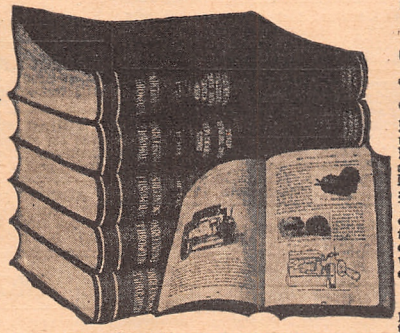

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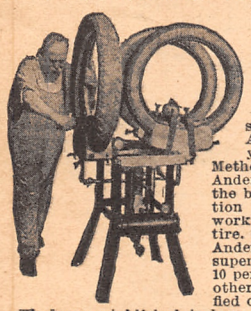

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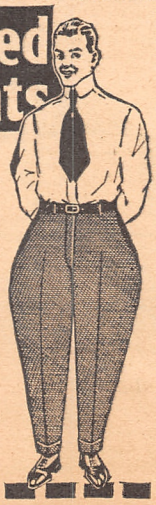

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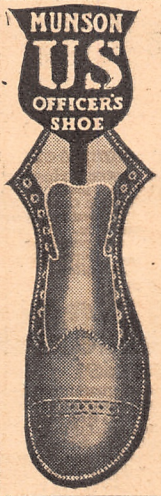

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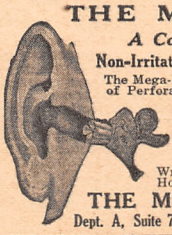

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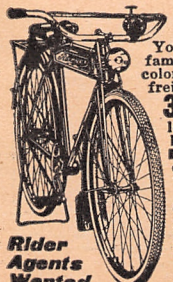

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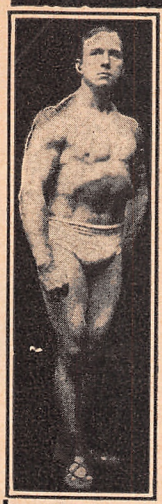

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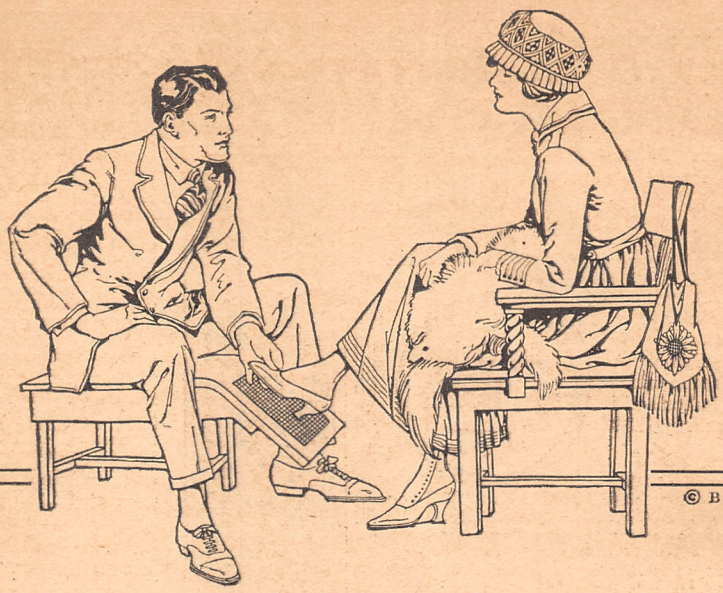

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On the Face of the Waters

by George Ethelbert Walsh

CHAPTER I.

THE CREW.

FIVE days out of St. Thomas, with a cargo of iron ore, the Virginia drifted with the trades on an oily sea, hot and burnished as a lake of molten lava. When the deck grew too blistering for bare feet it was either washed down with buckets of water, or the owners of exposed feet sought refuge in the shade of the canopy stretched forward or betook themselves to the cabin below.

Tar, pitch and turpentine were the symbolic triad of our youthful supremacy as a maritime nation; but of all torturing materials when heated to the boiling point, they have contributed most to the misery of American sailors of the tropics.

Just now the tar of the deck seams was bubbling, and the pitch was exuding from the pores of the planking to stick and burn its way in all flesh not immune by thick layers of hardened cuticle. A porous plaster clings no more lovingly to its victim than hot tar and pitch, nor exacts a greater toll of excruciating pain.

It was midday, and noon in the tropics is without parallel once you get beyond the fringe of palm trees. The sea holds all the torments of the tropical jungle without its alleviations. Water becomes a symbol of torture and not of cooling refreshment.

The Virginia was a miserable little coast trader, fashioned and built in some New England port, originally a two-masted schooner, but converted into a hybrid that was neither one thing nor another; that is, it could not be classified as a sloop, schooner, bark, brig or square-rigger. Necessity had shortened its sails, and in the conversion the canvas had been fashioned to fit the spaces allotted to it, by a hand as ingenious as that of a mother's cutting down a suit for the third or fourth time that the youngest of her offspring might be at least decorously clothed. There was no style to it, and the patches were as numerous and varicolored as Joseph's coat.

And the nondescript crew were in keeping with the flapping canvas. Si Lung, the cook, was scandalously clothed, or would have been if ladies had been present, in a belly sack that was beautifully ventilated for the tropics. Sutton, the mate, sported a rig that would have been the envy of a down-and-out hobo, and a beard that he trimmed with a razor; the deck hands and

sailors proclaimed their ancestry by their Caribbean flat noses and thick lips, and their utter disregard of clothing, either for appearances or protection, was all too manifest in their scant raiment.

The skipper of the trader had made a supreme effort to raise himself above the motley crew by certain concessions to his rank that goes with a battered cap, a jacket that had once been blue, and trousers that might have been white, but were so no longer. Like the mate's, his beard had been trimmed with a razor, which is a poor implement for such use. It had produced a blotched appearance that suggested smallpox or bubonic plague in the last stages.

But the keen eyes and clean-cut features of Burke Allister were not in keeping either with his disreputable uniform or the sea-scarred schooner of which he was master and owner. They were the eyes of the dreamer and fighter, a combination that, while paradoxical, is perfectly logical. In repose they were gentle and smiling, but fearsome in anger or combat. Moody is perhaps the best word, for they reflected the passing emotion of the soul, which was as storm-tossed as the sea, and equally calm and sunny when the passion was spent.

Sutton, the mate, a sturdily-built American of Irish parentage, who had been lounging forward, suddenly lurched aft. Si Lung, emerging from the galley, nearly bumped into him.

"What the devil—" Sutton began angrily, raising a hand as if to push the Chinaman out of his way.

"Velly hot, Mr. Sutton," grinned the Chink, rubbing his stomach, which is the Chinese equivalent to mopping the brow. "Me, what you say, frizzle down there. No breeze—no air! Whew! me no stand cook no more."

"What's that?" interrogated the mate sharply. "You won't cook? Say, look here, Si, that's mutiny, and I'll put you in irons if you give me any more of that talk. Get that?"

"Me no cook when me frizzle," calmly replied the Chinaman, flapping the end of his sack for a fan. "Me go on strike first."

The ugly faces of two black Caribs were watching them, and the sight of their sullen, mutinous eyes enraged Sutton. He caught the Chinaman by the neck and hurled him down the galley with as little compunction as he would a dog.

"You'll either cook or go overboard as shark meat!" he thundered.

Discipline had to be maintained, especially as they had a sullen, rebellious crew of natives, whose treachery was in the very air they breathed. "And you, too!" he snarled, turning upon the staring sailors, who had witnessed the little altercation. "Get forward, and stop your damn staring!"

They obeyed with the slow motions of the black man. Sutton waited, glaring at them, until they had literally obeyed his command. Then he continued toward the wheel where Burke Allister was standing, smoking with lazy indifference a nicotine-stained meerschaum pipe. He withdrew it from his lips long enough to expel a cloud of smoke.

"Why this sudden Berserker rage, Billy?" he queried, smiling.

Sutton, feeling a little sheepish at his outbreak, but determined not to show it, answered accordingly: "You heard? Then why ask? I didn't come along to answer conundrums."

Allister laughed good-naturedly. Sutton was not only his mate, but a friend in adventure, and, yes, part owner of the Virginia, for he had toiled as hard as any to salvage the schooner from the reef where it had been abandoned to its fate by the owners.

"It was only a case of nerves with Si," Allister said pleasantly. "You can't blame him, working in that infernally hot galley. If I had to cook in this weather, I'd—"

"What?" snapped Sutton, still unmollified.

"Go on strike as Si threatened to."

The mate's face darkened, the muscles twitching. "There you go again," he growled, "making excuses, and upholding mutiny. You play the devil with discipline. If we don't have our throats cut on this trip, it won't be—"

"Here comes Si to apologize," interrupted Allister, ignoring the other's dire threat.

Sutton swung around to face the cook,

who, smiling good-naturedly, as if nothing had happened, bowed and grinned at the skipper.

"Me no cook, Cap'n Burke," he said. "Me too hot. Mebbe when weather cools off me go back."

Sutton's eyes flamed with wrath, but Allister took the words out of his mouth. "All right, Si. Take a turn at the wheel. It's as cool here as anywhere. It is hot."

The Carib sailor relinquished the wheel and Si seized the spokes with evident satisfaction. Sutton waited a moment, and then burst forth angrily:

"All right!" he said, expelling the words forcibly. "*I'll* go on strike. I resign."

He strode away in high dudgeon. Allister waited long enough to reprove the cook. "Si, how many times have I told you not to irritate Mr. Sutton? It's got to stop."

"Me velly sorry, cap'n, but—"

"Never mind! Don't do it again."

Then he strode after the mate, and catching up with him, linked an arm in one of his. "Billy," he said easily, "we're both on the ragged edges of nervous prostration. So's Si. Let's forget it. We can't afford to quarrel among ourselves."

"That Chinaman's in with those black devils, and if we're not careful, he'll cut our throats or put poison in our food," replied Sutton heatedly. "I know how to handle this scum of the Caribbean, but a slant-eyed Oriental's got more sly tricks than—"

"Yes, a Chinaman's sly and tricky, Billy."

"Then why do you stand up for them?" demanded the mate furiously.

"I don't in general, but as a particular proposition Si Lung's worth it. He's our friend."

Sutton grunted his disgust, and spat viciously. "He's in league with that gang," he retorted. "He's ready to mutiny at the drop of the hat. It wouldn't startle me out of a year's growth to find he's the ringleader. He's got more brains than any of them."

"Yes," placidly admitted Allister, "he's in league with the gang. That's why he's our friend."

Sutton disengaged his arm and stared at the speaker. "Say, are you crazy or am I?" he demanded. "I didn't quite get you. Anyway, you're plumb daffy or I got the brain fever."

"No, we're both in our normal senses," continued Captain Allister, his eyes twinkling. "It's just that we don't start from the same premises. That's why we're arguing around in a circle."

He stopped long enough to make sure his pipe hadn't lost its last spark, then continued: "Si's our friend, working for us, but he's got to appear against us. If you hadn't been so dense, Billy, you'd caught on before. Si's reporting to me all that goes on forward."

"The devil he is!"

"Yes, and more, he's spying on them and wriggling his way into their confidence. Next to Malachi he's their leader. If it comes to a show down he may be able to divide their forces. At any rate, he'll attack in the rear."

Sutton stared with unbelieving eyes. "Si's as true as gold," continued Allister. "I'd trust my life to him quicker than—"

"How long have you known him?" sneered the mate. "Less than a week. You picked him up in that Chinese joint, and—"

"Two years ago I saved Si from the clutches of one of those Tong societies that had condemned him," was the quiet reply. "It was in Panama, I believe. Anyway, Si has never forgotten it. A Chinaman never does."

Sutton's unbelieving eyes softened. "Why didn't you tell me that before?" he asked querulously.

"I'm telling you now, Billy, but don't let it change your attitude toward Si. He expects to be set on—only don't go too far. We can't afford to drop him overboard for shark's food. Besides, Si has a holy horror of sharks."

Sutton grinned for the first time. "I'll see that that black Malachi takes his place. Sharks don't like black meat, but they'll eat it if they're hungry enough."

Malachi was not as black as the rest of the crew, the olive tinge of a white ancestor showing in his complexion, but his low, sullen brow and furtive eyes proclaimed the restless outcast of the half-breed, who feels

himself above his own people and below the whites—a combination that works for evil in most cases. Allister had shipped him and his crew under the compulsion of time and necessity; but confident in his own power he had given little heed to warnings or lack of credentials. Besides, the skipper of an old tub that no insurance company would bet on, has little choice in selecting a crew.

Malachi had been tractable until the fourth day out, and then in a moment of sullen resentment at an order he had betrayed his nature. Sutton had promptly knocked him down, and after that it had been war—silent, implacable, patient, but none the less war. Under the impression that strict discipline would crush any spirit, Sutton had used his powers impartially and freely.

But there was mutiny in the air. Allister had sniffed it long before his mate, but seemed simply curious to know what particular form it would take. He had faced danger in too many different ways in the past six years to waste sleep over such a little thing as mutiny on shipboard. But he had silently and methodically prepared for it. Si Lung had been his emissary to carry tales back and forth, and just now he had a particularly warm feeling for the cook.

"If it comes to the worst, Billy," he drawled, after a long pause, "Si can doctor their food and put them to sleep. Back in the Orient he worked for a drug firm, and I'll bet there isn't any dope he isn't familiar with."

"How about drugging our food first?" queried Sutton, who still entertained a lingering dislike for anything out of the Celestial Empire. "He could do it easily, and steal the old hooker, Malachi and all his gang."

"Yes, he could, but he couldn't sail it alone. You forget that."

Billy Sutton subsided into silence, watch the flecking of the sunlight on the oily waves. Across the tropic seas a smudge of smoke lifted lazily above the horizon. He watched it for some time, and then forgetting their recent conversation, observed:

"What steamer's that—an old oil tanker or a British tramp making for some southern port?"

Captain Allister followed his eyes lazily. "She wouldn't be headed eastward if she was bound south," he murmured, frowning. "She'd be 'way off her course."

Indolently but with increasing interest, they studied the outlines of the black hull, with its cloud of trailing smoke lifting slowly above it. Sutton finally clapped binoculars to his eyes.

"It's a P. & W. liner," he announced in a second; "one of their crack ships."

Allister suddenly lost his attitude of indifferent calm. "A P. & W!" he exclaimed. "Nonsense! What's she doing off here, and running eastward!"

His mate offered no comment, but handed him the glasses. Allister glued his eyes to them, and for a full minute stared through them in silence.

"You're right, Billy," he said, lowering them. "But she's a hundred miles off her course."

"And getting further every minute. Maybe she's in trouble or something."

"*I hope she is!*"

The words were accompanied by a sharp intake of the breath that gave them a peculiar vindictive, hissing sound. Sutton gazed quizzically, at a loss to understand the meaning of such a remark. What he saw, when he turned, gave him a sudden shock.

Swift, deadly hate had sprung into the dreamy eyes, transforming the whole face. Billy Sutton, familiar with his friend's many moods, was a little awed by the glimpse of malevolence that twisted and distorted the features of the man, who could be as gentle as a woman and as soft hearted as a child, but a veritable fury when aroused to combat.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAPTAIN CONFESSES.

An awkward moment of silence followed. To Sutton it seemed as if he had suddenly caught a glimpse of a soul naked for a moment, the guard down, pitilessly exposed to the searching gaze of friend or enemy, and it made him decidedly uncomfortable. He leaned rather heavily on the rail, and kept his eyes on the steamer,

purposely averting them from the face by his side. But his mind and tongue refused to work, and he cursed himself for an idiot, a dolt, for not finding some commonplace remark to break the tension.

Finally a hand rested lightly on his arm, and when he turned, as if stung, Burke Allister was smiling, the old expression on his face. "Did I startle you, Billy?" he asked, his eyes twinkling whimsically.

"I got the shock of my life!" grumbled the other, trying to conceal the uneasiness by gruffness.

"Yes, and so did I. It was a revelation to me. I thought I'd gotten over it."

The voice was tired and weary, and so was the face; and the eyes were shifty and unsteady.

"A man never knows when he's safe from his own passions, I suppose," Allister mused after a while. "I remember as a kid I was licked once by a bully, and ten years later, after both of us should have forgotten it, I met him face to face—came upon him unexpectedly—and, when he extended a friendly hand, the old grudge flared up in me, and for a moment I saw red. In the end I licked him, thrashed him until he cried quits. Afterward I was ashamed of myself. It seemed such a beastly little thing that I wanted to apologize."

"I ain't saying I wouldn't do the same," retorted Sutton. "But generally I get over a grudge in a short time, and forget it."

He stopped and looked at the steamer. "What's that got to do with a P. & W. liner?" he asked. "You're not expecting to find that bully aboard, are you?"

"No, that's gone out of my life long ago. I have no grudge against him. If I met him I'd shake his hand, and perhaps apologize for that thrashing."

"Then what?"

"Ten years ago, Billy," was the quiet reply, "I worked in the New York office of the P. & W. It wasn't as big a concern then as it is to-day. It was before the days of consolidation and high financing in shipping circles. The owner of one or two big ships was content then to let the other fellow own his, and they'd fraternize together, discussing shipping rates and cargoes over their lunch, and buy stock in each other's concern just to show friendly feelings. Old man Worden was then—"

"Worden of the P. & W.?"

"Yes, you've heard a lot about him since. He's become a high muck-a-muck in shipping circles—owns the P. & W. and has his tentacles on half a dozen other lines. His idea is to gobble up everything, and dictate shipping rates to the world. He was in a fair way to do this until Germany broke loose, and we got into the war. Then, I understand, Uncle Sam stepped in and commandeered his ships. What'll happen to him now I don't know, but he's sure to ride rough-shod over every one unless he finds Uncle Sammy too big for him. Anyway, all these new ships we've been building will make his job a big one. He may bite off more 'n he can chew, and get the indigestion. I hope so."

"You were saying something about being employed by old Worden before you got off your course," commented Sutton. "Let's get back to it."

Allister gave him a quizzical look. "That story, Billy, is a painful subject to me," he replied, forcing a grim smile. "It isn't very pleasant to think of or recall, although God knows the sight of one of Jim Worden's steamers down here makes me see red. It makes me a pirate at heart. I'm not sure but I'd scuttle her or blow her up with a bomb, if I had a chance."

"Good thing we got an old hooker that can't go faster than six or seven knots an hour," laughed Sutton. "We've had enough bombing and scuttling of ships. Don't want any more floating mines or submarines around."

"Speaking of mines, Billy," mused Allister, "what would the world say if a few of old Worden's steamers were mysteriously blown up at sea? Wouldn't they attribute the accident to loose mines?"

"Hell! Are you thinking of doing that? This is where we part company, Burke, if you've got any such crazy notions in that brain of yours. Think of the innocent crew and passengers you'd send to the bottom just to—just to get revenge on Jim Worden. I reckon he's at the bottom of it. Isn't he?"

Allister smoked in silence a few moments,

and then nodded his head. "Yes, Worden to me, after nearly six years, is like a red flag waved in the face of a bull. I thought I'd forgotten it, but I haven't. The sight of that steamer brought it all back. Billy, I hope I'll never step on board of one of his boats. I wouldn't want to trust myself."

Sutton was quiet and a little awed by the intensity of the other. After a moment, he stretched forth a hand, and said solemnly: "Man, can't you forgive and forget? Life's too short to nurse a grudge like that."

Captain Allister fussed with his pipe, knocking out the ashes and cleaning the bowl with his knife. The face was livid, and the eyes flaming.

"I'll try, Billy," he said finally in an uneasy voice. "But"—after a pause, a little drearily—"it's no use. I can't do it. Just as sure as I licked that bully who tormented me as a boy, I'll thrash Jim Worden, kill him, or blow up one of his steamers if our paths ever cross. I know it as surely as I stand here. It's in the blood."

Once more Billy Sutton stared at the speaker, and shook his head in awed silence. The deep passion of the speaker had startled him. Nothing in his own rough and ready life—and he had had no hesitation in knocking down a man who got in his way or beating up a sailor that didn't obey orders promptly—equalled this calm, implacable mood of Burke Allister. It was premeditated murder!

"Look here, Burke; you don't want to be hung, and that's surely what's coming to you if you don't quit thinking of it. You can knock a man down at sea, and shoot him, too, or toss him overboard, and you may get away with it under the plea of discipline. But you can't butt into a man of Worden's caliber and be safe. It will hang you or put you in prison."

"Prison!" laughed Allister harshly. "What of that! Didn't he send me there? Didn't I rot in jail for two years to save that damn rascal's precious skin?"

"You did?" murmured Sutton, his eyes blinking hard. "Jim Worden—hold on, Burke, let me get this straight. Now you've said so much, mind telling the rest?"

Allister paced the deck several minutes to quiet his agitation, and then stopped directly at his old place by the railing. With eyes fixed moodily on the sea, he said:

"All the details are unnecessary, Billy. I'll simply outline the story. Jim Worden was manager of the New York office then, and not a bad sort of fellow to know, I thought. But he was so ambitious and unscrupulous that he couldn't sleep nights trying to feather his nest. I was nothing but his assistant. Mud under his feet, I see now, and when I got on his shoes he wiped me off like that"—jerking his hands. "The old man—he was nearing middle age then, and looked ten years older than he was, had complete control of the funds of the company, and quite a lot of it passed through his hands, or rather mine, for as his assistant I did all the detail work, and he got the credit. But I didn't begrudge him that. I was young and ambitious, and was making a record for myself. There was a future—a mighty promising future, I thought."

He stopped and smiled ironically. "Oh, yes, the future was promising," he repeated after a pause, "but not quite what I had expected. I don't know to this day whether Jim Worden had been speculating or whether he'd been living beyond his means. But at any rate, there was a big shortage in the books, and nobody could account for it. The money was gone. That was enough. Somebody had to be the goat, and old Worden chose me for it. He offered to let me off easy if I would confess, promised immunity and a change of scenery. Said he'd stake me for a new start in a new country—South America or Africa. It was such a barefaced criminal act that I accused him of the defalcation to his face, and threatened to expose him.

"Well, you know what chance I had. Worden was on good terms with the directors, and when he got ahead of me and charged me with the theft the game was up. My counter-charges were laughed at. Nobody believed me. And Worden had laid his plans so well there was circumstantial evidence to point to my guilt. He got me. The law worked beautifully for him—and against me.

"I got three years, reduced to two for good behavior. Two years of rock-breaking, Billy, isn't conducive to pleasant think-

ing," Allister added, smiling at his mate. "Prison life didn't reform me, nor quite break me. When I got out I seemed like a tame animal, but the very devil was raging in me. You see, I'd spent most of my leisure time planning revenge. I'd get Jim Worden or—or—

"Oh, well," he added, after a momentary pause, "I hadn't got quite so far as murder. I thought perhaps a good thrashing, such as I gave that bully, would satisfy me. It was for that purpose I made my way to Worden's office three days after I'd been released. I wanted to pummel him within an inch of his life before I could be stopped. After that I didn't care much if they did send me back to prison.

"Fortunately, I was held up in the outside office, and while waiting to get by the Cerberus that guarded the door I caught a glimpse of Worden through the plate-glass window. Fortunate, I say, Billy, for I realized in a minute that if I'd stumbled upon the man suddenly I'd have killed him. Murder was in my heart. I couldn't have controlled myself. The sight of him turned me into a fury. I had just sense enough left to know that if I got hands on him, I'd never let up until he was dead."

The deadly intensity of the voice held Sutton in a trance. He found the cold sweat dewing his forehead without any consciousness of how it got there. He wiped it off with a damp hand that shook a little.

"You didn't get him?" he stammered interrogatively. "That black doorman kept you out, and—"

"No, he had nothing to do with it," growled Allister. "I got out before it was too late. I turned and fled—afraid of myself. That's the only time I was afraid of anybody or anything, Billy," he added, grinning. "Ever been afraid of your own shadow—no, of your other self? It's a damn sight worse than being afraid of some one else!"

He shivered and gripped the rail hard with both hands. Billy Sutton laid a hand on an arm.

"Sure, I understand, Burke. I guess it's the same as having the d. t.'s, and seeing things with both eyes open, funny little devils trying to spear you and hold you, and for the life of you, you can't move or run away or fight back. I had 'em."

"I didn't know, Billy," Allister murmured, squeezing the hand as if to acknowledge the bond of sympathy suddenly holding them. They stood a moment watching the smudge of smoke now growing dimmer on the horizon. For three years they had adventured together in the tropics without once speaking of their past, neither knowing or caring the least about the circumstances that had driven them to such a career. Then in a moment the confession of one had invited a peek into the past of the other.

"Stevenson was right," Allister added. "There's a *Jekyll* and *Hyde* in every one of us. I got a glimpse of my other self, and it wasn't pleasant. I tried to forget him, but I couldn't. He followed me night and day. Sometimes he was so plausible I was almost convinced he was me. I could dodge him in the daytime, but at night he was rampant. I began walking the streets, hoping to stumble across Worden. My hands itched to get at his throat.

"Then"—sighing—"it got so that in the daytime my mind went blank at times and I saw red. I began haunting the avenues where he lived and lying in wait for him in front of his office. It was some time before I had a grip on myself and pulled up short. It wasn't safe for me to live in the same city or country with Jim Worden. To save myself I had to get out—either that or kill the man who had wronged me.

"That's about all," he added, after another pause. "I took the next steamer south. I didn't know where she was going, but like the dope fiend trying to break himself of his habit I shipped on the first boat out from New York to get away from the poison that was turning me into a fiend. It was the only way to get the virus out of my system."

"And you thought it was gone—until you saw that P. & W. liner?"

"Yes; it's six years now, and I supposed Mr. Jekyll was laid for good. But it seems not." He smiled wearily. "If the sight of one of his boats arouses me like this, Billy, what will happen if I meet Worden face to face?"

"You mustn't meet him!" ejaculated Sutton fervently.

"I hope not, but—"

"I'll be there, too," was the short answer.

Allister gazed fondly into the grim face, with the square jaws and narrowing eyes, and then patted the back in a boyish way.

"I hope you will be, Billy," he said, "and if this ghost of the past rises up you must help me to lay it. Knock me on the head, imprison me, do anything to keep it from having its way. Otherwise—there'll—be—murder!"

Sutton shuddered again and stood aghast at the simple confession. Not his own deadly weakness—and it had been a hard one—had ever gripped him with such implacable intensity. He had often wondered what would happen if he was again under his old environments, with temptation insidiously beckoning him at every turn; but never had he feared for himself as he now feared for the friend by his side.

CHAPTER III.

HURRICANE.

THE Virginia was following on the course of the P. & W. liner, but her lubberly progress was like that of the tortoise trying to overtake the hare. In a short time the steamer was hull-down on the horizon, and nothing but a faint smudge of smoke indicated its presence. When the last visible signs vanished from the oily sea, Allister sighed, and then smiled up at his mate.

"The weather's getting thicker, Billy," he remarked, sniffing the air. "How's the barometer—falling?"

"Like the Irishman dropping out of a ten-story building."

"Then we'd better do something before it strikes the bottom."

The oily calm of the sea was treacherous. The air, which had been sufficiently sultry, had a new tang to it. No man can describe the subtle change that comes before a tropical storm. One feels it, and does not describe it. It is like nerves that vibrate to unseen danger, twanging sharply without apparent cause or reason, and then suddenly playing havoc with the owner by snapping and breaking. The effect is electrical.

The schooner was too deeply laden with its dead-weight cargo of iron ore to face a storm with any fair degree of safety. The knowledge of this soon drove from the minds of Allister and Sutton all fear of the crew's mutiny or bitter memories of the past. There is no surer cure of rebellion among the Carib seamen than a tropical hurricane at sea. It is a counter-irritant that never fails.

"Better shorten sail and haul her about," Allister added, after a quick survey of the heavens. "We're in for a nasty blow, and this old hooker's halt, lame and blind."

"And tongue-tied and ham-strung, with that cargo of ore," growled Sutton.

Si Lung, creeping along the deck, bobbed up, and raising a hand whispered: "Me belly much afraid, cap'n, big Malachi going to fight soon. He very much in damn killing mood."

"What's that?" demanded Allister, jerking around. "Malachi's on the war path! It's come, has it?" he added, smiling grimly. "Well, they'll have something else to fight soon. Where is he?"

"Me locked the galley. Mebbe in there."

Si offered this bit of information without a smile on his face. If they had stormed the galley first it was evident their gluttony had made the first appeal to them. A Carib thinks of his stomach first, and his precious skin after.

A swift golden haze had swooped down on the sea, and the sun, blood-red, was staring at them like Buddha's eye. It was so portentous that Si suddenly forgot his errand, and stared with fixed, scared gaze at the sky. He shuddered when he saw the celestial eye leering blood-red at him, and some superstition of his boyhood stirred within him.

"Golly!" he ejaculated. "The debbil's here!"

Then, like a rabbit scurrying for cover before the hounds, he ducked and ran. "Si, come back!" shouted Allister, but the Chinaman did not stop until he plunged into the galley, precipitating a commotion among the mutinous crew, both by his sudden en-

trance and the scared look on his face. Malachi and his black crew, with food and liquor dripping from their jaws, jumped to their feet, snarling like wild animals.

"The debbil! The debbil!" moaned Si, hiding his face under a pan, the nearest thing he could reach.

Suspecting anything but the truth, Malachi gripped an iron pin for a weapon, and grinned horribly, a sickening leer of the bloodthirsty ancestor of his who had feasted off the flesh of his victims. Food and drink had stimulated them to the frenzy of battle. Not one of them was afraid.

A peculiar moaning noise and a sharp lurch of the ship only intensified their frenzy. But black Malachi had inherited some of the caution of his white ancestor, and the jar overhead might indicate a shift of the battle line. The white men were shrewd and wily, and one did not rush headlong into a trap set by them.

The leader picked up Si and shook him, lifted him as easily as if he had been a bag of feathers. But Si, struggling for his lost saucer-pan that, ostrichlike, he might hide his head in it, simply moaned and reiterated the refrain of his superstitious terror.

Suddenly a shadow drifted athwart the entrance, and Sutton bellowed down at the crew.

"All hands on deck! Hey, you black devil, what're you doing with that pin?"

Malachi had poised the weapon for a throw, and in the hands of a black Carib anything from a stone to a spear is a deadly missile when hurled at short range. Sutton had just time to dodge it, and whip out his pistol. A quick bark, and the leader's right hand fell to his side.

"Get out of here, you black rascals!" Sutton added persuasively in a voice that cracked with anger. "Hell's to pay if you don't jump quick! We're running into a hurricane!"

Hurricane is the one word that every native from the Lesser to the Greater Antilles knows from his infancy; it's bred into his bones, pounded into his ignorant mind, and injected into his system by a thousand and one tales until he can smell it on the wind or feel it in the air. It means death and destruction by some agency that comes as near to the supernatural as anything within his ken.

As if to reenforce the mate's announcement, the schooner suddenly keeled over on one side and sprawled every member of the mutinous crew to the floor, and then the moaning of the rising wind whistled down the funnel of the companionway and made a harp of Si's dangling pots and kettles.

Sutton, in spite of the danger, smiled and grinned at the heap of rolling eyes, their whites shining like the ivory keys of a piano. "On deck before we go down!" he barked. "Come on, Malachi, you damn rascal, lead the way! Don't be afraid of me! There's fighting enough ahead to save your skin from the sharks! Up, every one of you!"

Stringing out of the galley like frightened school boys, the Caribs tumbled on deck where, after one glance at the sky and sea, they huddled together in terrified awe. All the fight was taken from them, and Sutton appeared among them without fear, shouting orders, flaying them right and left, and by degrees pounding some sense into their thick heads. The white man was supreme. Lacking all sense of orderly procedure in an emergency, the erstwhile crew looked to the mate for leadership and docilely obeyed his smallest orders. Even Malachi, with one hand dangling helplessly at his side, fought to haul down the sails and save the ship.

The hurricane was breaking with terrific force, and the poor old Virginia that had ridden safely through many a storm was being battered and buffeted as never before, its ribs groaning and creaking, its rigging and spars snapping and booming under the tension, its hull, loaded with its dead weight of iron ore, rising and falling like the terrible thuds of a trip hammer.

Almost from the first Allister and Sutton realized that the crazy craft they had salvaged from a lonely reef, and patched and poulticed and repaired into some semblance of a seaworthy boat, was doomed. Had she been running light, or with a cargo of lumber, there might have been a gambling chance, but that dead weight of iron ore was like a mill-stone around the neck of a swimmer. It was pulling her down in the brine to permit the waves to pound and bat-

ter against her ribbed sides. Neither wood nor steel could stand such punishment for long.

Stripping her bare of canvas under Sutton's booming orders was merely prolonging the fatal moment. Allister, tugging at the wheel to keep her on an even keel, faced the situation with eyes aflame with the lust of battle. Measuring his skill and strength against the elements was like a tonic draft to him. All the Viking blood of long-forgotten ancestors came to the surface. If there had been a single chance, the fight would have been to his liking, but the utter hopelessness of the situation disappointed him. It deprived him of the joy of winning against odds.

Once he grimly decided to hold on, and play the old heroic game of standing by the ship and going down with it; but heroics were not in his philosophy, and he smiled ironically at the thought. Besides, captains didn't go down with their ships in these modern, practical days, not unless they were fools or worse; they abandoned them, and took to the life-boats.

"Billy," he shouted above the shrieking wind when his mate approached, "another wave like that, and she'll never come up. Get the crew in the life-boat!"

"What for? It can't float ten seconds in this sea!"

"It's their only chance!"

"And ours?"

"No, we're going to stick!"

"Hell!"

"Oh, Billy, don't drive them to it!" yelled Allister. "Give them their choice. Every man for himself."

Sutton gazed quizzically at the captain, and started to remove his cap to scratch his head, but found it gone.

"What—" he began.

"There isn't room for all of us in the boat," Allister added in explanation of his order. "Knock together some sort of a raft—hatch-covers, loose lumber, spars, anything."

Sutton nodded and said something, but the wind shrieked and smothered it. In a few moments he was brow-beating the Caribs into gathering up loose spars, rigging, sails, hatch-covers, splintered pieces of railing, bulwark timber, anything that could float. With an eye to his own safety, he wove and tied and hammered and knocked the pieces together on the deck, protecting his handiwork from each succeeding wave that broke across the deck by quickly lashing himself and the raft to the mast.

Then with a smile of satisfaction, he released his gang of frightened captives. "We're going to abandon ship, Malachi," he shouted into the half-breed's ear. "There's the life-boat and this raft. Take your choice."

For an instant the half-breed stared studidly, shivering and cowering. Then his unbelieving eyes gradually opened and showed the whites. He glanced from the mate to the raft, and then to the life-boat still dangling safely over the stern. Sutton nodded.

"Yes, take your choice—but be damn quick about it!"

Malachi waited no longer for orders or permission. He started on a run for the life-boat, and with his mind once made up nothing could have stopped him. All discipline had gone by the board the instant permission to abandon ship had been given. The panic seized the others, and they tumbled and slipped along the deck in the wake of their leader.

In their frenzied effort to lower the boat they got the tackles in a snarl, and Sutton had to help them, but even then they glared at him with the ferociousness of animals at bay. Knowing well there was not room for crew and officers, they watched him suspiciously, ready to spring at his throat if he attempted to push them aside.

"You'd bite the hand that fed you!" the mate snapped. "Good riddance to you, and by the holy smoke of Vesuvius, I hope you'll feed the sharks before night!"

The life-boat was swept away so suddenly, with its load of jabbering humanity, that for a moment Sutton thought it was swamped, and he gasped at the speed with which his prayer had been answered. It bobbed up again on the crest of a wave, and then disappeared from view in the gloom.

Allister, still clinging to the wheel, smiled

when Sutton turned away from the scene. "Lucky to get rid of them!" he said. "They'll be fighting among themselves soon. Where's the raft?"

"All ready for launching, cap'n," replied Sutton, touching his forehead with a hand. "Any further orders?"

"Where's Si? Did he go with them in the life-boat?"

"Sure now, he didn't. He must be in the galley, hiding behind his pots and pans. Si was sure some frightened."

A wave sent the ship staggering over on the port, and for a few seconds both held their breath to see if she would recover. When she slowly righted herself, her nose deep in the water, Allister handed the wheel to Sutton.

"Hold it until I come back."

"Where you going?" growled the mate.

"After Si."

Sutton gasped and made as if to protest. Time was precious, and if they were to get away from the foundering ship before she took the final downward plunge they had to work quickly. But Allister was already gone. Billy Sutton struggled to hold the bow up to face the wind and waves, muttering with spent breath maledictions upon Caribs and Chinamen.

Allister finally emerged from the galley, holding a squealing, struggling Chinaman by the back of the neck and what should have been the seat of his trousers.

"Me belly sick, cap'n! Me want to go back! Me 'fraid of debbil's eye. Me—me—"

Squealing and protesting at every step, Si struggled in Allister's grip about as effectually as a kitten in the mouth of a bulldog. Dropping him finally on the raft, his captor bawled out at the top of his voice:

"Cut loose, Billy! Cut loose! She's going down!"

Sutton abandoned the wheel, and leaped for the raft just as a tremendous wave lifted it off the deck and washed it straight for the opposite side. Allister, with his clasp-knife, cut the ropes holding it to the mast, and clutched Si with one hand and the tail-end of the raft with the other. Then all three, raft and men, went bounding out into the darkness, riding the crest of a billow that seemed to tower mountain-high above its mates.

CHAPTER IV.

AN S. O. S. SIGNAL.

EACH succeeding wave drenched them, and every third threatened to wipe them off the raft, but between lulls they crawled closer together and lashed themselves to their insecure, teetering platform. Si Lung was of little help; but his squealing was smothered with salt brine every time he opened his mouth, and this was a relief to Sutton's ears and nerves. Allister still treated the Chinaman much as he would a helpless babe, and in a short time had him trussed up so tightly that had the raft turned turtle nothing could have saved Si from drowning.

They could merely guess whether the Virginia had foundered. By the time they had cleared the water from their eyes she had vanished, either in the murky twilight or under fifty fathoms of salt water. It mattered little to them either way. They had enough to do in weathering the storm on their raft.

For hours they bobbed up and down, the plaything of wind and wave, dying a thousand deaths, and so weary and exhausted at times that the spark of life left in them burned very low. Si had ceased to attempt further articulate remonstrances, and but for the chattering of his teeth he might have passed for one dead. He was no longer hot; indeed, he was chilly, and decidedly in a mood to return to his pots and kettles no matter if the temperature of the galley soared beyond the century mark.

Castaways in a storm are the least talkative and communicative of individuals, and had the roaring of the storm permitted they would still have been mute. Language is a superfluous accomplishment in such emergencies. Billy Sutton had forgotten the picturesque vocabulary of expletives he had acquired in the course of a lifetime of hard knocks and buffetings, and for once he was silent under punishment.

The hours dragged drearily along; night came on, and with total darkness an eclipse

of mental alertness. They must have dozed, taking catnaps between the worst of the waves, and then awakening only long enough to gasp for breath and clutch tighter to their hold. They proved the theory that man can sleep under the worst physical torture, the mind ceasing to act.

The dawn of a new day was breaking when Allister raised his head and glanced curiously around him, his mind dazed and confused. The storm had abated enough for him to see that in a short time all danger would be passed. The sea was still heaving and moaning restlessly, but the wind had subsided, and there was a rosy glow in the east that portended a new day of fair weather.

The tropic hurricane had swept past, leaving them adrift in the welter of the boundless sea. A smile spread mechanically over his face, and then with a sigh he dropped his head down again and slept.

The sun came up and began its daily function of heating a world that had been bathed in briny tears and salt-laden winds. A feeling of warm comfort began stealing through their bodies, and their sleep was deeper and less fretful. In time the steaming heat from a tropical sun dried their clothes and beat mercilessly upon bare heads and half-clothed bodies.

"Me belly hot, cap'n," murmured Si in his sleep. "Me no cook—me—"

"You heathen Chinee, I'll wring your neck—" began Sutton characteristically, his brain still drugged by sleep and exhaustion.

Allister crawled to his knees, and looked at his recumbent companions. The sense of loss that first overwhelmed him acted like a knife thrust, and he gritted his teeth; then he shrugged his shoulders and smiled. Life was intact, and that was what counted. He leaned toward Sutton, and shouted in his ear.

"Eight bells, Billy, and your watch!"

"Hey! What? Where the—"

The mate sat up and stared in ludicrous fashion around him. Then a look of infinite disgust followed.

"You ain't got the heart of a fish, Burke, to spoil a good dream and waken a poor devil to this," waving his hand around the horizon in bitter scorn.

Si, in his sleep, suddenly kicked out and landed one flat heel against the mate's shins. Sutton walloped the innocent leg and brought its owner to consciousness.

"Me belly sorry, Mr. Sutton, but—"

Si sat up like a jack-knife opening.

"Get down in the galley and cook some breakfast!" shouted Sutton. "Where d'you think we are?"

The cook rubbed his eyes, and glanced around him, rubbed them again, and then grinned.

"Me cook most beautiful breakfast, Mr. Sutton, if any galley left," he said.

The others laughed, for Si's returning good humor put them in a pleasanter mood. Sutton grinned and stretched himself. The warmth of the sun was restoring his blood to normal circulation, and the experience he had been through was already fading as an unpleasant nightmare.

"Billy, did you forget that man had to eat and drink when he went to sea on a raft?" queried Allister. "Or didn't you? I forgot whether I gave you orders to provision for the trip. We were a bit excited and in a hurry."

"There's water in the keg and some of Si's grub in the tin box, but I suppose they're salted down by this time," retorted the mate, pointing.

Allister seized the small keg and shook it. Then he clutched the tin box and rattled it. Both responded by sounds that had a musical ring. They were slightly "salted down," as Sutton expressed it, but the brine had not entirely spoiled either food or water. Allister sparingly doled out a little of each.

"We got to begin right," he explained. "Most expeditions like this start wrong. Everybody's hungry and thirsty at first, and they begin by feasting and end by starving. Let's fast now and get used to it."

Sutton grumbled at the niggardly allowance doled out, and even Si rubbed his stomach and licked his lips; but Allister was obdurate, and sat on guard over water-keg and tin of food. There was no telling how many days they would drift about before sighting land or a rescuing ship.

"Land's out of the question," Allister mused thoughtfully. "There's nothing between us and Europe, and that's a few thou-

sand miles away, but if we continue drifting eastward we may reach it in a couple of years. Meanwhile, ships don't pass this way. We're out of the trade routes."

"So was that P. & W. liner," observed Sutton. "Wonder now if she wasn't sent out here to pick us up."

"If you're getting superstitious, Billy, I'll try to support your delusion. Anyway, hope's our greatest asset. Therefore, let's hope for the best."

"If I could dry this tobacco so it would burn—" mumbled the mate, spreading a messy bag on the palms of his hands.

"Tobacco's a great solace," murmured Allister, spreading out his own water-soaked package, "but I've lost my pipe."

"We can take turns at this," replied Sutton, waving his own black bowl in the air.

"We'll draw lots for—"

"No, possession is more than half the battle at sea. And selfishness is the primal law of nature."

He filled the pipe, and from his water-proof match-case secured a light.

"Count the matches, man, and don't waste them!" interrupted Allister.

Billy, suddenly impressed by the value of his possessions, soberly counted the matches in the case. Allister did the same with his. The result was encouraging. With due care in lighting them, they might last as long as the food and water.

Si, deprived of his opium pipe, dropped back moodily to watch the others take turns at Billy's pipe.

"Me no feel good," he murmured occasionally. "Me belly sick."

"You'll last, Si," observed Allister. "You can't kill a Chinaman by starvation. I knew one who fasted for two weeks, and looked as fresh as a young chicken."

The hours sped wearily, draggingly. The sun got hot and torturous again. The sea was restored to its calm oiliness. The mid-day air lost all its vitality, and became sultry and enervating. There was no shade to protect their heads, and frequent bathing in the water was the only thing to prevent brain fever.

For all their attempts at lightness, the seriousness of their situation was driven into their brain. They had the one chance in a thousand of being picked up, and unless that came within a reasonably short time they would perish as miserably as any man could perish. Death by the slow method of starvation was horrible enough, but without water to moisten their lips it would become excruciatingly worse.

But they were philosophers, Sutton and Allister, used to hard knocks and tight corners, and Si was a fatalist. It might end in a test of the religion of the Orient and Occident—the intellectual philosophy of the white man and the teachings of Confucius.

Night brought them relief from the day torture, and they slept soundly and peacefully until another rosy morn awakened them. The second day was like the first. They ate sparingly but ravenously of their food; sipped the stale, warm water as if it were some rare vintage of wine; smoked their one pipe alternately; talked of the sea and shipwrecks; joked, smiled, and laughed—but always watched the horizon for the sign of a ship, scanning it so intently and longingly that the reflection of the sun on the surface of calm water made them color-blind.

Late in the afternoon of the third day, Allister took stock of their provisions and water, measuring them carefully with an eye to future use. "At this rate, two more days will finish it," he mumbled. "The water may last three, but the food will go in less time."

He glanced up at his companions, both watching him. "What shall it be—another cut in the rations, or two days of feasting, and then—starvation or rescue?"

"I'd rather starve outright than by degrees," grumbled Sutton. "Give me my portion now."

"No, we stick together—one rule for all. What's your wish, Si?"

"Me velly hungry—me eat now."

"Eat it is, then," smiled Allister. "Half to-day and the other half to-morrow. Then—"

"Let the next day take care of itself," interrupted Sutton, seizing his portion and eating it greedily. "Who knows what will happen before that? Like's not we'll pick up a sail or—"

He stopped, his mouth half open, his eyes peering curiously at something rising and bobbing lazily upon the water. It was a bottle, floating with its corked end up.

"I wonder now if, by chance, some fool dropped that overboard without properly emptying its contents down his throat," he added, leaning over to grasp the derelict bottle as it swept nearer on the crest of the next wave. "Anyway, I'm in a mood for investigating anything suspicious."

He caught the bottle by the neck and held it up to the sunlight. "Empty, of course!" he muttered in disgust. "Not a drop in it—and me so thirsty!"

"Hold, Billy, you're mistaken," interrupted Allister, smiling. "It's got its label inside. That's paper I see through the glass, isn't it?"

"Sure, and if you get any satisfaction reading the label you're welcome to it."

Billy tossed the bottle to his friend, who caught it, and squinted with one eye through the opalescent glass. "Queer that it's corked so tight," he observed. "Cork jammed down and tied there."

Breaking the string, he worked at the cork with thumb and fingers until it popped out. A crumpled piece of paper had been inserted spirally inside. Allister poked a finger through the narrow mouth, and gradually pulled the end of the paper toward the neck. It was stiff writing-paper, of good grade, and tinted a soft lavender. There was a delicate fragrance that the original contents of the bottle had not entirely neutralized.

"Why—this—is—" Allister began, stammeringly, pulling the paper out with a jerk, and smoothing it out on his knees. He stopped, and began reading the angular writing on one side of the paper. Billy Sutton, seeing his unusual absorption, leaned over his elbow to learn the cause of it. Si gazed at the empty horizon.

It was a message cast up by the sea, an S. O. S. signal sent by bottle-messenger instead of by wireless.

"Aboard Steamship Princeps
"Lat. 19 31′
"Long. 62 50′—approximately.

"Mutiny aboard. Captain and first mate killed. Other officers and passengers prisoners. Sailing due east. Send help at once or telegraph New York office. Our fate and destination unknown."

There was a signature, but it was scrawled so hastily that it was undecipherable, especially as a drop of water, or tear perhaps, had spread the signature and blotted it out.

"Say, that's the P. & W. liner we saw the other day!" Sutton broke in excitedly. "Their crack steamer's called the Princeps. That's why she was 'way off her course, Burke."

"Quite likely," murmured Allister. He raised the paper to his nose and sniffed at it. "This was written by a woman," he added, "a woman in distress, Billy."

"I pity her if she's any worse off than we are," retorted Sutton.

CHAPTER V.

ALL IN WHITE.

THE food had given out to the last morsel, and the water-keg drained and squeezed of every ounce of its moisture, but with empty stomachs and parched, thirsty lips and throats the three castaways faced the precarious future with more cheerfulness than many a one shows in sitting down to a feast. Perhaps, it was artificial, intended to deceive each other, and as it was general it had the desired effect.

"This tobacco's fine," remarked Sutton. "I'd rather have it than food and drink. Poor Si, I wish you had your opium."

"Me velly much satisfied now," replied the cook. "Me not so sick."

"Getting used to it?" grinned Allister. "It's one of the beautiful laws of nature that we can adapt ourselves to anything. Old Doc Tanner fasted forty days, didn't he, Billy?"

"Something like that."

"Then it won't be hard on us to fast a week."

"Me no fast forty days," observed Si, "but me know great Chinaman who eat only once a month. Him great man in China. Velly learned man—him philosopher."

"Sure he was. Nobody but a philosopher would fast, and then boast of it." Sut-

ton made a wry face, and inhaled some smoke to relieve his parched throat.

Allister was rereading the message cast up by the sea in the floating bottle. He had read it many times. "That first letter of the signature," he remarked suddenly, "is certainly a J. I wonder what it stands for?"

"John, Joseph, or Jehoshaphat, mebbe," grinned Sutton.

"No, it's a woman's handwriting, I told you," replied Allister a trifle irritably.

"Then it's Jane, Jennie, or Jerusha. I had an old aunt named Jerusha. Never knew there was such a name until I met her, and I'd hate to meet another."

"The next one looks like an N or M," added Allister, squinting hard at the paper.

They spent a good part of an hour going over the script again, advancing and contradicting plausible arguments that the message was written by a woman in great distress or by a man who wrote a feminine hand. Billy argumentatively insisted that it was the latter.

"What would a woman know about latitude and longitude?" he said scornfully. "The chap that wrote that knew something about navigation."

"Granted," admitted Allister, "but no man would use lavender note-paper, and scented at that."

"His wife's mebbe," scoffed Sutton.

That night they brooded over their fate silently, tossing sleepily on their hard couch, but keeping their morbid thoughts to each other. Before daybreak they were up. It was their custom to rise early to scan the horizon for a ship. Eagerly and anxiously their red-rimmed eyes penetrated the murky twilight of early day.

Suddenly a yell escaped the lips of Billy Sutton, and as though his legs were made of springs he leaped up. "A ship, or I'll eat my sea-boots!" he screamed. "Praise be to Allah or your old Confucius, Si! Get up, and feast your eyes on her!"

Si was already on his feet staring through the misty weather, and Allister was by his side. They supported each other on their wabbly platform by grasping arms or shoulders. In this position they stood a moment like figures posing for human statues.

The huge bulk of a steamer was slowly being penciled against the background of gray and black, emerging from the gloom as surely, if less swiftly, as the artist's creation develops on the screen. There was no human hand directing the penciling—nothing but the breaking light in the east.

"She's a steamer!" exclaimed Allister finally. "A. P. & W. liner!"

"The Princeps!"

"Yes, and she's waiting to pick us up! What 'd I tell you?"

There was no doubt that the big, black hulk was stationary, rolling gently on the oily swells—hove to and drifting with the current and wind. In the dawning twilight of early morning she appeared nearer than she was, a common optical illusion at sea.

In his excess of joy, Sutton let out a series of yells, in which Si joined with his thin, cracking voice, and Allister finally added the weight of his deep bass to the chorus. Waving, shouting, and yelling, the trio could not for long escape attention.

Shadowy figures moved on the deck of the steamer, and faces were turned toward them. The castaways continued to wave and shout; but there was no movement to launch a boat to rescue them. Twilight turned into daylight, and the rosy flush of morn spread from the eastern horizon to the zenith of heavens. Still the Princeps rolled gently on the waves, a silent ship of mystery.

Suddenly Allister frowned. "The mutiny, Billy," he said hoarsely. "She's in the hands of the mutineers."

"Sure, but I'd rather be their prisoner than a castaway on this raft. They got to rescue us."

"It's one of Worden's steamers, Billy!" added Allister in a strangely calm, dangerous voice.

"Hell, man, are you thinking of that!" snapped Sutton.

Allister was quiet, but his eyes were blazing. "If by chance, Jim Worden's aboard," he mumbled, "I don't want to be rescued."

His friend turned on him angrily. "Where's that letter?" he demanded sharply. "Give it to me! I got a heart, and if there's a woman, and maybe helpless little kids aboard, I'm going to them. I may help them."

"Not if they knock you down and put you in irons."

"They'd feed me, and that's the best thing I can think of now. After that—who knows?"

"You'd sell your soul for a meal, Billy, and—"

"You'd sell yours and a lot of passengers' for a grudge! Where's that letter?"

"I'll keep it," replied Allister stiffly.

"Then you'll consent to be rescued even if it's by Jim Worden?"

"If they come to pick us up; but I see no signs of it yet."

Drifting and rolling the steamer was still wrapped in mysterious silence. They could see dozens of faces lining the side nearest them; but no hand-wave or responsive shout. After exhausting his voice in yelling, Sutton finally subsided in disgust.

"The damn polecats! They ain't going to help us!" he exploded violently. "They're the worst scum of the sea! They're—"

"Hold on, they're lowering a boat!" interrupted Allister, grasping his arm.

Si, who had remained mute, began dancing and rubbing his stomach. A boat was swinging from the davits, and when it splashed in the water Sutton's face beamed with smiles. "I smell coffee and biscuits," he murmured, "and water and—"

"Not so fast, Billy. We may be jumping from the frying-pan into the fire."

"I'm willing! It can't sizzle you worse than this sun. I couldn't stand another day of it without going daffy. Here they come!"

The boat dancing over the waves contained a dozen men, eight at the oars, and four in bow and stern. The latter were watching the castaways intently.

"Say, they're a fine looking bunch," muttered Sutton, as the boat drew nearer. "Pipe their dress! Ain't they rigged up for dinner? Sure they are!"

The clothes of the seamen were certainly peculiar. Some were in ordinary business suits of the prosperous banker or broker; others had silk-faced dinner-jackets drawn over starched, but dirty white shirts; nearly all wore collars and neckties that were hardly in keeping with the sea. The men at the oars had their hands protected by kid gloves, some of which had parted in the middle and ripped clear down the back.

Billy Sutton rubbed his eyes. "Say, are they a bunch of lunatics? I ain't sure I want to be rescued."

"No," replied Allister, his eyes brightening, "it's the result of the mutiny. The officers and passengers have retaken the ship, and in the fight they—they—"

"Mebbe so," interrupted Sutton uncertainly, "but I don't like the looks of 'em. They're swell-looking passengers, I don't think!"

When the boat drew alongside the raft, the men rested on their oars and let the craft drift. The occupants studied the three castaways leisurely until Sutton could no longer endure the scrutiny.

"Well, how about it, mates, ain't you going to take us off?" he asked. "We got a fine appetite for breakfast—been fasting so long our stomach's glued to the backbone."

"How'd you get here on that?" asked one of the men in the bow. He was a tall, cadaverous chap, with a prominent Adam's apple, and supple, lanky arms.

"Just drifted here when our ship foundered," replied Allister. "We've been nearly five days on the water, and our food and water are exhausted."

"What ship?"

"The Virginia—a schooner."

"Where from?"

"St. Thomas, loaded with iron-ore. The hurricane caught us and sent her to the bottom."

"Where's the rest of the crew?"

"They took the only life-boat we had. I couldn't say where they are—most likely at the bottom of the sea."

"Are you the captain?"

"I was, but I'm without a ship now."

"Good navigator? Know these southern waters well?"

"Like a book—been knocking around here for five or six years, handling all sorts of tubs."

"I mean, can you navigate a steamer?" interrupted the tall, lanky inquisitor.

"Yes, easily. Why?"

The speaker ignored his question. "That your mate?" he added, pointing to Sutton.

"Sure! Don't I look it?" replied Billy. "I got a mate's license, and an engineer's—"

"You're an engineer?" interrupted the other eagerly.

"That's what I said," dryly replied Sutton. "I was chief engineer on—"

"That's enough," cut in the interrogator. He turned his eyes on Si. "Who's he?"

"That's Si Lung, our cook, and the best little cook out of the Celestial empire. That's why we brought him along—to cook for us."

Si grinned and bowed like a mannikin. "Me velly good cook. Me cookee for you. Me—"

The man turned to two of his companions in the bow of the boat, and together they held a consultation. The three castaways watched them intently, straining their ears to catch fragments of the conversation. There seemed to be a little disagreement among them, but finally the first spoke again.

"We'll take you aboard," he said. "Hop in when we draw up alongside."

They scrambled into the boat, taking a grateful farewell of their raft, which continued to bob lazily upon the water as they drew away from it and neared the steamer's side.

Allister was the first on the deck of the Princeps, followed closely by Sutton, with Si well in the rear. The quick trip had been made in silence, none of the men showing any interest in them, and the castaways for once being guardedly quiet and noncommunicative.

The first thing that struck Allister as unusual was the peculiar nondescript dress of the crew lolling around on the deck waiting for them. For the most part they wore well-tailored clothes, and of good material, but wretchedly fitted to the wearers. There were combinations of street dress, afternoon and evening clothes. One man actually wore a high silk hat tilted on the back of his head.

The next thing that came under his swift observation was the disorderly condition of the deck. It lacked all the shipshape orderliness of a crack ocean liner, and the crew or passengers—Allister could not say which they were, or distinguish one from the other—were loafing around in shiftless attitudes, smoking or chewing tobacco according to their preferences.

The tall, lanky chap who had interrogated them sprang up after them, and paused a moment. Then he addressed a man with a livid scar across his right cheek, speaking in a low voice. That individual finally nodded his head, and said:

"All right! Give 'em their fill, an' then let 'em report to the cap'n."

He turned suddenly and clapped his hands. A white-faced boy, wearing a steward's uniform, appeared, and stood trembling before him. Removing a fat cigar from his cheek, the scar-faced individual growled:

"Tell Miss Jane to feed 'em—give 'em all they can stow away. When they've had enough let me know."

He waved a hand and walked away. The boyish-looking steward turned to Allister, his eyes surprised now as much as frightened.

"This way, please," he said.

In wonder and amazement, sorely puzzled, and not entirely sure they were not dreaming, the three castaways followed their guide.

"Pinch me," muttered Sutton. "Wake me up, Burke. I got a nightmare."

"Quiet, Billy, until we've had something to eat. I can't think straight on an empty stomach."

"Miss Jane," called the steward as they entered the dining-saloon, "Mr. Corby says that you're to feed these—these shipwrecks. They come off the raft."

Allister turned to face a young woman clothed in white from head to foot, cap, apron, and dress in sharp contrast to her dark hair and black eyes. The face was almost as pale as the white linen of her dress; but the lustrous eyes were defiant and haughty, although fear and dread lurked in their corners. Altogether, Allister thought, it was the prettiest face he had ever seen.

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 Whispering Shell

by Herman Howard Matteson

HUNUI, at one time or another, had supplicated nearly all of the forty evil Polynesian gods. Hunui proposed to wreak suitable vengeance upon Amanu, the five-minute diver. One by one, as the plan of her revenge took definite form, she abandoned all the gods save two —Tababa, the shark god, and Mite O-fua, the god of the giant mollusk that would close down its shell upon a man's hand or foot, and hold him until he drowned. To Tababa and to Mite O-fua the girl prayed every morning and evening, and made lavish votive offering.

The thick gray of early morning still hung over the sleeping village when Hunui crawled from the thatched hut, made her way through the pandang shrubbery to the edge of the sea. She surveyed the deserted beach, crept back into the wood, hid herself, waited.

Presently she heard the thud of naked feet hurrying along the path. Amanu, the five-minute diver, for all his craft and cunning, was eager for the bait. Derided, humiliated because a girl had beaten him at the diving, had for a fortnight piled up nightly before the chief a greater take of pearl shell than he, Amanu had spied upon her to discover what bank of pearl shell she had found.

Now he knew. Hunui's basket, filled beyond capacity, spilling a shell here and there along the trail, had told the secret.

This was the place of Hunui's rich store. Amanu had come early, very early. By the custom, the place was his for the day, for he had come first.

Hunui, black eyes glittering, breast heaving, watched from her hiding-place while Amanu stood upon the brim of rock, made ready. He wadded the fiber basket into a ball, tucked it into his girdle. Then he lifted his face to the sky and uttered the diver's propitiating prayer. He leaned from the edge of the cliff, dropped into the sea with a soft plash.

Hunui counted. One minute—two minutes.

She moved from the covert of pandang, stole a step nearer the edge of the cliff.

Three minutes. Any Polynesian will remain below water three minutes. Amanu was a five-minute diver, best diver of any island of the far Tuamotus.

Four minutes.

A little nearer the edge of the cliff she crept.

Four minutes. Amanu was a diver; not a doubt of it.

Four minutes and a half.

Four minutes below had been the best that Hunui had ever been able to do.

Amanu had been below four and a half. Five minutes. Five—

No swirl of water marked the return of the diver. Five minutes.

Her lips parted, an image in bronze save

for the rhythmic lift and fall of the counting hand, Hunui stood upon the cliff. Five minutes.

Five minutes and a half. No diver of the whole Pacific had ever remained below so long, and lived.

Five minutes and a half.

Six minutes.

Hunui leaned from the edge of the cliff, stared into the depths of uneasy waters.

Six minutes—more than six minutes.

Hunui dropped from the rock, swam in under the overhang. In a moment she reappeared. She climbed the bank, flung her arms, burst into hysterical screams, ran to the woods, into the trail, and still ran, sobbing, laughing, to her hut.

In a corner of the hut, as if in a shrine, rested a shell of the great mollusk, Mite O-fua. Before this Hunui flung herself, bowed her head to the earth, and uttered fervent thanks.

The government pilot books describe Marutea Island as one of the most dangerous in the archipelago. Twenty miles long, the whole southwestern aspect is bordered by a submerged reef. Only at the northwestern extremity of the island was there an opening in the reef, and this was marked precariously by a jutting bit of coral that looked like a dead man's hand. More often than not even this small mark of guidance was awash in the seas.

The master of the tops'l schooner Faraway, sighting the coral hand, began to wear his ship. A roller higher than its fellows buried the guiding coral hand. The quartermaster spun the wheel a spoke too far. The Faraway took a sheer, rose to the heave of a swell, flung itself upon the reef.

And there she balanced, grinding, turning. Almost, when the waves hogged the Faraway at stem and stern, was she able to slide from the reef, but when the waters sank the entire weight of ship and cargo rested upon the fulcrum of sharp coral.

Creaking, groaning, the seams began to open. The old oak ribs began to fetch away. The masts began to roll in their steppings.

There came a series of higher waves, with the alternate deeper abyss. The old Faraway broke fairly in two, slid into deep water, her fo'c's'le within the reef, her afterpart without.

Here and there a human figure spun madly for a moment in the vortex of a tide rip, then went down with the sucking undertow.

One with a shock of red hair went down, came up, went down. Clinging with one hand to a shattered bit of spar, he flailed the waters with his free arm, fought his way out of the spume of breaking seas to the sirupy, undulating smoothness that marked the opening of the reef.

But the undertow caught him, sucked him under, flung him far back, whence again he began to swim doggedly toward the haven of the lagoon.

High upon the side of the pinnacle that arose from the border of the lagoon stood a girl, a pointed conch shell clasped in her hands. This was the *eeo* shell of the Polynesian maiden into which she whispers her secrets, to which she lays her ear while it whispers back the mystic answer.

A score of times had Hunui climbed the cliff to where she could be alone. At first the *eeo* had been stupid, stubborn, and would only drone back murmuring, inarticulate reply.

Then, finally, the *eeo* began to speak in words that were no more different from her own words than an echo differs from the voice that provokes it.

But Hunui's heart and mind were the dreaming, imaginative heart and mind of the superstitious islander. The *eeo* had answered, twice and thrice had answered, and had said that he would come from the east, tall, strong, fair of skin, with flame-colored hair, a god to be her very own.

Three times the *eeo* had answered Hunui. Exalted, light as a bird, she had hurried down the cliff side, had sped through the pandang to the open in the midst of the village huts where Old Motu was beginning to thump out the measure of the *meke-meke* dance with the *raau* stick.

From across the circle of eager, laughing faces Amanu, the five-minute diver, had nodded for Hunui to come to his side. Often Amanu had boasted that what maiden of the island he desired was his.

Imperatively he bobbed his head toward Hunui. She burst into shrill, derisive laughter, seated herself on the opposite side of the ring, disposing her short lava-lava skirt about her graceful body.

Publicly, Hunui had flouted Amanu, the five-minute diver. Amanu glowered, sulked; Hunui laughed, danced as she had never danced before.

Every day the girl sought the cliff side, the *eeo* shell clasped in her hands. She loved to whisper over and again the words, to hear again the promise that he should come from the east, tall, strong, fair of skin, with flame-colored hair, a god to be her very own.

From the cliff side, clapsing the *eeo* shell to her bosom, Hunui had watched the coming of the Faraway.

Shrilly she had screamed when she had seen that the skipper had veered the ship a fatal fathom from the true course.

In an instant the sea had broken its plaything. Fighting his way toward the lagoon was a man with hair of the color called by the islanders *uraura*.

Recklessly Hunui slid down the declivity of the cliff, dragged an outrigger canoe to the surf, thrust it into the water, swam alongside until it had topped the third roller. Then she climbed over the rail, picked up the paddle.

Paddling with all her wiry strength, maneuvering the craft with all her sea-born cunning, she came finally to where she could reach, seize the shock of *uraura*-colored hair.

Careening the canoe, she drew him in. Hers, all hers. The man god had come to her from the east as the magic *eeo* shell had promised.

Tenderly she gazed upon him where his vast form lay huddled inertly against a thwart. What a wonder, that aureole of reddish hair! Upon the backs of his hands and upon his face were tiny brown spots. His skin, where the neckband of his flannel shirt had been torn away, was as white as the flesh of a young coconut.

Hers, to be her very own. The *eeo* shell had promised her. She had but gone into the sea to claim her own.

Billy Danner, able seaman, blinking up wonderingly at the thatch of a cone-shaped roof above him, began to meditate painfully that he had been badly stove up. He felt himself over tentatively, discovered that he had cracked a rib amidships. Also he felt a bit light in the tops.

But very shortly youth and an amazingly robust constitution began to assert themselves. If he could just stow a fairish cargo of lobscouse and tea, and then have a good sleep, he would be quite all right.

Lobscouse and tea are strangers to the Tuamotun Island bill of fare. But roast pig and yams and sweet coconut milk are not.

A sweet, lisping voice sounded in Billy's ear. A firm hand supported his head. He was eating three-finger poi, nibbling at roast meat and yam, drinking milk through a hole gouged in the end of a coconut.

It was rather dark in the hut. Billy wanted a look at his benefactress. Her voice was mighty promising. Billy palavered his gratitude, started to rise, but the girl thrust him back upon the sleeping mat.

There in the hut the big, young sailor slept, ate, slept again.

Then he crawled to the open, stood a bit wabbly to his feet. A native girl with the most wonderful, big, soft black eyes Billy Danner had ever looked into, stood by smiling, appraising Billy's great frame with an air of proprietorship.

Billy talked sign-talk to Hunui, who, rather reluctantly, finally let herself understand that the white man with the *uraura*-colored hair desired speech with the chief of the village.

It is amazing how lucidly one may talk, under necessity, without words. Billy made the chief understand finally, and the chief answered. An *iruwa pahi*, or foreign ship, touched at Marutea Island once a year sometimes. Sometimes it missed a year, or two years.

The *iruwa pahi* was owned and skippered by a little, capering French trader from Papeete. The ship was a ten-ton schooner and picked up pearls, copra, and small logs of hard wood in exchange for calico, rum and knives. The Frenchman had just been at Marutea, therefore would not come again for many months.

Billy Danner set himself to space out philosophically the waiting months. But time hung intolerably heavy. Why wait? Billy had ever been a man of action.

Hunui trotting beside him, Billy had done the island. Where the open Pacific pounded the coral to powder much drift had accumulated. Here were fir logs that must have traveled thousands of miles from the Oregon coast, logs that the fretting waves had worn to a piano polish. Here and there were bits of plank.

A year seemed a mighty long time to wait. Anyway, the sight of the Oregon fir had made Billy homesick. Besides, they—that is, some one on that Oregon coast—before a year was up would be mourning him as dead.

The Maruteans possessed a few rude implements, and these Billy borrowed. With infinite pains he began to fashion from a log a keel for a ten-ton yawl.

Finally he got the keel laid, notched for the ribs, and began to fashion the latter in rude form. The ribs that he had set in place at sundown he found floating in the lagoon the following morning. The old adze and a saw-toothed draw-knife rested upon the coral bottom in forty feet of water.

Billy bribed a native to recover the tools for him. His unimaginative man's wits pondering every explanation of the interference with his work but the right one, he set the ribs back into place.

In the morning the tools were again in the lagoon, and the ribs afloat. Thrice was his day's work undone while he slept.

The fourth night, determined to bestow upon some Marutean the drubbing of his life, Billy kept watch. A girl slipped from the shelter of the pandang shrub, tore at the frame of the yawl like a fury, flung the ribs into the ocean and the adze and the draw-knife after them.

When Billy laid his broad hand upon her quivering shoulder she gave a startled yelp. Then she flung her arms about Billy's neck. Moaning, crying, she clung and clung. One reiterated word he could detect in her sobbing, hysterical speech, and the word was *eeo*.

Feeling confoundedly foolish, deeply thankful that it was night and no one looking on, Billy stood while Hunui, half crying, ran her fingers through his hair, saying over and again, "*Eeo, eeo.*"

Teetering to and fro with that bearlike awkwardness that comes upon a man embarrassed, Billy could only mutter: "I swear. Well, now, I swear."

Then he began to understand. Gently he released her grasp from about his neck, gave her round shoulder a little pat, striving to comfort her with: "There there—don't you blow a clew, little matey."

To the respective owners Billy returned the adze and the haggle-toothed draw-knife. He toiled no more at the ten-ton yawl in which it had been his design to trade a while in the Tahitis, then make into Papeete, and traffic both ship and stores for French francs and Louis d'or, then for the Oregon coast. Then, the months of hurricanes coming on, the keel of the ship all but disappeared from view in the sand and broken coral washed over it by the seas.

Hunui followed him about like his shadow. He had accumulated sufficient store of the simple Polynesian dialect to understand now the miracle story of the *eeo* shell. But the wonder of it, the perplexing state of being regarded as a god gift to this girl with the big, wonderful black eyes, abided with him. He would look at Hunui, who would smile gloriously, then stare away over the sea while he worried his thatch of red hair and muttered: "I swear. Now, I swear."

But with the ceasing of the storms, the resumption of the faithful, gentle trades, stronger than ever there came upon him the longing for home. His manhood revolted at the lazy, pampered, voluptuary life that he had led.

Playfully, Hunui had thrust a sprig of the flaming, scarlet hibiscus over his ear. Like a man caught in some shameful act, he blustered an oath, hurled the flower to the sand, ran down the slope and with his bare hands began hurling away the sand and silt that had buried the keel of the ten-ton yawl.

Again he borrowed adze and draw-knife, and set to work.

Never again did Hunui disturb the timbers of the slowly shaping craft. Always when he ceased work there was ready for him smoking hot yams, roasted meat, a bowl of pink, three-finger poi. When not engaged in gathering, or preparing food for the white man god, Hunui would sit in the edge of the pandang shrub, supplicating the spirit of the *eeo* shell, threatening it with direful punishment if it mocked her or played her false.

For five months jealousy had been festering in the heart of Amanu, the five-minute diver, like the poisonous spine of the sea urchin in the heel of a fisherman. A dozen times Amanu had sought to engage Hunui in talk, but she would stare at him with her big, black eyes as if he were one she had never seen before.

Amanu, reasoning that the white man was building a craft for two, and not for one, came often to look on while the white man scattered chips with the broad-bladed adze. Standing beside Billy, Amanu considered the height, the length of arm, the thickness of the white man's wrist.

Amanu had the greater girth of chest and waist. That man who can remain below water five minutes has lung space. Amanu had the greater beam; Billy Danner length and reach.

Once, in deadly earnest, though the white man had taken it in fun, Amanu laid his hands upon Billy's shoulders in the attitude taken by the island wrestler.

Billy whipped a hand beneath Amanu's arm, seized the native's chin, at the same time clasping the other hand into the small of Amanu's back. For all his struggles, Amanu bent backward, slowly backward. Then Billy gave him a twist, a throw that landed him on his head spinning like a top.

Hunui, sitting in the edge of the pandang shrub, laughed shrilly. Fishermen, standing upon the rocks near by, also laughed, called to Amanu mockingly.

The ship's frame now ribbed astern and amidships, Billy began to ponder the matter of obtaining a knee and short, natural crooks for the bow.

He began to search the woods, ask the natives where he might find distorted trees that would answer the purpose.

Amanu, as Billy was coming from his hut in the early morning, met the white man half-way to the ship. Amanu knew where there was a tree of tough kao wood that would answer. The tree grew upon the cliff, far below the village. There was a short cut through the woods to the place.

Billy followed Amanu into the jungles. Presently the trail emerged upon the beach. Amanu waved his hand. The place lay further on.

Where the upper end of the island broke away abruptly from the north, and the smooth beach became a tangle of piled boulders and broken coral, Amanu pointed to the cliff side. There, surely enough, was a twisted, gnarled tree that might answer.

Amanu reached, took the adze from Billy's hand, pointed for the white man to climb the cliff, decide whether the tree would do.

Amanu's eyes glittered wickedly. If the white man found that the tree would answer, Amanu would climb after him with the adze, help him cut it, get it to the beach.

The nichelike space between two jutting rocks appeared to be the only feasible route from which to climb. Billy walked forward, turned the edge of the rock.

There followed a threshing sound, a squeaking almost human in timbre. The tentacles of the giant, south Pacific devilfish flailed themselves about the white man's body.

Amanu, uttering a laugh, dropped the adze, ran down the beach to where he had left his outrigger canoe, embarked, paddled in the direction of the pearl-shell banks.

Wrapping, unwrapping, tensing, the hungry suckers of the tentacles feeling for a holding spot upon the white man's flesh, the monster began to heave and undulate its vast bulk back, back into its den in the rock niche.

The tentacles, thick as a man's thigh where they joined the thing's body, tensed tighter still. A groan issued from the victim's lips. There was a crack as of breaking sticks. Both thigh bones had broken under the terrific embrace.

A mad scream echoed along the shore. Her bronze skin an ashen hue, shrieking

like a fury, striking with desperate strength, yet with an accuracy truly marvelous, Hunui hewed away with the adze at the great fleshly arms that were crushing the life out of the precious white body that the god of the *eeo* shell had given to her.

The crevice of rock looking upon the waters became a shambles. Severed tentacles, still wriggling, lay upon the bloody sands. Hunui flung the adze from her, gathered the broken, inert body of Billy Danner into her arms, drew it to the open beach.

With the hair of her head she wiped the foam from the white lips. She ran her fingers through the thatch of red hair, whispered to him, laid her ear to his breast.

There was a flutter. Still he lived. He would not die. No, the *eeo* shell had promised her a living white man god.

He would live, and not die. His eyes opened. A groan escaped his lips. He would live.

Standing with arms widely flung, Hunui faced the open sea where dwelt the twenty good gods, and the forty evil ones of her Polynesian faith. To the forty evil gods she swore an oath, pledged her body and soul to even up with Amanu, the five-minute diver, for the breaking of the beautiful body of the white god that the *eeo* had given her.

Again she knelt beside Billy Danner. He was rolling his head, muttering. But he would live.

Hunui sped back to the village, crying that a devil-fish had got the *uoyu tane*. The *uoyu tane* was badly hurt, but would live.

"For once, hurry, snail men!" she screamed.

The islanders bore Billy Danner back to the village, laid him upon the sleeping mat in the *fare* of Hunui. There, while Billy in delirium struggled with a devil-fish that he called Amanu, raved of the green hills of Oregon, of one who dwelt there, Hunui watched beside him.

With infinite love and tenderness, she cared for the stricken man. Never did she leave him save to fetch him food and drink, or to stand for a moment while she whispered into the *eeo* shell that whispered back.

But Hunui had begun to doubt. Again and again she threatened to abjure the *eeo* shell forever, and all her faith, if the little, magic thing of pink and white and brown should lie to her.

Slowly Billy Danner recovered from the effects of his hurt. Within two months he had regained his health and strength, perfectly regained them save that his once tall, straight form was now squat, hideous, moved grotesquely like a sand crab scuttering over the rocks. The thigh bones, the fractures unreduced, had healed and set themselves arcwise, one bowed in, the other out. His hands hung below his knees. His gait was shuffling, rolling, simian.

Hunui watched Billy as he went sidling over the beach to where lay the incompleted ship. A moment the man stood regarding his handicap. With a snarl, followed by bitter, booming oaths, he tore the thing asunder with his bare hands and hove them into the sea.

Hunui clasped her hands to her bosom, called down a blessing upon the spirit of the *eeo* shell. Hers, all hers. Billy Danner was never going to leave Marutea Island.

Softly she followed after him, as he made his way up the slope, to the cliff side. She watched him as he seated himself upon a rock. For a long time he stared into the open, to the eastward where lay the Oregon coast. Then he gathered his face in his hands and wept.

Silently Hunui withdrew. To the Polynesian nothing is so sacred as the grief that brings a strong man to tears.

And day after day Billy Danner repaired to the same cliff side, to gaze *te hitia o-tera*, or "the place that is to the east."

The countenance of Hunui lost gradually all its softness and tenderness. The lips that had been always warm with smiles set themselves into sinister lines. The black eyes took on an ophidian glitter.

In reckless mood she joined the pearl-divers. Anointing her slim, wonderful body with coconut oil, she dove with the men, taking hazards from which even Amanu, the five-minute diver, shrank back.

At first Hunui was able to bring up pearl

shell from only three fathoms of water. Then she dove in four fathoms, five, six, eight.

At first she had been able to remain below but a minute. This she increased gradually to two minutes, three. Four was her extreme limit.

Once having brought up bottom in eight fathoms, having remained below a full four minutes, she began to taunt, ridicule and challenge Amanu.

She dared him to dive in the outer lagoon where the gray tiger sharks were.

When he refused, she dived alone, came up unharmed. The other divers and the idle onlookers laughed Amanu back to the village.

It was the custom for the divers every night to lay before the chief what pearl shell they had taken during the day. From the piles upon the earth the chief counted out every tenth shell for himself.

There came shortly a night when the number of the shell piled before the chief by Hunui exceeded the count of the pile of Amanu. And day after day, while Amanu glowered sullenly under the chaffing of the natives, the number of Hunui's shell exceeded his own.

Only, had Amanu but known, the private store of Hunui's shell in her *fare,* or hut, grew but negligibly slow.

But Amanu did not know. Jealous, enraged, all his old strong fancy for Hunui changed into hate, Amanu began to spy upon Hunui to learn what new, secret store of pearl she had discovered. Every night she brought her basket overflowing. Now Hunui dove always alone. She had found some new rich deposit of pearl.

But Hunui was crafty. She left her *fare* before daybreak. One night she would return to the village by canoe, another night by the trail from the west, on still another from the east.

With each succeeding day Amanu took up his watch at an earlier hour. In the gray of late night Amanu saw Hunui steal from the hut, enter the woods.

He followed. A distance inland, the trail split into three trails.

At fault, he returned finally to the village. That night, the number of Hunui's pearl shell exceeded any take ever made on Marutea Island.

Again he followed her, but in vain. Somewhere she left the beaten trail.

That night, when Hunui came in, she gave Amanu a patronizing toss of her head. Looking Amanu evenly in the eyes, she declared that she would no longer dive during the entire day, but would come in with her shell when the sun was high.

As she had walked from the woods Amanu had noted that a shell had rolled from her too full basket, lay unheeded at her feet.

Amanu pondered.

True to her boast, Hunui came to the village at noon on the day following, her basket heaped high.

Amanu waited. Toward night he slunk into the forest. There, in the trail, lay a pearl shell, still wet. A distance on, lay another, then another.

His nose to the ground like a hound, Amanu hurried on. He found a third shell, a fourth. The sixth shell brought him to where a by trail led to the beach. Halfway down the slope he found another. Upon a flat rock that rose abruptly from deep water lay a little, scattered pile of shells.

This was the place. He had found the store of Hunui's treasure.

Poised upon the edge of the rock, he looked about him apprehensively. This was dangerous diving. This water would be a good eight fathoms deep. The rock shelved inward forming a cavern, no telling how wide in extent. This would be a favored haunt for dreaded sea monsters.

His heart weakening, he leaned to stare down into the depths. Dangerous business, diving there alone. Anyway, it had grown too dark.

A sudden flare of rage against the girl who had publicly flaunted him scattered his timid, faltering thoughts. What a girl could do, he could do.

Morning's first light found him at the place.

His feet braced to the outer brim of the rock, he puffed out his enormous chest, drew a deep breath. Slowly he leaned forward, dropped into the sea with a soft splash.

From the edge of the woods stepped Hunui, her eyes glittering, bosom heaving. Her lips snarled away from her white teeth as she lifted her hand, began to count the seconds.

One minute. Two minutes. Three minutes.

She drew nearer the edge of the rock, turned her head to listen for the swirling sound that marked the return of a diver to the surface.

Four minutes. Four and a half.

Amanu, to grant him his due, was the greatest diver of the archipelago. Four minutes and a half—three-quarters.

To the very edge of the rock Hunui drew. Four minutes and three-quarters. Leaning, she noted how a shaft of yellow light slanted into the water like a long, pointing finger.

Five minutes. Five was the very limit of human endurance. No diver of the Polynesians had ever exceeded five minutes and lived.

Five. Five and a quarter. Five and a half.

At the girl's feet the water lay quiet.

Six minutes. It was over. Amanu had dived his last.

Hunui spread her arms, thanked the forty evil gods for heeding her prayer. Then Hunui, in her turn, poised herself upon the rock brim. Down, down went her slender body, undulating, to the stroke of her arms as she went deeper, deeper. A distance under the overhang of the rock she swam, turned, swam swiftly out, came popping to the surface.

Cunningly for love of the broken white man god she had matched one terror of the sea against another, the giant ostrem shell fish against the devil squid with eight arms. Along the outer edge of the ledge Hunui had lain a train of pearl-oyster shell. Feeling over the find, Amanu had followed it beneath the rock where it was dark, and thrust his hand into the maw of the great, rock-anchored bivalve that, at the least touch, closes down its inexorable jaws. Amanu, the five-minute diver, his wrist held between the edges of the shell as in a vise, swung gently to and fro as the current ebbed and flowed.

The capering French trader's ship rode in the offing. Ashore, the little man was trading knives, rum, calico for pearls and copra.

Banteringly he invited Hunui to bring forth her fabulous store of shell concerning which he had heard so much.

But she shook her head. In truth, Hunui had no store of shell. What shell she had taken from the deep she had used to bait her trap of the giant ostrem.

The bartering over, the Frenchman and Billy Danner engaged in earnest speech. The Frenchman was telling Billy of the famous Paris surgeon, resident for a while at Papeete. The famous surgeon, some weeks before, had broken the bone in the crooked arm of a man, had restored it perfectly. The surgeon would do as much for Billy Danner's case.

From the cliff side Hunui watched the little trading schooner wear into the offing. From its deck a white man with a shock of red hair had waved to her. She lifted her hand, waved in return.

Then, as the ship became a speck upon the horizon, Hunui leaned far out from the cliff, dropped the *eeo* shell into space. Upon the rocks far below it broke into a thousand fragments.

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LOVE'S ALCHEMY

BY MARGARET ROHE

O LOVE, a master alchemist thou art;
An empty life of dross and dull alloy,
You turn into a golden dream of joy,
Your only crucible a woman's heart.

Sara Was Judith

An Enigma

by Julian Hawthorne

Author of "A Goth from Boston," "Doris Dances," "Absolute Evil," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

THIS is a story—or a biography—written by Martha Klemm, psychic, and perhaps the reincarnation of a Salem ancestress hanged for witchcraft. Our readers will remember the part Martha Klemm played in "A Goth from Boston" and "Absolute Evil," both stories from Mr. Hawthorne's pen.

Sara, a woman chiefly remarkable for her absolutely colorless personality and forceless mentality, married an elderly Boston business man, John Roadnight. Examination by Dr. Topham Brent, a lifelong admirer of Martha's, convinced the physician that Sara was suffering from some internal disease—perhaps cancer. Yet when a child, Judith, was born to the middle-aged couple, the baby girl was beautiful and physically perfect; and after her birth the mother's disease seemed to be arrested.

Martha Klemm, between trips abroad—where she held interesting conversations with Lyof Rudol, a Russian man of learning—watched the development of Judith; indeed, between the child and Martha there seemed to be a closer bond than between Judith and her parents, who worshiped her. She tolerated her indulgent father, but was openly contemptuous of her colorless mother.

John Roadnight had a beautiful estate on the north shore of Massachusetts, and there Judith was brought up; whatever the season, her favorite costume was a scanty one-piece bathing-suit. Much of her time was spent in swimming or canoeing. When she was twelve years old she met a youth sailing a catboat—Drake Frobisher, the rather wild son of a rich and indulgent mother, who lived near the Roadnight estate. After that Judith spent much time on the water with Drake, and to keep the affair from becoming sentimental Martha advised Sara to invite the youth and his mother to meet Judith at tea. Judith was quite frank about her friendship with the boy, and told Martha that she liked him because "his me looks at my me."

As they were talking the colorless Sara came toward them, and Martha wondered if Sara really was dead, and this radiant young nymph, Sara's true self, never manifest in its original form.

CHAPTER VII.

A WARDROBE OF SHROUDS.

SARA sat down in the chair over against us and arranged her draperies.

She had put on a new costume. Since her marriage she had abounded in costumes, whether by way of keeping abreast of her income, or of rising to the height of her improved social station, or as a silent protest against her daughter's scorn of vestments. At all events, she had taken to adorning her pithless and uninviting anatomy with an assortment of costly and fashionable garments such as duchesses might be supposed to wear—but such duchesses only as pervade the hectic romances of servant-girl-ism.

She dressed relentlessly. Inasmuch as the housekeeper relieved her of all domestic planning and management, and the servants knew better than she what she ought to want in the way of service, and Judith rejected all efforts to be educated—though she was, somehow, better educated than are most children of her years—Sara's mania for robing herself must have been due to her having no other occupation. Modistes were in constant consultation with her; her only literature was fashion-periodicals, and

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she habitually changed her dress three or four times a day, whether or not visitors were expected. The effect was like tricking out a faded corpse in festal finery.

I can imagine nothing more discouraging to sane judgment than this phantasmagory of Sara's—unless she should undertake to rival Judith's archaic simplicity. But I never allowed myself to betray a hint of my dissatisfaction; it is not my habit to meddle with other people unless they directly cross me; and Judith, though conscious enough of the "ridiculousness" of her parent, was too ignorant of the world to lay it to her attire.

Opening out of Sara's bedroom up-stairs was another room of the same dimensions, which she used for no other purpose than as a clothes' closet. I am confident that no princess of Europe, or queen of the stage, could show the like.

There, attached to stout hooks, rank upon rank, depended the innumerable chrysalids—butterfly-wings, rather—appertaining to this sad old grub. They dated back to her wedding-day, for she never threw away anything, and many of them she would wear but once. I once inspected the collection; there were several hundred of them, each toilette complete, down to the shoes and stockings.

In Bluebeard's chamber hung heads without bodies; this place had the appearance of containing bodies without heads; one head only for all of them, and that one Sara's! Sara informed me that she was wont to spend some hours daily in reviewing this costly rubbish, shaking out the folds of the skirts, dusting them off, preserving them from moth or fading; but though she may have found a dreary sort of pleasure in caring for the things, I never could think that they themselves were dear to her.

As she sat there, in an elaborate afternoon dress, with sleeves to the elbow and a deep, V-shaped opening in front, which showed the peculiar pale-brown mole on the upper part of her left breast—Judith had not inherited this birthmark; her body from head to foot was without blemish—I wondered whether she ever saw herself, in imagination, as an ideal Sara, sumptuous, regal, glorious without and within, moving amid noble assemblages in splendid palaces, followed by murmurs of admiration and yearnings of passion, a queen of the great world.

What a blank stare, bewildered and uncomprehending, would she have given me had I asked her the question at that moment. And yet, could I have found a Diable Boiteux to open to me the chamber of her dreams, I might have received a startling answer, so mysterious are we even to ourselves.

There are women of temperament and bearing magnificent enough to have made you feel that such adornment was but the outward manifestation of the nature within; but it was inconceivable that any impulse of Sara's spirit could have prompted her to express herself in a guise so rampantly incongruous. Out of the silk and lace rose her lean, plucked-chicken throat, weakly supporting a head that seemed unwieldy; her ashen-yellow hair was clustered up in painful curls; her long hands were like turkey's claws; she wasn't more than five and thirty, but she looked as if fifty were long gone by.

Nevertheless, retaining this tragic figure-of-fun in the corner of my eye, while turning more fully toward Judith, so that I had them both in the field of vision at once, I received, transiently, an odd impression of an amalgamation of the two, as in a print of two superimposed negatives of different persons.

Suppose the pure, heroic nakedness of the child suddenly overtaken by disease, debility and age, her rich intelligence dwindled to a dry wisp, and her body decked out in this finery, might she not resemble her mother?

Or endow the withered woman with the youthful splendor of the child, and what was there in her fundamental physical structure inconsistent with a possible transmutation into Judith's fragrant bloom? Mother and daughter, after all.

I faltered inwardly at the notion, and the next moment, looking straight at Sara, I repudiated it. Save as there is in everybody a skeleton, destitute more or less of individual traits, there could be no likeness between these two.

"What a charming toilette," said I, grinning satanically.

Judith turned toward the door.

"Why do you leave us?" I called after her.

She half faced about and laid her finger-tips over her stomach, a little below the diaphragm. She drew down the corners of her mouth.

"She makes me feel uncomfortable here," she said.

The child was actually nauseated.

I wanted to laugh, and could almost have cried; I couldn't endure Sara's humiliation, and with another polite grimace—of self-preservation, as it were—I murmured to her, "It's the eau de cologne"—with which, indeed, Sara was redolent.

But Sara was evidently used to that sort of thing; the only visible effect on her was to make the rouge on her cheeks a little more conspicuous.

Judith went out, shining as she passed through a beam of sunlight from a window. Sara and I were left to confront each other; she bored me intolerably, but I couldn't keep the mingled mirth and pity out of my expression.

"She hates me," she remarked in a dry voice. "She always has. She always will. I've tried to make myself useful to her, but I only do her harm. The best service I could do her would be to go up-stairs and hang myself. If it wasn't for John—though I don't suppose he—" Her voice trailed off.

I was startled; Sara had never before betrayed any glimpse of the tragic.

"Steady, old girl," I exclaimed briskly. "The little cub is abnormally sensitive to smells, like an animal; toilet scents repel her. If you'd had a bunch of fresh violets in your corsage she'd have kissed you."

Sara was staring vacantly at nothing; her face twitched. After a pause she said:

"She has never kissed me."

An awful statement. She continued:

"When I was up-stairs, just now, taking down this dress from the hook, I thought to myself what a fool I was not to put myself in its place. Everybody'd be glad; I don't believe God would mind—and I don't care."

At this point I felt it incumbent on me to produce a laugh of merry scorn, and I did it; but it rang emptily through the quiet of the room.

"You ate something that disagreed with you at breakfast, my dear," I said cheerfully. "You're morbid, anyway, about Judith. She's near the critical age now, when children are always queer, but she'll round into form before long."

Sara made no response.

"I've been having a talk with her about that young fellow, Drake, as she calls him," I went on brightly. "It's all as right as rain. She, of course, is as innocent as a drop of water; and the boy respects her, and is rather afraid of her. The boy is a gentleman, and Judith's a lady. That sums it up."

Sara was still dumb.

"You had better take my advice and have him and his mother for tea," I said. "Of course, as you said, they're too young yet for marriage to be thought of, but either the two youngsters will make a match of it—and they might go further and fare worse—or they'll see each other from another angle and call it off.

"But it wouldn't be half a bad thing to let them be engaged for a while; he has known fashionable girls, and has the technique of society, and nothing would be so likely to hasten the cure of her—ah—eccentricities as to find herself brought in comparison with ordinary young women. She'd want to be dressed in the latest modes. Oh, you'll find her making free with that wonderful wardrobe of yours yet."

"A wardrobe of shrouds!" muttered Sara, again surprising me. She had never seemed capable of imaginative insight.

I felt toward her an impulse of real affection. I got up and went over to her, and patted her on the shoulder, thinking of our old times together in school.

"You're off color, old chum," I said. "We must have Topham over here to look you over again. Why not make a break, and get John to take you and the child to Europe for a few months? He'd be better himself for getting his nose out of those groceries for a while. He has more money than you can ever spend."

As I spoke I had a vision of the decorated mummy and the old tradesman, with the youthful deity between them, traversing London, Paris, Munich, Rome; but I was talking, not to make sense, but only to keep up an agreeable conventional noise.

A maid entered to announce luncheon. The crisis seemed over. Sara reverted to her usual manner.

"I think, by the bye, this is Dr. Brent's regular day for calling here," she remarked. "He comes every week, you know. There's nothing for him to do, but John likes to have him here, and it's all the same to me."

"Just his being here—a man like that—does you good without your knowing it," said I. "He could prescribe no medicine better than himself. Will he be here at lunch?"

"No, he comes later," she replied. She got up, and we went into the dining-room, my arm round Sara's waist.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO STORMS.

JUDITH was not with us at table. The maid said she had taken some fruit and bread out to the summer-house on the cliff. I had noticed that the little white tunic was still lying on the floor near the front-room window, where she had thrown it on seeing me. She would probably go out on the bay again in her kayak; perhaps she and Drake had an appointment at Devil's Rib.

Sara appeared to notice nothing, and showed no surprise at the child's absence.

I kept up a ripple of talk, mostly monologue, for Sara, after her unusual demonstration, had dropped into an inert phase. My prattle was less for her benefit than for my own. I felt as if specters were lurking in the corners of the room, and that taciturnity would encourage them to creep forth.

I told anecdotes, some of them quite stirring and unconventional, about my adventures with men, and other things. And the more I observed that Sara wasn't listening, the more freely did I chatter.

The morning had been hot; as the day advanced an irksome sultriness got into the air. Moisture and electricity were gathering up for an explosion, and I felt the kind of nervous uneasiness that a close temperature produces. There was more to it than that, however. My spiritual composure had been disturbed by the impressions of the morning, and, as I've said, it was the full of the moon. Senses, perceptions, were awakening in me, which, as I knew by long experience, portended the occurrence of something out of the ordinary.

I cannot give any clear account of this state. When I pass into it I find myself in a region distinct from the plane of routine existence; doors open through which I discern a realm wherein thoughts and emotions assume a visibility like material objects.

It is not a very enjoyable condition, especially in its earlier transition period; but once fully entered into it there comes an excitement which carries me through it. It ends, commonly, with an unpleasant reaction.

After lunch Sara and I went out on the front veranda, where, from the comfortable extension chairs, we could look out over the lawn and beyond the bay, and the horizon arc. The air drawing through the windows behind us made this the coolest place attainable. But Sara, after a few minutes, got up from her chair, moved hither and thither aimlessly, and at last, croaking out something which I failed to catch, returned indoors—perhaps to put on another costume; to say truth, I was glad of her departure; I wished to be alone when my mood should come upon me.

I moved my chair so that, sitting in it, I could look toward the west, where a group of dark clouds was now gathering into a mass and mounting upward. The indigo hue of it began to be streaked with trailings of saffron and green, moving and spreading, and the upper edges of the huge agglomeration were torn into fringes. The storm was to be a heavy one.

A breeze now set in, blowing from the east directly against the dark cloud; it ruffled a little the blue of the sea, directly above which the sun stood hot and white. The contrast was striking between the sum-

mer beauty amid which I sat, and the impending wrath.

"The impending wrath," I whispered to myself; "it's coming, and nothing can prevent it." But I was thinking not so much of the physical storm as of the spiritual one.

If you are not familiar with these peculiar states of consciousness, I cannot enlighten you. I must write as if you were. The one contains or embodies the other, but the two are not confused; the subject of them can give attention to either separately, or to both at once. Both seemed equally real—and perhaps they were so. I could see the supernatural through the natural.

There was a swarm of beings aloft there. Those shreds of vapor that careered so wildly just beyond the serried mass of the advancing host, were the leaders, maddened devils exulting in the evil hour at hand. The lurid greens and yellows were caused by dark light flashing from the scaly harness of troops deploying and reforming in the center. They ascended and again swept downward, or obliquely, grotesquely maneuvering, but so charged with fury that all order was abandoned—there can be no order in hell.

The myriads in the background were so pressed together that they seemed controlled, but it was the black frenzy of each to forge ahead that kept the bulk of them in line. They tore and snatched at one another as they came, and twisted together in serpent wrestlings, eager to choke and destroy each his fellow in mutual torturings and murderings; but so deep is the damnation of these beings that torture, the more extreme it is, revives them the more; from agony and outrage, suffered or inflicted, they take life afresh and rise, famishing for more wickedness, wickedness being their life.

At intervals, irregular but frequent, a terrible pulse shot from end to end of the ghastly battalions, molten hate drawn out in slender lines by its own intensity, aimed to destroy mankind, but swerved aside this way and that by conflicting aims, staggering in zigzags, rending those that sent it forth, yet now and again breaking away earthward, to be swallowed in land or sea. Sullen roarings followed, near and remote, and the lions of the pit shook their black manes and hurtled forward.

Below, in the tranquil bay, lay becalmed a small sailboat; for the breeze from the east had now died away and left a glassy smoothness on the wide expanse. The boat had swung to left and right in the low swell, and at this time presented its stern to the oncoming storm, and the man seated at the tiller seemed to be unaware of the peril.

With the opera-glass I could make him out quite distinctly; he lolled in the seat; was he smoking a pipe or had he fallen into a doze? The single sail was hoisted to the full; in a few more minutes there would be disaster. Could nothing rouse the man? The sun, suspended aloft there, seemed to be playing the enemy's game, so torrid and undisturbed was he; soon his brightness would be engulfed and lost in the towering maelstrom.

Now, for the first time, a thought of Judith struck me. Was she in the arbor—in the boat-house? Was it possible that she had put out to sea in that tiny cockleshell of hers in the face of that menace?

I tried to rise from my chair to cross the lawn to the cliff, but a heaviness held me down so that I could not move. It was the lethargy of the trance. I could not cry out, either; my voice came as an inaudible whisper.

Then, in great trouble of mind, I spoke to one whom I had already recognized in the vanguard of the infernals, though I had vowed that there should never again be communication between us. I knew that he would hear me, having spoken with him formerly.

"Do you claim her as yours, and yet would destroy her?" I said.

Immediately his remembered voice was close in my ear.

"You don't know the whole story," he chuckled. "Haven't you read in the Holy Book, 'After death the resurrection'? We never lose our own. You will understand by and by. But come and hunt with us. There is seldom such game afoot. Come, you know the way—be one of us."

I was visited by a hideous impulse to comply; but I clenched my fists and teeth

and fought it back. It seemed to rend me asunder. "I will not come," I said.

"Come," he repeated, and again the impulse seized me. "Who knows? I can make interest for you. You may save her."

I bent myself forward on my knees in the struggle. "No, no!"

"Your power will be great," he murmured softly. "The glory and the kingdom. Come!"

"No!"

As the word came from me, or was uttered in my heart, for my tongue seemed dead, the light of the sun was blotted out, and the heavens were taken by assault. There was an outrageous crack of thunder just overhead, simultaneous with the flash, but the rain did not yet fall. Nor was there as yet any movement in the lifeless air.

But my fetters were broken. I sprang from my chair and ran at my best speed down the long slope of the lawn, leaping down the terraces, falling once, tripped by my skirt, but up and on again. As I went I let out my voice in a long, piercing call. After that I saved my breath for the race.

I reached the arbor and looked down. Judith had embarked in her little skiff, and was then more than a hundred yards from shore, paddling strongly outward toward the catboat.

I glanced westward. The foot of the storm upon the sea seemed not more than a mile distant, a black wall stretching east and west, the waves torn into whiteness where it trod, but its advance was slow, as when the front line of an army beats time. The waters on the hither side remained calm, though the blue was gone, and in its stead was leaden gloom.

Judith plied her paddle vigorously. I knew her to be fearless, and she had confidence in the seaworthiness of her tiny craft, but nothing could withstand the furies foaming at the bit in the west. Once more I put all my force into a scream.

She must have heard me, for she ceased paddling for a moment, and turned her head. I had on a garment of white muslin, and stood conspicuous on the verge of the cliff, with a dark mass of shrubbery behind me. I saw the child nod her head and lift an arm in greeting and recognition; and then I groaned to see her resume her paddle toward the catboat. It was Drake's boat, of course, and she, knowing his unhandiness in managing it, was going out to help him. Very likely she regarded the matter as nothing more than an exciting and amusing adventure; but I had been warned, and knew what was to come.

The catboat lay not more than a mile from shore; it was a question whether Judith or the thunder-storm would reach it first.

Drake, in the stern of the boat, had not yet stirred; he slept as if only the crack of doom would awaken him. It would come soon enough. And all I could do was to stand and look on. There was no help in me.

I glanced up at the cloud on my left. It was very near now, and its vast belly boiled with devilish passion, while the snake-tongues of lightning flickered through it, slender and fatal. I had ceased to see anything but material realities at this stage. The inner world was closed for the time.

A draft of icy air slid over me, chilling the sweat on my forehead and bosom. Again I looked up; the cloud yawned from earth to zenith, a cavern of hell, its mouth like a giant archway disclosing fearful depths somberly iridescent, formless billows of vapor heaving up around it, swallowed up in it, and vomited forth in alternation. Ahead of it skipped the heralds of the hurricane, blanching the faces of the waves as they scattered, reared and sank. Now I could hear the long whining of the gale hungry as wolves.

I turned my eyes once more to the east. The mirky wall was close at hand, but I had a final glimpse of the tiny skiff, and Judith's white shoulders bending and lifting to their work. She was close aboard the catboat now. And Drake had been roused at last; he was on his feet and tearing at the halyards. But he would be too late.

In another moment the sable veil shut down between me and them, the storm leaped on me with a shriek, and thunderous detonations and stinging rain, rushing aslant, drenched me in an instant I caught at the bough of a yew-tree growing near the brink, to save myself from being carried

over the precipice. It was dark as night, and wintry cold.

What was doing out there in the deadly thick of it?

CHAPTER IX.

SARA LOCKS THE DOOR.

I WAS now obliged, however, to give my whole attention and strength to saving myself. The gale increased and drove the rain, mixed with hail, nearly horizontal, and I perceived that the summer-house would be no protection; it would probably be itself destroyed. My business was to get back to the house and telephone to the town for help.

As I faced in that direction the fierce claws of the wind caught at my light summer skirts, saturated though they were, and whipped them about my legs; the long, thick mass of my hair was blown loose at once, and lashed me across the face; the hail cut my scalp and cheeks; I could see nothing, and with difficulty kept my feet. A crash behind me told that the summer-house was gone, and, turning to catch my breath, I saw the roof whirl high in air and disappear to leeward like a black bat.

Strong though I was, I was beaten almost to a standstill. But the spirit within me rose and fought back. I edged forward, wavering from side to side, and sometimes forced to give ground, like one walking up the rapids of a river.

The icy rain seemed to pierce my body, but I felt a savage exultation. I was meeting nature in her wild mood—the rank, racy tang of the primeval; nature as the cave-women of a million years ago had felt her. She was of my kin; my soul welcomed her.

I got down on all four and crawled forward, catching at the grass-tufts and bushes. I came to the terrace, up which I had an hour or two since seen Judith bound like a chamois. Just above stood the giant oak from whose bough she had swung; the old tree was waving its great arms and fighting for its life like me. The darkness was so thick, however, that I heard rather than saw its struggle.

Suddenly a broad lightning-flash glared forth, revealing every leaf and twig, and the whole breadth of the scene beyond, while the keen smell of ozone filled my nostrils. The oak groaned and fell asunder, riven from crown to foot by the bolt. The thunder-clap, bursting simultaneously, numbed my ears. I was dazzled and stunned at once; the blackness closed in again, blacker than before.

The gale, which had paused for an instant, now leaped out again and smote me like a giant's buffet. It ripped off my skirt and tore the waist to shreds, stripping me almost naked. I lay flat on my face, clutching at the grass. The boughs of the oak had all but crushed me in their fall. But as I clung there I laughed deep down in my heart. I knew that Martha Klemm was not to perish now.

Another flash, far away, showed among the branches of the oak something that resembled a human figure. He was coatless, his shirt flying in torn pennons; he was gripping the branches with might and main, knowing that to lose control meant to be swept over the cliff. He must have seen me, too, and he was making his way toward me, making sure of each fresh hold before letting go the other.

I knew, without need of eyes, that he could be no other than Topham Brent. Who but he would have dared the hurricane for my sake? Whether he shouted, or the wind shrieked, I could not tell, but my heart greeted him as warriors greet in battle.

Slowly, by inches, we neared each other, by turns visible and invisible in the dark and the glare. Now we were within each other's reach, and I felt on my bare waist and shoulder the firm grasp of his powerful hands, warm despite the freezing blizzard. Our faces were close; his resolute eyes searched mine; half beaten into insensibility though I was, I felt delight in his masculine contact, and I had a moment's vision of one of our highly civilized little tête-à-tête dinners together, when he would have given the world to see and hold me thus. The storm both gave freedom and denied it.

He put his mouth to my ear and yelled words, which were reft away before I caught them; but what words! The tree afforded

us some protection. We would hold on there for the time. It was pleasant to be there with him. Could I have loved him, we should have known paradise in the midst of hell. We held each other fast, and I wondered at the stanchness of his chivalry.

In the midmost of the blind whirl and howl there fell a flash that did not pass away, and looking up we beheld, incredibly, the sun sending down a ray through the black pent-house roof overhead. The gap widened, its ragged edges flying apart, disclosing clear breadths of untroubled blue. The gale moaned and fell.

Topham released his hold of me, and I sat erect, panting and gathering over my bosom the soaked strands of my hair. We faced each other like persons cast up, half drowned, from a whirlpool.

The ponderous masses of the storm-cloud fled booming down the coast, leaving wreck and chaos behind. The flooding rain had dug gullies in the turf and formed pools in the hollows. The larger trees were mutilated or overthrown; the flower-beds were muddy wastes. The passage of fighting armies could not have left worse ruin. But the house, solidly built of brick and stone, in days when builders did faithful work, still stood, though the veranda was broken here and there and was swept bare of chairs and tables, and all the awnings had been ripped away. But a bird in some covert warbled forth a satisfied little bar of music. Nature has no memory, and would begin again her soft, creative work, as if nothing had happened.

After a glance at this scene, I pulled myself to my feet by the bough that had all but knocked my brains out, and looked out across the bay.

The tide was at the ebb, and the Devil's Rib was visible, a low, dark emergence out of the azure. There was something upon it that had not been there half an hour before.

I felt for my opera-glass; it was hanging down my back, and Topham handed it to me. The thing was uninjured. I adjusted the focus, steadied my arm against the bough, and took an observation.

The object on the reef was the hull of a sailboat. The mast was broken off close to the deck. Something white clung to it—the remnant of a sail, no doubt. Nothing moved anywhere except the waves that slid up and broke over the rock and the hull.

I lowered the glass. Topham took it from my hand and made a long and careful scrutiny. Meanwhile a rainbow, more deeply colored and vividly defined than any other I had ever seen, formed its arch above the Devil's Rib. I have never since then put faith in the Bow of Hope.

"She went out?" asked Topham at last, turning to me and putting the question perfunctorily.

I nodded without speaking. I love life; few, I think, love it more, but I believe that to have saved that child I would have given up whatever of it might still remain to me. There was something impious in the cutting down of so superb a flower.

"There's a steam-launch putting out from the town-wharf below," said Topham. "If the wires are working, I'll tell them to bring whatever they find here. But first I'll fetch you something to put on. Stay where you are till I come back."

I sat down in a crotch of the branches. The sun was once more warm, and the immortality of the life of earth was indomitable even in the midst of the destruction; but the child, with all her beauty, intelligence and strength, was gone forever. She would never bloom again, and the promise of her ripening was mocked. But up there in the house was cowering a poor, useless, hopeless, unhappy creature, whose departure from this stage of being would have been welcome even to herself; she was left, and the other was taken.

My broodings amid the wet leaves of the shattered oak were rebellious. After all, why had I resisted the tempter who had invited my soul to go with him? What had I gained? Judith was dead!

Topham was coming back, swinging his broad shoulders, plashing through the puddles unheeding, with a wrap of some sort on his arm, to cover my nakedness withal. Well, he would have been glad of my resistance, could he have known it. The cords which bind us to things as they are, are complicated; to sever one of them is to

disorder the whole web. Topham was a good fellow, but what good to him was I?

He came up, his eyes, as Judith would have said, looking at me, and threw the wrap over my shoulders. "Mrs. Prime will give you whatever you need, up at the house," he said.

"Is Sara all right?" I asked.

"I didn't see her. Mrs. Prime said she's locked in her room, and wouldn't come out—scared, I suppose. The wires are all down, as I expected. I told the groom to saddle the bay mare. I shall ride over to town, and have them take me over to the reef.

"The man told me that the sailboat belonged to young Frobisher, and that his mother is prostrated by shock, but I can't attend to her now. Judith was last seen—"

I made a gesture. "I know. If her body is recovered—"

"Hardly a chance of that—not till after some days, at any rate. Can I help you up to the house?"

I shook my head. "Lose no time—off you go."

He set off at once. He had on the groom's jacket and cap, which were too small for him, and his trousers were rolled up to his knees. He went up the lawn at a trot, and disappeared round the corner of the stable. Topham was a man, and a prince of men, though he wore beggar's rags.

When I got to the house I was surprised to find that it was already four o'clock. Mrs. Prime, a large, square, quiet woman, received me sympathetically, and acted as my tire-man. After knocking at Sara's door at the head of the landing up-stairs, and getting in reply only unintelligible croakings, we passed on to Judith's chamber, and there I availed myself of the housekeeper's liberality. There was room enough in her ample petticoats for two bodies such as mine, though there is flesh enough on my bones. After rigging me out as best she might, she left me, and went down to oversee the rehabilitation of the rooms, which had been somewhat dismantled by the hurricane.

Judith's chamber faced the sea; it was almost as simple and unadorned as the child herself. Furniture and walls were in ivory white. She had tacked up the photographs that she especially liked of the Greek statues that I had given her. "The Apoxyomenos" faced the foot of the bed, which was an army cot, without even a mattress or a pillow, a white sheet smoothly covering it.

Above the washstand was the Borghese "Sleeping Faun," sprawling in his magnificent shamelessness. Beside the bed stood a small table, with a few sea-shells on it, and a little woven bird-nest, with blue eggs in it. There were no books.

How, in any comprehensible scheme of things, was it possible that Judith could cease to exist—never again be seen on this earth? As I stood in contemplation I felt the live presence of the child in the room; not ghostlike, but real. If I turned quickly, should I not see her, laughingly playing at hide-and-seek? No, she was gone. Her body was swaying in the depths of the ocean, drawn by currents far away.

To save, or to warn, a good-for-nothing young college scapegrace, she had thrown her life into the abyss; the shining career that had awaited her was lost in the sneer of destiny. The world, which would never have forgotten her, would never know her. An abominable tragedy!

I spent an hour drying my hair in the sunshine, and pursuing these futile reflections. At last I went up to the little cot, turned back the sheet, and kissed the place where Judith had lain; that much I must yield to sentiment.

Then I left the chamber, and knocked again at Sara's door.

I had waited, and knocked once more before I heard Sara's feeble tones. They sounded as if she were standing close to the panel on the other side. "Who is that?"

"It's I—Martha. Unlock the door, I must speak with you."

"Oh, not now, I'm busy; I want to be alone." The words were drawled out lifelessly.

"I want to tell you about Judith. Open the door."

"Some other time. She's dead—I know. I'm sorry. I can't help it."

"You don't understand. Judith went out in her boat and was caught in the storm. Topham has gone to the reef to find out whether the body was recovered. Let me in!"

"No, no, no; I can't; not now. There's something I have to do. Oh, it's so hard. But I must do it."

"What are you maundering about, Sara?" I said angrily. "What are you trying to do at a time like this? Are you daft?"

"I tried twice, maybe the third time I can. Oh dear, oh dear!"

I was hot with irritation and perplexity. Sara had always been a fool, but never before such a fool as now; and she had always yielded to my will. I shook the door-knob violently and called to her once more, but all I got in reply was inarticulate croakings, and then the tap of her boot-heels as she retreated inward. I gave it up.

I went down-stairs, resentful, but uneasy. Had the woman been suddenly crazed by the storm and the catastrophe? I stood on the dilapidated veranda and let the air, cool and sweet, breathe upon me. I recovered my temper. "Poor creature—after all."

The rooms were a sorry spectacle. Those windows which had been closed when the storm burst had been driven in, and broken glass was scattered over the floors. A branch of a tree had been carried through the wide French casement, and had smashed the mirror over the mantelpiece in the drawing-room.

Pictures hung awry on the walls; table ornaments were piled in corners; the embroidered damask of a sofa was soaked and muddy. But outdoors all the while birds were singing in joy of heart, and the declining sun glorified everything.

The two housemaids, with awed faces, were clearing up the litter. I paced up and down the veranda, waiting for Topham's return. There were two steam-launches at the reef, and a third was putting back to the town. What did it carry?

An hour passed. "Would I have dinner?" Mrs. Prime came to inquire. I would wait till Dr. Brent returned. Another hour went by, during which nature adorned the west with an imperial sunset. In my mood it was repulsive.

Topham came in at half-past seven.

CHAPTER X.

DROWNED.

TOPHAM looked tired and depressed and said he was hungry. We sat down to table, Mrs. Prime having failed in another attempt to draw Sara from her retirement. We ate for a while almost in silence. I asked no questions, knowing he would tell me all. We drank a pint of John's excellent claret. Had I been born twenty-five hundred years ago, I would have joined heartily in the Bacchic festivals.

Topham presently began to tell me a series of facts. He had been out to the reef, and had seen and talked with Drake Frobisher. Drake had been found lying insensible in the cockpit of his boat, but had responded to treatment—there was a ragged wound on his scalp, but the skull had not been fractured—and he had then related what he knew. The boy's agony of mind was great, and he had frequently broken down and cried.

He had been asleep—he had said—till just before the storm struck his boat. In his sleep he had heard a voice—Judith's—calling him by name. As he awoke and raised himself the first gust of wind had struck the sail of the boat, causing it to lurch forward and throwing him on his back.

He got up again and now saw Judith very near in her kayak, her bare shoulders crimson with the lashing of the rain and hail. She had her paddle poised, ready to fend off when the kayak should come in contact with the catboat. He turned to let down the gaff, but the halyards were jammed. In a moment, however, the sail was ripped out by the wind and vanished in the smother, and the mast broke short off and trailed alongside, held by the rigging.

The drive to leeward was thereby abated, and the next thing he knew, Judith's skiff had struck the side of the catboat and

crumpled up, but Judith—laughing, Drake said—got an arm and a leg over the freeboard, and he got hold of her and helped drag her aboard. He noticed blood on the side of her bathing-suit, caused perhaps by a wound from a broken plank, but she was still laughing, and didn't seem to mind the injury.

The dismantled hull of the catboat was staggering forward into the thick darkness, pooped every minute or two by huge masses of water, which seemed to be lifted off their base and carried bodily aboard. She was driven, at time, broadside on, seeing which, Judith had got hold of the tiller, hoping, no doubt, either to bring her up in the wind, or, if that proved impossible, to hold her straight before the gale. She stood there a moment, her hair flying, her eyes gleaming with the light of battle, and putting her whole strength into the effort. He saw her thus, as he was scrambling aft over the tangled cordage and wreckage to aid her. Before he could reach her the end came.

A bolt fell straight down from the black cloud above, terribly white and blinding. He was dazed and jarred, but did not lose his senses. But he saw Judith suddenly stiffen and pitch backward, falling with her back across the rail of the stern. Then a huge wave, racing up from behind, whelmed over, lifting her body with it, and sweeping it off to starboard, Drake clutching at it vainly as it passed.

At the same moment, the boat struck on the reef, a jagged peak of which crashed up through her bottom and held her fast. The abrupt arrest of motion hurled Drake on his back, and that was the last he knew until he was revived an hour later by the first rescue party. He had struck the back of his head on the rim of the cockpit, and was jammed down so fast that the waves sweeping over him had failed to dislodge him. Such was the boy's tale, told with broken intervals of anguish, rage and despair.

Topham went on to say that one of the launches had picked up the broken mast and the remnant of the sail five miles to the southeast.

"But the body—?"

"No. That would sink at once, of course. We spent two hours searching for it, and parties will go out again in the morning. I fancy the currents will carry it eastward, out to sea. A body, struck by lightning, would be likely to sink deep.

"It's a hundred to one it will never be seen again. Young Frobisher says he's going to keep up the search indefinitely: he seems to have cared for the child seriously. It's a sorrowful thing."

The beautiful young body was never found; somewhere on the deep and dark Atlantic floor it lay white and still. She had met death with a laugh, and fighting hard. Not for romantic love's sake had she gone forth, but from an impulse of friendly comradeship; and so all was at an end for her in this world—this strange world! Even then, I could not make myself realize that it was the end.

Topham and I went to the drawing-room, which had been restored to some sort of order. We drew up chairs to the hearth, on which a wood fire had been kindled, for it was a cool evening. I was facing partly toward the open French windows at the other side of the room, to seaward, for I felt impelled to glance occasionally in that direction. Topham sat with his gaze on the burning logs; he had lit a cigar, but had let it go out.

We fell to talking about Sara, more to avoid speaking further of the disaster than for any other reason. Topham, in his dishevelled and grim state, had never appeared to better advantage. His deliberate urbanity was gone—the plain man was left. In the firelight, which was the only light we had, I was struck anew with the noble development of the forehead and dome of his head over the wholesome but strong animality of the lower face.

His was a great, virile nature, endowed with tenderness, stamina and intellect. He had never happened to woo me when I was in the right mood. I was in the right mood now. I was actually in love with him, but he didn't know it, and I knew it would pass.

The night seemed unusually still; there was no murmur from the sea. Topham looked at his watch. "Past ten!" he remarked. "I shall stay here all night, I

want to see Sara before I go. You'd better go to bed."

"I would rather stay here with you," I said, letting my hand move toward him in the darkness, and speaking very softly. He did not see my hand, nor understand the significance of my voice; he was not a woman!

After a pause, I said: "Do you think there's anything seriously wrong with Sara? Is she liable to have a fit?"

"No; but Sara, for all her dull and vacuity, has qualities, latent hitherto, which under certain provocations might declare themselves. Whether the stimulus most apt to arouse them would be physical or mental is not clear. But something in the way she was put together has prevented her from living the life she was capable of—you might say, that she was designed for. Certain wheels of the mechanism, meant to gear to each other, have failed to connect. Frustrated propensities may react like a suppressed ulcer, secretly distilling poison."

This caught my attention.

"Could tendencies, suppressed or unsatisfied in an ancestor, be transmitted to a descendant, and be altered into some pathological condition? I happen to know that Sara's grandfather was a homicidal maniac, and her father became all at once a religious crank."

"Did he kill anybody—her grandfather?"

"No, he was shut up, let out again apparently harmless, but dull and stupid; married, and after many years the mania broke out again, and he tried to kill somebody, but was himself beaten to death by the crowd. His son became an itinerant preacher, and Sara was his only daughter."

Topham thought over it for a time. "Did the grandfather, before his first seizure, show any mental ability?" he finally asked.

"I believe he was thought to be very brilliant in his youth."

"Well," he slowly rejoined, "a diagnosis cannot be safely formed on hearsay. All I had in mind was, that a sudden strain or shock, breaking the routine, might let loose in Sara some force—might bring the wheels back into gear—and we might have strange results; she might become a very different sort of person. Or it might kill her."

"We've discussed Sara before now, Topham," I remarked, "and I will only remind you that you said that diseases may be due to—or physically represent—evil states of the spiritual man. And I imagine that you were thinking just now, in the back of your mind, that evil impulses, repressed in Sara's ancestry, might appear in her in the form of the organic disease she suffered from before Judith's birth."

"Such a thing might be possible," he admitted, in a muttering tone. "Science has no present warrant for saying anything more. The matter is very obscure."

"Progress in knowledge is made through obscurities, I believe!"

He let that challenge pass, and said, "I may as well go up and see Sara now."

"I'll go with you," I rejoined.

The servants had gone to bed; the wing of the house in which their quarters were was separated from the part occupied by the family by a solid brick partition, with only one door in it, which was locked by Mrs. Prime when she went to bed, and she kept the key. During the last half hour I had been conscious of interior hintings which rendered me averse to being left alone. Besides, I was curious as to what Sara was doing.

I switched on the lights in the hall, and we went up-stairs together. Topham knocked authoritatively at Sara's door.

"It's I, Mrs. Roadnight—Dr. Brent. May I come in?"

There was no answer or sound from within.

He knocked again more loudly, so that the door vibrated. "Mrs. Roadnight, open the door, I must see you at once, don't compel me to break the door down!"

There was still no response. Sara was a light sleeper; had she been asleep, a noise much lighter would have awakened her.

"Is it certain she's in there?" he asked me.

"Her room opens into another, where she keeps her dresses."

"Has that room another exit?"

"No; the only way to both rooms is

through this door, which is locked on the inside."

"What about the windows? Is it much of a drop to the ground?"

"About twenty feet, I should say."

"You wait here, please; I'll be back in a minute; I'm going to take a look round outside the house." He left me.

I knocked once more, and said persuasively, "Sara, do open the door. Why should you keep out your friends? Topham will force the door, if you don't open. Do be sensible!"

The silence was like a darkness, which the electric bulbs couldn't dispel. I couldn't keep my teeth from chattering; my nerves had long been on edge.

Topham came back up the stairs.

"The windows are all shut on that side, and there are no traces on the ground," he reported. "We've delayed long enough!"

He put his shoulder to the door.

"Don't do that—it would wake the servants!" I whispered, putting a hand on his arm. "Perhaps I can open it."

I took from my hair one of Mrs. Prime's hairpins, a stout instrument, and bent it into a certain shape, and inserted it into the keyhole. In former times I had opened other doors in the same way. After a few moments fumbling, I caught the wards, and the bolt slid back. Topham turned the handle and we looked in.

The room was unlighted. I found the button and turned on the lights. Nobody was there, and the bed had not been slept in. At the farther end of the room, the door leading into the clothes-room was ajar. I pointed to it, but didn't trust my voice to speak.

Topham went striding across the floor, flung the door wide, and called out, "Are you there, Mrs. Roadnight?" His voice came back to him unanswered.

"There seems to be nothing here but hundreds of gowns!" he muttered.

But I knew what had happened. I understood the significance of the words in our conversation through the closed door that afternoon, and the suggestions she had previously let fall at the lunch-table. "It's so hard!" Yes, others had found it hard to do what she had now done! I recalled a childhood saying which I had sometimes repeated to Sara in our school days, when she was inert and discouraged: "If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again!" She had followed my advice at last!

I became outwardly more composed than Topham himself. "Come!" I said to him.

I led him down the aisle between the pendent garments. The faint perfume which they exhaled brought to my mind Judith's disgust. Half way down the aisle, I stopped, and pointed to one of the dresses hanging midway in the row on the right. There was in its appearance something different from the others.

It contained Sara's body, straight and meagre, with a noose round her throat made of a pair of purple silk stockings knotted together. Her head was crooked a little forward. The hook supported her firmly; she had stood on a mahogany work-box inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and had afterward pushed it away with her foot; her knees were a little drawn up. There she hung, an effigy of success!

The prompt and practical physician lost not an instant. He held up the body in the crook of his left arm, while with his right hand he loosened the slip-knot.

"She isn't quite cold yet—we'll see what can be done!" I heard him murmur to himself. I said:

"Wouldn't it be kinder to let the poor thing alone?"

But the profession doesn't take that view. There may have been in his mind no more doubt than there was in mine that Sara was dead; she couldn't have been hanging less than half an hour; nevertheless, everything possible for resuscitation must be tried. A doctor is bound not to believe what death says until he is forced to it.

So Topham carried his burden back into the bedchamber and laid it on the bed. In the operations that followed I gave him expert assistance. I had my diploma as a nurse. The body, which was much emaciated, passively resisted our efforts. We labored over it for nearly two hours.

When the clock in the hall below struck twelve, Topham turned away and resumed the groom's jacket. "That's all!" he said.

"Isn't it almost unbelievable that this

poor remnant and Judith belonged to the same order of things!" I said. "And Judith was her daughter!"

He drew a sheet over the corpse.

"Come away!" said he, heavily.

CHAPTER XI.

WHO CRIED OUT?

TOPHAM closed the door as he went out, locked it, and put the key in his pocket. We returned to our chairs beside the hearth in the drawing-room; Topham made up the fire, and I brought the decanter of port wine from the sideboard, and set it on a little table between us. The day had been a hard one for us both, and we were very weary, but not disposed as yet to sleep. The jangling of the nerves must first subside.

I could not get out of my mind the thought of the emaciated body lying stark on the bed up-stairs, the head bent a little to one side, the lips drawn slightly back from those white, even teeth, which had been Sara's only good feature. She had not been given the smiles in life, but she could smile now. I had seen many dead bodies, but never before one that looked so dead as Sara's did.

In order to be rid of this vision, I began to bend my thoughts strongly on Judith. There would be nothing repulsive, I thought, in the aspect of the beautiful sheathe that her spirit had worn.

"How deep is the sea off the coast here?" I asked Topham.

"Not more than two hundred feet, I think. Fifteen or twenty miles out, though, there is a hollow in the bottom, they say, which would go a hundred feet or more deeper, and ten miles in diameter."

"It would be dark at that depth, even at midday, wouldn't it?"

He took a sip of port. "Yes, quite dark. I wouldn't think of that sort of thing, Martha. The poor child's soul isn't there."

"You don't know that! A person's soul may not entirely leave the body for several hours—days, even!"

"What is your authority for that statement?"

"Oh, first-hand authority!" I couldn't help laughing a little.

At the unnatural sound of it, he reached across and set his firm fingers on the pulse of my wrist. His touch was entirely professional. But in the course of our labors up-stairs that drawing toward him that I had felt had passed off.

"You're overwrought, Martha," he said after a few moments. "The beat is very uneven and has a peculiar quality. You are not far from a crisis of some sort. Hold yourself down as hard as you can—try to empty your mind of all thoughts. You have a powerful will—now is the time to use it!"

"All right!" said I, between my teeth. I folded my arms and leaned back in my chair. I wanted to laugh again at the shallowness of the scientific insight, but I suppressed it.

We didn't speak again for a long time; he took out a notebook and made entries in it; he was thinking of the inquest, probably. John, too, must be notified to-morrow.

I closed my eyes, which were paining me a little, but I could still perceive through the lids the alternate breaking-out and subsidence of the flames on the logs. But soon I was out at sea—far out—and peering down through the depths of the waters.

The full moon was above, and its rays penetrated to a great depth; I descended part way with them; there was no movement of the waters here. Below me, in the dimness, lay extended a white object, slender and motionless, lying on its back as if in sleep.

By and by, perhaps in consequence of the stirring of some deep-sea current, the posture of the white object was changed slightly. The arms moved vaguely, as a sleeper moves them in dreams. I watched closely.

With a light, gradual impulse, the body lifted itself to a sitting attitude. The hair, reddish gold, as I perceived in spite of the moonlit gloom, floated out around the head like a nimbus. Now she drew her feet under her, and rose without effort till she

stood erect. The arms extended themselves at each side, and took on an undulating movement, graceful and flexible as the fins of a hovering fish. The knees, first one, then the other, lifted slowly, with an easy, climbing motion, and the body rose slowly upward through the sea. The face was in shadow, but the eyes seemed to be closed.

I had no measure of time, but the upward journey seemed long; the depth may have been greater than Topham thought. The child moved with the leisurely unconsciousness of a sleep-walker, but the ascent was uninterrupted. "After death, the resurrection!"

Topham's voice spoke—he may have noticed my closed eyes— "Have you a headache?"

His words, though distinct, seemed to come from a remoteless of many miles.

"I'm all right, thanks!" Little did he suspect the effort my reply required. But I am accustomed to handling myself in these conditions.

She was now very near the surface, which was calm. I waited eagerly to see her head emerge. At last it appeared, glistening in the light of the moon. The face turned this way and that, as if to know its course; we were out of sight of land.

Presently she began to move forward on a line between north and west, which would bring her to our bay and boat-landing. The movement was swift, and constantly accelerated.

Topham got up and replaced with the tongs a log that had fallen forward. My inner sight was interrupted for a time; when I found Judith again, she was entering our bay, having passed the Devil's Rib.

The tide was making, and she was swimming with long, vigorous strokes that sent her forward fast. Her face was now clearly visible; it was without expression, the eyes shut, the lips that had been so red, white and still. She reached the boat-landing, and climbed out of the water; how beautiful in the mysterious light!

"There's some aspirin in my case, if you need it," said Topham.

"I'm doing very well!"

She had climbed the stair to the top of the cliff and had stepped out on the lawn. She paid no heed to the destruction wrought by the storm. She ascended the slope with her customary elastic gait, which had in it so much dignity. She stepped up on the veranda, and entered the room through the French window.

I had now returned to my place beside the fire; I was to follow her no further.

She passed by my chair so close that I could have touched her by reaching out my hand. The sea-water dripped from her body, and a strand of delicate green seaweed clung to her thigh. Topham lifted his head and looked straight at her, but he saw nothing.

"Do you feel the draft of air?" he asked. "Hadn't I better close the windows?"

I managed to make a negative movement of my head, but I couldn't speak; what was Judith going to do?

She was going up-stairs. She stopped at Sara's door. After a few moments, I spoke out sharply.

"Topham, she's in Sara's room!"

"What?"

"Judith; she went in!"

He faced round and looked at me. I was panting heavily, and my forehead was wet with sweat. "She went in!" I repeated.

"You've been having a nap—and a dream, apparently. Steady! You'll come round in a minute." He spoke soothingly.

"Don't be a fool!" I said angrily. "She came in by that window, and went close by me, and up-stairs. She is in Sara's room!"

He looked at me, smiling. "You'll be yourself directly." He put his hand in his pocket, and pulled out the key of the door. "You saw me lock it."

"Oh, I know!"

I threw myself back in my chair, trembling.

From up-stairs came the muffled sound of a human cry. Topham heard it, and jumped to his feet. I had a thrill of triumph over the skeptic; but my fear overpowered it. Was it Sara who cried out? The cry was repeated, louder; and I dragged myself to my feet.

Topham, big man though he is, reasoned

along the line of least resistance. But his forehead wrinkled anxiously.

"Those servant-girls are playing a practical joke, or they're somnambulists!"

"You know that no one can get upstairs without passing through here. I saw Judith five minutes ago—she was dripping wet!"

"Don't mix up Judith with this thing! It sounded like Sara—but the woman is dead. You know that as well as I do."

As he spoke, the cry came once more, and was accompanied by a noise as of some one pounding against a door; then came a heavy fall.

"A practical joke!" said I, mockingly. "They're carrying it far! Raising from the dead is a very practical joke! What are you going to do?"

He gave me an appalled look, stiffened himself, and stalked toward the stairway, I at his heels; my nerve was gone. The upper hall, when we reached it, was empty; Sara's door was closed, as we had left it. After listening at it for a moment, Topham laid his hand on the knob. The door was locked.

He pulled out the key, and after several attempts, like those of a drunken man coming home from a spree, he drove it into the keyhole and turned the bolt. Then, biting his lips, he opened the door with a forcible shove; but there was some obstruction. He pushed his head and shoulder through the aperture, but the room was dark, and he could see nothing.

"Where's that damned switch-button?" he muttered, feeling for it.

I found it; our fingers, coming in contact, were cold. He took a breath before looking in again. I peeped under his arm, with fearfulness in my heart.

Sara's body, with the sheet twisted round it, lay on its back on the floor athwart the threshold. There was no one else in the room.

Topham now stepped in, and I still followed; but at first I shut my eyes and pressed my fists against my temples, to rally myself. When I looked again, he had carried the body to the bed, and was bending over it. I came up, tiptoeing.

"It was a cataleptic fit, after all," he said gruffly. "It's strange; we tried everything; I'd have staked my professional word that she was dead. I don't see how I could have been misled! Well, that's all—there's nothing to be scared about; she'll come-to soon."

"Did she have her cataleptic fit before hanging herself, or after?" I asked.

"We have to take things as we find them, Martha. Catalepsy produced rigidity, and that might prevent strangulation. But I can't explain it; it's improbable that she should hang herself at the moment before the fit. But anything may happen once!"

"You don't think Judith could have had anything to do with it?"

"Why do you persist in that insane notion?"

"I only take things as I find them. The hallucination and coincidence hypotheses may be overdone. I told you of Judith before Sara cried out. But what are you going to do? Kill her or let her live?"

He turned from me with a perplexed frown, and tried Sara's wrist for the pulse; then he stooped down and laid his ear against her breast.

"There seems to be plenty of life here!" he murmured.

"I knew, long ago, that death by hanging doesn't kill," I said.

Sara's left eyelid fluttered and opened; then the right.

"Who am I?" she asked.

CHAPTER XII.

JOHN COMES IN.

BY ten o'clock that morning, Topham and I, who had not slept, were jaded and dull; but Sara was looking extraordinarily bright and well, and her speech and bearing were full of animation. The things she said, however, were incoherent and obscure; and I could see my own opinion taking form in Topham's mind that the woman intellect had been jarred off its balance.

She would recover her bodily health, perhaps—she might even become stronger than she had been hitherto—but she would be-

come a subject for an alienist. The sudden crash and terror of the storm, followed by the tragic death of the child, had strained her nerves too far, and her reason had collapsed.

But her condition concerned me less than did the occurence which had preceded her resuscitation. I said nothing more to Topham about this; I knew what his attitude was, and was in no mood for a conflict of views with him. It was nothing more than a dream—that was his position, which had too much plausibility for me to undertake to controvert it.

I had not mentioned to him my previous experience during the storm, and it would have been futile to try to make him recognize a connection between the two. What are called subjective impressions don't admit of argument; from the outside point of view they are as unquestionably hallucinations as, from the other, they are more veritable than fact itself.

What had ensued upon the entrance of the child's spirit into her mother's death-chamber? The first outcry had followed almost immediately. The dead had lived again; but was the new life identical with the old? How had the renewal been effected?

Judith had never betrayed any affection for Sara, or interest in her; on what grounds could I assume that a visitation so strange intended to recall the existence of a person so unsympathetic with the agent of the recall? Yet what, if not that, had happened?

My weary brain refused to attack the problem. It was a relief to chat with Mrs. Prime and the servants, and hear their artless comments. None of them, of course, had any suspicion of Sara's suicide. The misses had had a bad spell in the night, that was all. No wonder, with everything going topsy-turvy at once! But the doctor had brought her out of it fine! She was chipper and smart as you please! And poor Miss Judith, she was drowned! What 'll the master do when he gets home and hears it? He was that fond of the child!

Topham and I shared their misgivings, and he commanded that none of the domestics should give the old man any intimation of his daughter's death—he himself would shoulder the burden of that disclosure. With every mitigation, the shock might prove dangerous.

The profoundest passion of John's nature—the only profound one, perhaps—was his love for the child. He had a friendly feeling for Sara, but he could have borne her loss very well. Judith was his whole world, and the sky above it; how could he exist without her?

After the broken wires had been restored, we learned from New York that John had left for Boston the evening before, and he would therefore be due here to-day. While we were debating how the facts could most prudently be communicated to him, a hack drove up to the door and in trudged John, beaming with good nature. "Well, well! here's a sight for sore eyes! Both you young folks here together! Well, that's as it should be! Yes, they told me of the storm—dear, dear! made a mess of things, eh? We'll get the decorators up here and let 'em fix it up. Where's my little girl?"

"She went out in her boat," said I; "Sara has been ill, but she's much better; she'll want to see you."

Sara, at her own insistent request, had been packed up in a chair on the veranda; she had expressed a singular desire to be placed where she could see the ocean, though I had never before known her to care for it; but sick persons have fancies. John went out with her, I following; for though Sara had never once alluded to Judith, evidently not realizing the truth, yet she might let fall some ill-aimed remark which I could somehow deflect.

The scene which now took place was puzzling.

John wore a pair of spectacles made especially for him with strong lenses.

He was an old man, and in some respects older than his years, a creature of daily routine, dwelling amid a monotonous round of events, sights and interests. Sara was a part of this monotony, as much a matter of course as were his armchair and slippers.

But Judith was the unique and shining pole-star, contemplation whereof was his joy

and reward, and with reference to which he pursued his labors and built his hopes. When he was absent from her, she filled his thoughts; when she was present he lived in her.

Adjusting his spectacles, I say, he approached his wife's chair. She turned her head, gave him an indifferent glance, and turned away again. This was quite contrary to her custom; she had always borne herself toward her husband with a humble deference more suggestive of the employee than of the wedded partner. I ascribed the change to her disordered wits.

John stopped short, with an air of mystification. After gazing at her for a few moments he pulled off his spectacles and looked again. He smiled more and more broadly, and finally broke into a chuckle, his shoulders shaking, and he lifted his finger and shook it at her archly, as if he had detected a rare bit of roguery on her part.

"Ah, ah, ah!" he crowed out. "Where can my little girl be, I wonder! Papa is looking for her everywhere, and can't find her! They said she was out in her boat, but I believe she's hiding somewhere! Maybe she's wrapped herself up in some of mama's things, and playing she's got a headache or something, so he won't know her!

"But papa has two pairs of eyes, one to look after his business, and the other just for his little girl! And when he takes off his business eyes"—he shook his spectacles at her playfully—"then he can see right through the funny wrappings and the make-believe faces, and— Well, there, who'd think it! there she is, right before him all the time! And now she's going to pay papa for finding her with a nice little kiss!"

With that he stooped down, took the wizen face between his hands, and kissed it fondly. Such kisses as I had seen him bestow upon his wife had been very perfunctory affairs; but there was no doubt of the tenderness of this embrace.

I didn't know what to think. Was it possible that, with or without his spectacles, he could mistake Sara for Judith? Or was he attempting some absurd bit of tomfoolery?

Be that as it might, Sara seemed to take the cue from him. She pushed him away impatiently. "Don't! — there! — let me alone, I don't like kissing!" she exclaimed; and then, catching sight of me at the open window, "Make him go away, Auntie! Tell him I've been sick, and don't want to be bothered!"

What was the meaning of this ridiculous behavior? I was astonished, too, at the histrionic ability which Sara displayed in playing the part of her daughter; the gesture, the manner, even the intonations of the voice, were all Judith's. A crazy woman, to be sure, may imagine herself to be anybody and act accordingly; but John, presumably, was sane; how was his extravaganza to be accounted for? It must be the spectacles! But this, of course, was only the instinctive effort of the mind to seize upon any subterfuge to escape from the inexplicable.

"What is it?" spoke Topham's voice, behind me.

"This place is becoming a madhouse, and if I don't get out of it, I shall have to stay as an inmate!" I told him what I had seen. Meanwhile, John, contented and happy, had stepped out on the lawn, and was talking with one of the gardeners about remedying the devastation caused by the gale and deluge.

I said: "I've heard of delusions being contagious. It was queer enough that a woman like Sara should confuse her own identity with one whose death had unseated her reason; but that a sober-sided, matter-of-fact old man like John should give himself to such fantastic tricks, passes my understanding!"

It was not until after a long interval that Topham made his answer; when it came, it seemed to me the wisest thing he had ever said, and after these many years, I still incline to that opinion.

"Nature ties all sorts of Gordian knots," he said, "and our Alexanders cut them, but they prove nothing but their own impatience. Let them alone for a while, and they'll untie themselves."

"I'm going home, to sleep twenty-four hours," said I.

"I was going to advise that, and I took

the liberty of wiring your maid to bring a change of clothes for you here; and she has just arrived, and my man with her—I'd sent the same message to him."

"You'll go with me, then?"

"Nothing more can be done here at present. If the delusion of these two people is mutual, it may continue indefinitely—and nothing could be better! I sha'n't try to disenchant either of them."

"Auntie!" called out Sara, from her chair, "don't go away and leave me with these people! I have such a lot to tell you about me and Drake in the storm!"

"What people do you refer to, Mrs. Roadnight?" asked Topham, coming forward.

"You're very stupid to think I'm mother just because they've put some of her old things on me! I don't mind father so much, but mother bothers me!"

"Is your mother here?"

"She's round here somewhere; I wish you'd take her away with you!"

"She has gone, now. You had better go up-stairs and take a nap."

"All right; but you must carry me up. I got hurt out there on the reef—my paddle broke off and the sharp end stuck in my side."

She pulled open her kimono (an impossible act for Sara!) and displayed her side. There was no wound upon it. She seemed perplexed.

"Why, it's all healed up! But how thin and horrible I look! I'm like some nasty old woman—like mother, almost!"

"You must make haste and get well, and then you'll look the same as ever. Sleep is the best thing; come along!"

He lifted her—the last time he had done so, she had been a corpse—and carried her up-stairs. I threw open the door of Sara's room, but she protested.

"I won't be put in mother's room!" she declared; "why don't you take me to my own?"

"To be sure!" said Topham, smiling grimly. He laid her on the little army-cot, and she, after a glance at the Greek gods and goddesses on the walls, and at the shells and the bird-nest on the table, curled herself up and was asleep in a few moments.

"What will be the end of it all?" I ejaculated, as we returned down-stairs.

"I don't know. You'd better take a month up in the Maine woods, and forget it. I'll let you know if anything happens."

"Yes, the Maine woods!" exclaimed I, picturing to myself with longing the primeval forest, the shaggy mountains, the broad, clear lakes. "But first, I'm going to hear Paderewski," I added. "He plays to-morrow evening, and he promised me he'd give the 'Moonlight Sonata.' You must come."

"Thanks!" said Topham.

But I didn't go to the Maine woods; and more than two years were to pass before Topham and I heard Paderewski play the "Moonlight Sonata."

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.

IN A GARDEN

BY BLISS CARMAN

THOUGHT is a garden wide and old
For airy creatures to explore,
Where grow the great, fantastic flowers
With truth for honey at the core.

There, like a wild, marauding bee
Made desperate by hungry fears,
From gorgeous *If* to dark *Perhaps*
I blunder down the dusk of years.

The Roof of the World

by Frank Blighton

Author of "The Pagan," "Mr. North of Nowhere," "Black Crosses," etc.

CHAPTER I.

BUMBLEBEES.

"JUST suppose," began Archie O'Neill to Vivian Lane, dreamily, as if he were thinking out loud. He stopped and looked away.

"Yes," encouraged Vivian, with a very fetching perk of her blond head half sidewise, like a robin looking at a luscious worm. "Please go on. Suppose what?"

Archie's face took on a ruddier glow than it had a moment before when flushed with enthusiasm. What he might have intended saying seemed to be shut off. Instead, he remarked: "I didn't know there were bumblebees out here. Can you hear one?"

Vivian's eyes danced. She was always quite self-possessed, but never without a latent mischief—so Archie thought. Also she was not only blond, but slender, obviously well-bred, and, generally speaking, to Archie's way of thinking the sort of a girl one would like to be near—always.

In her presence, however, Archie was always diffident. Among men he was as poised as the girl herself, notwithstanding he was patently an alien among Gulchville types, and for like reason a chap from the Atlantic seaboard. In Arizona, on first arrival, Archie resembled an orchid lost in a cactus forest. Amid the polyglot throng of this rejuvenated gold camp his frank, boyish face, untroubled eyes and semi-languid air set him apart, at first—no less than the cuffs on his gray flannel trousers.

But after he had "buckled in" and taken the first job that offered, washing dishes in a Chinese restaurant, and after he had won the two-hundred-yard sprint in the Fourth of July celebration, it was generally remarked that "mebbe the boy has something down in his cellar that he hain't spread out on the shelves—yit."

Which shortly proved to be not such a bad guess, all things considered. Archie's modest mien was not a pose and hence it was deceptive. The proof came boiling up one day some months afterward, when he had left off dish-washing to become timekeeper at the Wanderer Mine. The former incumbent "shuffled over the Big Divide" during a brief epidemic of "black pneumonia."

Archie went after the job hot-foot and got it. It paid much better than dish-washing. He liked the work, for it was not especially onerous, but required close attention, since the Wanderer was now in pay ore, working full time on three shifts, employing about five hundred men underground and the usual complement in office, hoist-houses, engine, and air-compressor rooms.

Although his work was eminently satisfactory, Archie stayed on that job only a little more than two months. Then fate, according to Three-Finger Flynn, "framed him up and promoted him," in such spectacular style that but for the sensible strain in him the boy's head might have expanded in like proportion to the unusual event

which again opened to him a fresh opportunity.

Gulchville, geologically a mere gash in the hills, boasted a bank. It was not housed in a very imposing edifice, but it was no less a brisk and busy institution. With Three-Finger Flynn, who was a guard employed by the mine, Archie went down one morning for the semi-weekly pay-roll for the Wanderer men. He had just " sacked " currency and bills in a neat leather bag and stepped away from the paying-teller's window, when a short, stocky man, garbed in jumper and overalls, with his head in a flour-sack and each hand holding a gleaming pistol, stepped in and amiably directed all present to " hold up your hands! "

Archie's quick compliance made him elevate the small leather grip.

Avery Williams, paying-teller; Giles Jones, the cashier, and even old John Hopwood, the president of the bank, assumed like positions, since all were included in the invitation. A confederate of the stocky chap shuffled in, with another weapon, and proceeded to take what money was in sight which Avery Williams had not counted out to Archie O'Neill.

The ceremony was brief, but thorough. Then the confederate backed out of the bank. Archie still stood with his hands erect, but the arm holding the leather grip sagged involuntarily.

The chap who had backed out of the door with the booty was a tall, angular fellow and plainly nervous—notwithstanding two more of his ilk were also acting as " lookout men " on horses near the bank's steps, and one of them had previously " stuck up " Three-Finger Flynn and despoiled him of his badge of guardianship of the Wanderer pay-roll—a six-gun that had done yeoman service in past frontier days.

The two-gun man inside the bank cocked one malignant eye at Archie O'Neill through the gash in the flour-sack. Archie was thinking of the old days of the " Kluklux Klan," when night-riders wore similar headgear; and, being rather imaginative, as well, despite the peril of his position, personally, was also ruminating on what the respectable miller of flour who had sent out that particular sack with three red " X's " flaring a trade-mark of quality would have said had he seen the base use to which his vaunted trade-mark was applied.

There was a whistle outside the bank. The stocky man moved nearer the door, stepping as if walking on eggs and as if his safety depended on not cracking a shell.

One hand strayed back of him to reach the knob. The other was pointed at the three stupefied officials whom the hold-up man had grouped together back of the counter.

As his left hand shifted his pistol into his pocket so that it might be free to manipulate the knob without his turning around, Archie O'Neill displayed a sudden energy that is characteristic of only a fool or a hero.

A man who is unarmed and who " tackles " another man with two deadly weapons is a fool—unless he " gets away with it "—and then he is a hero.

Archie started to behave like the first and emerged with the plaudits of the whole camp. He hurled his small but heavy satchel over his shoulder, knocked the six-gun out of the short chap's other hand, caught it up from the floor by the barrel before the fellow could draw the other one, and smashed him on the jaw so hard with the butt that the hold-up man fell clear through the now swinging entrance to the bank and sprawled on the steps outside like any other cheap, swaggering villain who has met more than his match.

Then, while the three other men in the Gulchville bank made one simultaneous dive to try and wedge under the big safe in the rear, Archie " cut loose " with the six-gun at the three men outside on horses, and they, with a promptitude that left nothing to be desired, returned his fire.

They had the advantage—in numbers and cartridges.

Only because of that fact did the stocky chap get away. Archie ran behind the paying-teller's counter, feverishly scooped up all the guns in sight, ran out again, and peppered away, futilely, at the departing bandits.

When it was all over and the sheriff was

swearing in the posse to pursue them into the hills, John Hopwood said to the young timekeeper:

"What in Tophet did you do that for?"

"Why," said Archie, with an ingenuous stare from his glinting gray eyes, "I wasn't going to let him get away with the pay-roll, too. I've got to send my mother some money, this afternoon. If I hadn't slung the sack at him, he might have taken it away from me!"

John Hopwood didn't swear. He just stared at the brown-haired boy. "You took an awful chance," said he. "We might all have been killed."

"I'm sorry if I put you in danger—"

Hopwood snorted. "You didn't. We were in danger from the minute they made up their minds to put over this job. But, you poor fish, if you weren't the luckiest lad west of the Mississippi this morning—well, the coroner would be collecting fees from your carcass—right now!"

"You pay him, anyway," grinned Archie. "Business is bad with the coroner. I don't see how he gets enough for campaign expenses. The wild and woolly West is generally tamer than Twenty-Third Street. I was held up there once and they got my week's wages when I was clerking in a shoe-store. Once is enough for me. Mother and I had a tough pull—that week. The rent was due and I had to make four trips to court to keep us from being put out."

Avery Williams resigned his job a week from then. John Hopwood hired Archie O'Neill in his place. Archie took to banking with the same enthusiasm that he had embraced dish-washing. People pointed him out on the street as "a hero." Archie was bored if not offended. He merely remarked that "no one will try to hold up the bank again, I'm sure."

The prophecy was justified. The four chaps who had put over the former "job" were trailed in the hills, for months. Once they were so hard pressed they abandoned their horses, which Three-Finger Flynn brought in. But, curiously enough, none of them were ever captured.

Yet the chase was not abandoned. Every pass leading into the Swisshelm Range, where they had taken refuge, was "covered" night and day. A large part of the wilderness was set apart under the Forest Reserve Act. Uncle Sam's guardians, while watching for fires in the big growth of forest from which the Wanderer and other mines were permitted to buy timber for their tunnels, also kept an eye out.

It was futile.

Archie saw the sheriff's posse, after a week of "combing" the trails, return jaded and empty-handed. Three-Finger Flynn, fuming like a carboy of nitric acid, was the hardest hit of any one. Never in his hectic career had he been "waylaid" before, he confided in Archie, while also chiding him for his "foolhardiness."

"I ain't saying you done wrong," said Flynn, "but you took chances—awful chances."

"Didn't you ever take any?" asked Archie.

"Well, sometimes—when I had to. But there was an awful percentage ag'in' you. Four gunmen ag'in' one is purty high. Besides, what do you know about gun-fightin'?"

"That," said Archie, "was where I was lame. But, old-timer, I'm going to tell you something funny. *I didn't know I threw that sack until I saw it hit his gun!*"

CHAPTER II.

OUT OF THE SKY.

FLYNN looked properly mystified.

"Say that agin!" he adjured.

Archie complied. Flynn shook the stumps of his two missing digits at the world in general and at nothing in particular. "I don't understand it—at all," he plaintively observed.

"Nor do I," said Archie, "only—and this sounds awful silly—when I used to help my mother wipe the dishes, if I dropped one, I always caught it before it hit the floor. Now, that's something I never could explain, either. You go down to Fong Gow's and he'll tell you I never broke a dish while I was working for him.

"Something protected me—I don't know what. Just like it was another man standing by me that grabbed that sack and

threw it—only, of course, you understand it was my arm that threw it, but my brain didn't tell me to throw it—like your brain would have told you to shoot if they hadn't waylaid you from behind, outside."

"I won't tell any one," said Flynn, "because, now that you done what you done—and lived through it—you're entitled to all the credit. Folks wouldn't understand that remark of yours. My advice is not to tell nobody what you told me and I sure won't. Godfrey's bones! I seen some busy minits in my time—but nothin' busier than you shooting the spots off'n the sun and them four loafers knocking the bank-fixtures an' furniture to pieces with their slugs. You know, I was like a man in a trance—and you—you looked—well, I can't tell you what you looked like. You didn't look scairt, though. But, you orter been."

The mutual confidence took place the night before Archie O'Neill took his new job as paying-teller in the bank—on probation. John Hopwood emphasized the probation part of it. Archie modestly said: "I'll do my very best, sir, and I hope I make good."

His best was better than the president had believed possible. He was painstaking, thorough, a glutton for work. He was courteous, brief, businesslike. In three months the bank was running as smoothly as ever—barring the loss of fifteen odd thousand dollars which the bandits, led by the man in the 3-X flour-sack mask, had carried away.

Then it was that Vivian Lane came to town. She was Hopwood's niece and rumor had it she was an orphan. Archie met her in the bank. In time, of course, she heard of his spectacular exploit. And, in time, since Gulchville society was democratic, Archie met her at a church "sociable."

He couldn't deny to himself that he liked her very much. And Vivian was a frank sort—invariably pleasant—but equally, as said, invariably self-possessed. Archie O'Neill didn't know just exactly how he stood in her estimation. He rather grew to dislike the fact that she must always regard him as a harum-scarum young hot-head who had stood off four men who shot to kill—and, by sheer luck, "got away with it," in camp vernacular.

He wished he had met her without this handicap, for they had some things in common. Vivian liked books. So did Archie. They discussed them and here, at least, the slight barrier which made him diffident grew thinner.

And so, this being Saturday, and a bank half-holiday, Archie had seized on a volume of "literature" and ensconced himself on the front porch of McNally's Hotel, where John Hopwood lived with his niece.

Vivian came strolling out, looking very piquant in a Swiss mull frock, and after perching herself in the hammock, looked down on Archie with her usual semi-quizzical gaze.

They chatted of this and that. Gulchville, they both agreed, was "rather slow." But, Vivian said, it was "picturesque and a relief after the effete East." She said it mischievously—at least Archie thought he discerned a smile lurking in her enigmatic eyes.

"Yes, it's picturesque," agreed Archie, "but the picture don't change a great deal. For one thing, it don't rain up here. We have a little snow in the winter months, but all the rain seems to fall on the north slope of the Catalinas. Don't you find it rather tiresome, at times?"

"I haven't been here very long, you know."

"Well, neither have I—not quite a year, yet. But, sometimes, I wish I could—oh, get around and see the world—the old palaces, you know, and the enchanted islands and all that."

"You're romantic!" sibilated the girl. "But," she continued, in a tentative tone, "you seem to be thought rather well of around here. And Uncle John said the other day that you were a good chap to have around the bank."

Archie flushed. "Three-Finger Flynn knows that I'm just a lucky hot-head," said he. "After the lecture he gave me, do you know, I'm sort of sure if that particular bank episode came up again I would stand as meek as Mary's little lamb. I didn't even think, when I started mixing it with that bunch the morning I was after the pay-roll—that is, I only thought if they got the mine's money I wouldn't be able to send

mother her draft that day. And I hated to disappoint her!"

Vivian Lane smiled. Then: "You were lucky. Lucky that your mother didn't get a message of a different kind."

"Yes," said Archie, "I was very fortunate. But, it was all sheer impulse—"

He stopped in a shamefaced fashion, remembering Three-Finger Flynn's admonition that "folks wouldn't understand."

Sensing his embarrassment the girl deflected the conversation to ask what he had been reading. He held up the book.

"'The Tempest,'" she read. "Well, what do you think of the Bard of Avon in that play?"

Archie's diffidence dropped away. "Old-fashioned, impossible, but somehow interesting."

"Interesting?" she echoed.

"Well, up at the Wanderer Mine the chemist is a sort of a 'Prospero.' The ore was hopelessly refractory—as mining men say—until he devised a process to get out the values. Claude Dubois is his name. A very clever chap. He found a way to set a lot of little chemical imps to work to get out those minerals—and look at the bread and butter other people get because he succeeded! Have you met him?"

"I have heard Uncle John speak of him."

Her reply was level, but Archie O'Neill's glowing face and frank, engaging enthusiasm as he mentioned the other's name, held a spontaneity that seemed to put them more on a par than hitherto. The young fellow had no idea whatever why her incredibly blue eyes seemed to smolder just then, for, as usual, his diffidence caught and held him by the throat and he looked away at the hills.

He could never quite overcome his feeling of—well, it seemed to be his extreme youth and lack of polish—in her presence, although he was her senior by at least two years, and he was only turning twenty-two. Her implied ascendency over him was not merely due to her sex or her attractiveness; nor yet the fact that she was quite the most eligible girl in this out-of-the-way corner of the world; at least, not wholly that. There was something else beside her provocative personality and even her obvious breeding—these might have been the frame to a picture, Archie thought—a picture painted by pigments as elusive as the elfs in Shakespeare's whimsical play he had been reading, and yet as actually potent to enthrall him as Ariel to play pranks with the shipwrecked and mystified mariners.

Then it was that, somewhat dreamily, he remarked: "Just suppose—" and, again abashed, permitted his sentence to remain unfinished. It was downright foolish to think out loud! So, Archie O'Neill, as said, deftly shunted what he had been on the verge of remarking, into the observation: "I didn't know there were bumblebees out here. Can you hear one?"

She bent her head and observed: "I hear something. What is it?"

Archie tucked his book beneath his arm and stood erect on the steps. "It's back of the hotel, somewhere," he replied. "Let's see if we can locate it!"

McNally's hotel, like other architecture of Gulchville, was built against one of the innumerable slants of the mountain range, into which ran tunnels and shafts too numerous to mention. In the old days when the Apaches skirted these same foot-hills, men had delved in the earth for treasure, toiled, swaggered, drank, gambled, died or moved away, when the cruder mining methods of a former generation no longer sufficed. The Gulch, proper, was given up to the trail. But there was one spot rather level—a half-mile or so below—where a thrifty resident was utilizing the water pumped from a mine for raising alfalfa, on which he herded cows, chickens, and the like, in a tiny ranch hardly bigger than a pocket-handkerchief as Western ranches go and barely ten acres in extent.

One glimpse above the ragged summit of the mountains, etched in a sort of sepia against the flawless yellow of the sky, and the "bumblebee" was revealed.

It was an airplane. The pilot came tumbling out of the sky like an insane buzzard, diving with incredible rapidity over the crest of the hill back of McNally's Hotel, down toward the patch of green which promised a landing.

In a trice he was slithering across the field of virgin alfalfa, which gave three or

four cuttings a year, bouncing a little jerkily as the machine lost headway.

Then, at O'Neill's elbow a man spoke.

"He came shooting out of the sky like Beelzebub fell from heaven!" remarked Claude Dubois.

"Oh, hello!" said Archie. "That's odd—I was just speaking of you a minute or so ago to Miss Lane." The girl turned at sound of her name. "May I present Mr. Dubois, chemist up at the Wanderer Mine?" asked Archie.

"How do you do?" said the girl. "Mr. O'Neill was just speaking of your work, and then he thought he heard a bumblebee."

CHAPTER III.

PROSPERO'S PREDICTION.

DUBOIS bowed and smiled. He was a smooth-faced man of fifty or thereabouts, but did not look his age, except for the gray in his hair. "Well, I was watching the plane up at my office—picked him up in my glass some ten minutes ago as he rounded Mushroom Mountain. The fellow really flies like a demon. Let's go down and look him over."

Their decision was almost practically unanimous on the part of other Gulchville folk. No one above ground seemed unwilling to look over the aviator at close range. They boiled out of the stores, shacks, saloons, and even the movie-theater was deserted. An airplane in Gulchville was not altogether a novelty, for army machines had patroled the border one or two years before. But, compared to this meteorlike affair, they were "like squash-bugs traveling along with a devil's darning-needle," as Three-Finger Flynn remarked. He, too, was one of the throng which streamed down to where the machine had landed.

When Archie, Dubois, and Miss Lane reached the spot the pilot was under the machine, repairing some defect; and much too absorbed in his work to take detailed notice of the constantly augmenting throng.

The cuffs of his jacket were turned back, his sinewy wrists were exposed and he was straining with both hands at the handle of a large wrench.

Archie O'Neill stooped down, as did also Dubois, to see what the chap was doing. The younger man straightened up suddenly with an enigmatic look in his eyes, but his face was as casual as that of any other of the curious ones who had gathered there.

Presently, the pilot crawled from beneath the machine, doffed his helmet, and wiped his streaming face with his sleeve, for the air was warm down in this little pocket between the hills.

Vivian Lane gave an exclamation when she saw his face.

"Why—of all things! Savage Frye! When did you leave New York?"

The surprised pilot dropped the wrench. A flicker of amazement swept his bland but masterful face which had been appraising the crowd and then he smiled and put out his hand. Archie O'Neill, who had already half turned aside, moved toward the edge of the crowd with Flynn. His face, as he encountered Flynn's corrosive eyes, wore an odd expression, like one just awakening from sleep, until Flynn remarked, *sotto voce:* "What you thinkin' of?"

Then Archie grinned, but in rather sickly fashion.

"Well, old-timer," he gulped, "I was thinking, for one thing, how good it is to see another hero in the Gulch."

"You're a damn liar—half-way!" growled the frontiersman in a matter-of-fact undertone. "You was also thinkin' of how glad Miss Lane was to see him, wasn't you?"

"You ought to join a carnival and read palms," jeered the youth. "They say there's money in it. I worked on a ballyhoo once for Sol's Big Shows, with a supposed swami, but he wasn't near as good-looking as you."

They walked slowly back up toward McNally's Hotel, for it was near the midday meal-hour. Behind them Pilot Frye, after divesting himself of his heavy leather-and-fur outer garment, explained to Miss Lane his meteoric plunge for the alfalfa-field.

"I was flying along nicely when a terrible thumping started under the engine. The first rule in the air, when you think something has gone wrong with your plane, is to get down. I obeyed the rule, rather pre-

cipitately. On landing I found one of the lock-nuts that bolt the engine in place had dropped off. The churning of the pistons, if not remedied, might have led to disaster."

"Disaster?" echoed Miss Lane.

"Yes. With the engine loose at this point, the vibration might have thrown the main crank-shaft out of line, or pounded the plane apart beneath the engine, allowing it to drop out of line with the propeller-shaft. In any event, the engine would have stopped, and I should have been forced to land back in the hills—regardless of the risks. I was a little squeamish for a few seconds, until I spied that bit of green and made for it, for the old girl was beginning to rattle like the last verse of Oliver Wendell Holmes's 'One Hoss Shay.' Fortunately, I had a spare lock-nut or two in my kit and the damage is already repaired."

Vivian Lane nodded, although the intricacies of the machine were beyond her ken. Then: "You haven't answered my question yet," she observed.

"Oh, I came out here about sixty days ago," smiled Frye. His face in profile was more amiable than when viewed from the front. He had a nose like an eagle's beak, a pair of close-set black eyes under projecting brows, very even, white teeth, but his cheek-bones were too high and the lower part of his countenance too narrow for true symmetry. "I'm scouting on the other side of the range, watching for fires in the forest," he explained. "Yes—working. You never suspected I'd really work, did you?" he bantered as they started to go back up the hill.

"Is it as fascinating as polo?" smiled the girl. "By the way, pardon me, please. I want you to meet Mr. Claude Dubois, chemist at the Wanderer Mine. And you really must stop with us and have a cup of tea. Uncle John will be glad to see you."

"Thanks," said Frye, after acknowledging the introduction. "Mr. Hopwood, I understand, is one of the syndicate which has bought the forestry I'm policing from my airplane. In case of a fire, you know, it is much easier to direct a force to the place before it gets out of control." He looked at the Gulch, whimsically. "Where is the casino?" he asked.

Vivian looked around for Archie O'Neill. He was far ahead with Three-Finger Flynn, and the two were trudging along as if the young bank-clerk had forgotten her existence. Whatever the girl thought she said nothing, although she plainly discerned her quondam escort as he stepped into McNally's Hotel with the book still tucked under his arm.

Savage Frye did not leave that afternoon. John Hopwood was very much interested in the airplane and the use to which it was being put. He gave a little dinner to Mr. Frye that night, at which the mayor of Gulchville, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, and other local celebrities, including Claude Dubois, attended.

It was a very enjoyable occasion. Frye enlivened it by tales of adventures in flying that had befallen him and several more thrilling still that had happened to fellow pilots.

"By George!" said Hopwood. "O'Neill would enjoy that last story. Where is he? I haven't seen him all evening."

"Really," said Vivian demurely, "I do not know. He was down to see Mr. Frye after landing, but he went back to the hotel."

"Who is O'Neill?" queried Mr. Frye, after a short pause.

"A chap in our bank," said Mr. Hopwood. "Lot of nerve, although only a boy—but the same sort you've been telling us about." He launched into a terse, swift tale of the hold-up and Archie's disregard of personal danger.

"He must be an unusual youngster," said Frye. "Who is he?"

"Oh, just one of the boys around the camp," said Hopwood. "Was a dish-washer in a Chinese restaurant before he became timekeeper at the Wanderer. I'll have you meet him to-morrow."

The conversation drifted back to flying—its hazards and the development of the science. Frye was quite at home on the topic. He proved to them that the hazard was much less than laymen believed by showing the percentage of accidents as compared with the number of miles flown and declared it far less than statistics of accidents in the development of the automobile.

"Why is that?" asked Dubois.

"Well, several reasons. First, the high technique of plane construction. We used to think an airplane had to be light. This made for frail machines. Now, we build to rigid engineering inspections and put on adequate power. My plane delivers between four hundred and five hundred horsepower at the propeller-shaft. Then, there is the skill of the pilot. No one can get a license to fly a plane unless he passes rigid tests, which, of course, prove or disprove his ability to control a machine."

"You make me want to take a ride," said Vivian.

"I'll take you up to-morrow," said Frye eagerly.

John Hopwood, however, demurred. After a discussion, Frye offered to take up Hopwood to prove the safety of the machine. Then, when Hopwood admitted that he was a little timid, he offered to take Dubois with Hopwood, the following day. After Dubois accepted, the bank president, as he himself phrased it, "found himself in a jack-pot" and had to "draw cards" by agreeing to go along.

Three-Finger Flynn, not being among the guests at the dinner, roamed around restlessly during its progress. Even the seductions of stud-poker at Swisshelm Sam's emporium of luck held no fascination on this particular Saturday night, although Flynn indulged in the pastime regularly and played it as some masters play chess.

The news spread around McNally's when the dinner broke up that Hopwood and Dubois were "going up" with Frye the next day. Flynn heard it and grew even more restless. Then he stalked solemnly up to the sleeping-floor and knocked at the room which Archie O'Neill occupied.

"Come in," called the occupant. He was sitting in a big flannel robe with purple spots, his feet in slippers, and with a book. "Hello," said Archie. "What's on your mind, old-timer? Sit down and have a smoke."

Flynn closed the door, accepted the proffered cigar, lighted it, and then asked: "Why wasn't you at the dinner? Big doin's down-stairs with the bird-man."

"I've been reading," said Archie.

Flynn looked his incredulity, silently. But as the younger man laid down his book without further comment, Flynn asked: "What you been readin'?"

"Oh, a book called 'The Tempest.' Not about sand-storms," he went on blithely, "but a mighty interesting play by a man called Shakespeare."

"Seems to me I've heard of him," said Three-Finger, tentatively. "There was a fellow by that name that used to travel with Billy the Kid, in the old days. A lot of people was after him, but he died of Changres fever before they could hang him."

"This Shakespeare never saw the cow-country," countered Archie with the alert air of one crossing rapiers with an antagonist on the field of honor. "And the wind-up of the book is something wonderful!"

"Eh? How does it end?"

"Well, the hero is a magician. After pulling a lot of stunts and squaring accounts with a lot of highbinders all around, and seeing his daughter happy with the man she is about to marry, this chap whose name is Prospero, turns loose all the spirits who have helped him, breaks his staff, and pitches his book of magic secrets into the water so no one else shall find it," went on the youth glibly.

"H-m!" growled Three-Finger.

"Yes," sighed Archie, reaching for a fresh cigar, "and then he predicts: 'The great globe, itself, yea, all which it inherits, shall dissolve.'"

He stopped and looked his visitor full in the eye. Three-Finger Flynn shuffled his feet uneasily.

"Seems to me," he remarked after a long pause and after clearing his throat with quite unnecessary vehemence, "that the Chamber of Commerce of Gulchville orter to be posted if that prediction is anyways near true about things dissolvin'. But you said the girl was about to be married and was happy, too? It don't make sense, does it?"

"Some things don't," said Archie.

"Well," said Three-Finger, "I s'pose you'll be on hand to-morrow. John Hopwood is courtin' a cancellation of his life-insurance. Him and Dubois is going to

take a fly with this here aviator, so they say down-stairs. Goin' out early in the mornin'. He rose and walked to the door. "Good night, son, said he.

"See you to-morrow, old-timer," said Archie O'Neill calmly, although the knuckles of his fingers whitened as he gripped the arm of the chair in which he still sat.

"Oh, the hull Gulch 'll be there," observed Three-Finger, as he closed the door.

CHAPTER IV.

"UP AMONG THE RAFTERS."

ALL the Gulch was there. And many were the envious ones who watched the two passengers bundle up and take their seats in the fuselage, after Frye had lightened the machine of various supplies, tools, and the like, to compensate for the weight of the two men.

The plane shot out from the alfalfa-field to the great discomfiture of several yearling calves, who went bouncing sidewise with their absurd tails held at an alarmed loop.

It rose evenly and steadily and whisked down through the notch in the hills like an arrow from a bow, flying with superlative ease and almost the same amazing speed which had characterized the descent of the day before. It launched itself, at last, a tiny speck against the flawless amber of the morning sky over the border-line of two republics, perhaps forty miles below. Within the hour it again slanted back into the improvised landing-field.

John Hopwood and Dubois emerged from the fuselage. Vivian Lane and Archie O'Neill were standing together. "Hello!" said the bank president. "Say, Archie, I want you to meet Mr. Frye. Mr. Frye, this is the boy I told you about last night."

"How do you do?" bowed Archie. He seemed embarrassed by the public implication referring to his past performances and fingered his book nervously. Vivian favored him with an enigmatic smile which seemed to enhance the bank clerk's uneasiness. At any rate, he did not shake hands with the aviator, who nodded patronizingly, and made a conventional acknowledgement of Hapwood's introduction.

Archie looked at the airplane in an abstracted fashion. Beyond it was Three-Finger Flynn, also studying it with a semifrown as if these innovations on the frontier were quite unwelcome, since they quite eclipsed the "old-timers" and their past achievements.

"Did you enjoy the ride, Uncle John?" asked Vivian.

"Did I?" echoed her relative. "Well, I never enjoyed anything as much—unless it was my first pair of long pants. It was a revelation. How did you like it, Dubois?"

"I'm afraid I'm incurably infected with the flying germ," said the chemist, "and I envy Mr. Frye the ownership of so powerful and dependable a machine. I wish I had one."

"Well," said Vivian, "if that is so, you men don't want to keep all the pleasure to yourselves, do you? How about my taking a spin—and Archie, here, too? I'm sure Mr. Frye would oblige."

Mr. Frye expressed himself as delighted. He bowed his pleasure, and John Hopwood could not resist the pleading face his niece turned toward him.

It was all settled so suddenly that Archie had barely time to toss his book to Three-Finger Flynn, ere he was getting into three sweaters which Dubois loaned him and also exchanging his hat for a cap with the vizor turned backward. Vivian looked "like a Teddy-bear," as her uncle declared, ere she, too, climbed into the fuselage just behind Archie O'Neill, both of them sitting in front of Frye.

A corps of Gulchville volunteers steadied the plane while the aviator whirled the gigantic propeller and took his place, and while the engine rose to speed and the propeller disappeared, all but the hub.

They rose from the field amid the loud defiances of a turkey gobbler who was among the habitual residents of the pocket-handkerchief ranch, darted aloft, pirouetted above the Gulch, and slid off into mazy spaces above the Swisshelm Range, leaving Three-Finger Flynn looking at the last pages of "The Tempest" when he was not cocking a malignant eye at this device which defied all limitations of time or space.

"Dissolved!" growled the mine-guard as he trudged back up the Gulch. "And into thin air. Gawd knows the air is thin enough around here. But that ex-dishwasher never did have no sense—never. The percentage looks to me—although I may be wrong—to be ag'in' him. And he sets into that contraption as cool as he looked when them four gun-men was a-thickenin' Gulchville air with their slugs that mornin'."

Claude Dubois, following the flight of the plane with a pair of binoculars, remarked: "He's heading for Mushroom Mountain, I guess. Too bad Frye wasn't around here some months ago," said he to John Hopwood, as they started back up the Gulch. "Those bank bandits that got away in the hills would have little chance against an aviator. He could have spotted them from above and signaled to any one of a dozen posses!"

"By jove, that's right!" said the bank president. "And Frye looks to me like the kind of a man that wouldn't be above mixing it with gun-men, if he had to, either. Vivian says he was a famous polo-player back East."

Immersed in the incredible, Archie O'Neill looked down on the panorama slithering behind and below him with real awe. The roar of the engine was like sweet music to his ears. It was unceasing, testifying to the continuous impulses on which their safety depended. The air, too, although thin and even brittle with their speed, was like a draft of old wine. Strange thoughts came into his mind. Prospero's enchantments seemed startlingly real and the exploits of Ariel, although written down centuries before this superlative mechanical achievement, were rather tame, on the whole.

The range below them opened into an enormous cuplike arena, evidently of volcanic formation, fashioned a thousand centuries before "The Tempest" was penned. In the midst of it was Mushroom Mountain, so-called because of its shape. It was a geological monstrosity. The stem rose straight and sheer for many hundreds of feet—how many Archie could not guess—and the top of it, like the fungus from which it was named, was like a crushed cream-puff, hanging over the precipitous upright which held it in place, making ascent of it absolutely impossible from below no matter what methods of scaling it might be invoked.

Odd tales of it by old-timers in the Gulch were current; dim, misty and mystical traditions handed down from Indians or their predecessors in this old, old land. For the land was very old and many civilizations had lived on it ere the coming of the Anglo-Saxon. Remains of a great irrigation system might yet be discerned in the valleys, and some of the peaks were honeycombed with caves or the ruins of structures built on dizzy heights.

It was weird to look down on these decayed remains of vanished races, which had streamed into the dead centuries as the air which held them poised above it all, streamed past this cunningly fabricated device, spinning them along so speedily as to shame the tale of the magic carpet in the Arabian legend. And no jinn could have been surer of himself than the saturnine man in helmet and goggles whose germ of brain-power and nerves of steel directed the play of the forces constantly unleashed from the tank of gas and the whirling magneto which woke such stupendous energy to its work.

They skirled away to the north, rising still higher, dodged to the east and then slowly circled, at a height so great the earth below looked like a huge, inverted bowl, with mountains sticking up like teeth on an old-fashioned music-box cylinder. They circled slowly, it seemed, in a great arc and finally were pointing back toward the general direction of Gulchville, although Archie knew that by now, because of the distance and the intervening mountains, they must be completely out of sight of that locality.

The plane floated lazily downward, although with undiminished speed. It was to the imaginative youth in the forefront of the fuselage a moment of grandeur almost unearthly. He felt like an infant cherubim, with a vision inward as well as outward, in which forms of people or of mountains, colors and substances, took on their actual shapes and displayed their true qualities—

free from the distortions, false pomps and sleekly emotional lies which the motives of men had fastened upon them.

His thoughts, stimulated by his position and the constant quaffing of the pure air forced into his lungs, broke into myriads of elastic, expanding branches—too gorgeous, too elusive for language, even had he been able to speak to the girl sitting behind him.

So Archie O'Neill, for the first time, turned to look at her.

Her eyes were more brilliant than her smile. The light in them seemed to break out into unconscious flashes—trenchant yet with a certain resilient delicateness, as if heretofore stifled by life of the earth-bound, but now unfolding with a jubilant and overwhelming curiosity as to how all of this adventure would end.

Then the plane seemed to shiver slightly as if smitten with a sudden tremor and the rhythmic purr of the roaring engine was interspersed with an asthmatic gasp and a series of gurgles.

For the first time Archie O'Neill felt a qualm. But, as if endowed with an instinct which divined the slightest impairment of this well-fabricated structure, the pilot inclined it more sharply, and Archie strained against the safety-belt under his armpits as they shot down toward the ground. He felt like a man strapped in a falling hammock, and the subterfuges of the past suddenly became alarmingly real, splitting apart the fantastic thoughts in which he had been immersed, with a sickening sensation of horrid reality.

Luck was with them.

Although the earth seemed to be leaping up to meet them, they landed rather smoothly, on the whole, and Archie had a curious feeling that the relatively smooth surface over which they glided until the breeze sweeping this summit had checked the machine's progress, was a meeting-place for the long-dead Past and the ever-vital Present.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Frye. "I call that good fortune—plus!"

His words came dimly to both his passengers, unaccustomed to the reverberating of the engine, now silent. They clambered out, however, as he did, and Frye solicitously handed Miss Lane to the ground.

"Why," said Vivian, looking around, "I guess we're on the roof of the world, aren't we?"

Frye laughed. "Hardly that. But, we're certainly up among the rafters." His voice was reassuring and his gesture savored of a recovered infallibility. "I heard the old girl missing," he continued, "and I started for a soft spot. Never landed here before nor have I ever even flown over it. Bad wind currents off those peaks. They swirl around this summit like water in the Devil's Hole in the Niagara Gorge."

"Is—is anything wrong?" asked Vivian, while Archie O'Neill straightened knees and stood blinking in the strong sunlight.

Frye smiled with a superior sort of self-complacency.

"She began to miss—spark-plugs must have carbonized a bit," said he. "I'll put in new ones or clean these directly, and then try her out again. O'Neill, would you mind bringing a few stones to block the wheels?"

"Not in the least," said Archie, darting away. There were no stones close by. In fact, his previous impressions about Past and Present were augmented as he gazed on the place where the plane had landed. It was an indurated surface and certainly composed of a layer of something artificial—rather like concrete and yet different. So he kept on toward a pile of débris on one side. A black spot ahead of him challenged attention. He bent over it and then stooped and picked it up, with a thrill of premonitory interest to the sudden shock he experienced when he touched it.

CHAPTER V.

THE BRAND OF THE MILLER.

THE great globe didn't exactly dissolve at that instant, as predicted by Prospero, but something that passed current for courage in the lad seemed to ooze out of him as he pocketed a large nut, a duplicate of that which Frye had replaced on his airplane when landing in the alfalfa field. He knew he could not

be mistaken, for he had noted that point of contact with the large wrench when peering beneath the airplane as Frye strained the duplicate into place. And it could not have dropped from the plane a second time, for it was at least fifty feet to one side of where they had just come down.

Also, Archie O'Neill had seen something else when peering at Frye beneath the machine, and from Three-Finger Flynn's manner he was almost certain that the old-timer had also noted it. But neither of them had mentioned it—for reasons.

Archie did not look back toward Frye and Vivian Lane. Had he done so he might have noted the suddenly repressed but ill-omened glance that Frye sent at his back as he straightened up. The pilot did not again look his way. Instead, he dived into his kit of tools and began taking out the spark-plugs from the twelve-cylindered motor rather ostentatiously, and wiping them free from their sooty accumulations, sitting, meanwhile, astride the peak of the fuselage where the engine was built in. While he worked he chatted casually with Vivian Lane.

He was still so engaged when Archie laboriously lugged back several assorted stones and carefully blocked the disk-wheels of the plane with their enormously thick pneumatic tires.

"Where in the world are we?" Vivian said, with a smile of mock dismay, and tilting her head, robin-fashion, to look up at their mentor.

"Why, on the summit of Mushroom Mountain," blandly returned Frye, as he twisted out another plug. "And if you're looking for something to tell your friends when you go back home, you might add that we're the first human beings for some centuries to put foot on it until this morning."

"Why," said Vivian, "I thought no one had ever been up here before. How could they get up here?"

Frye raised his wrench and pointed toward another section of the summit. "As to your question, I'll refer it to the gentlemen who ponder on how the pyramids were built in ancient Egypt," he lightly returned. "But if that isn't an ancient house over there, then we've been joy-riding in a wheelbarrow all morning."

Vivian looked in the direction he pointed.

"It surely looks like a house," said she. "I wonder if I might go over and look at it? Rents," she mischievously smiled, "are so high in the East that any apartment is worth investigating."

Frye grinned at her retort. "Go ahead," said he, "but don't wander too near the brink of the summit. From the looks of it, as we flew by a while back, it tilts rather sharply and if one skidded off—"

He finished by an expressive shrug.

"I'll be very careful," said Vivian, as she looked up at him. "But really, there isn't as much danger as there was when the engine failed, is there?"

"There was less danger then than there seemed," said Frye equably. "In this business we can't take things for granted. There are two parachutes in the plane. It only takes a minute to buckle the harness around your waist under your armpits. Then, if the plane is falling, the passengers step out. If the parachute opens all right—they're qualified for a thrilling story for a dinner-party, such as I told last night—remember?"

He was looking at her and twisting at the wrench as he delivered the badinage. "The pilot, you know," he went on as she nodded, "goes into neutral with the joy-stick and lets the plane come down wherever it will at the natural gliding angle— Hey! Look out below!"

The wrench slipped from the plug he was screwing back into place and fell as he shouted. Archie O'Neill, who happened to have his head about five feet beneath where Frye was sitting, dodged back and caught the descending tool in a nonchalant—almost dreamy—fashion.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" exclaimed Frye, staring down at him from his perch. "How did you do that?"

"I don't know," said Archie. "Only, if you'll go to Fong Gow's restaurant when we get back to Gulchville, and ask him, he'll tell you when I washed dishes for him that I never broke one—although I sometimes let one slip."

He handed back the wrench and moved

slightly to one side of the machine. It seemed more incredible than the sensations he had experienced from aloft so recently, to think that Frye might have allowed that tool to fall by design. The floods of sunshine bathing the summit of this most grotesque of mountains seemed to give such an idea the lie. For it was not night—the hour most favorable to men's evil purposes of hate, despair or greed. Had it been night, Archie O'Neill might have been more willing to believe that it was not accident.

He was on the point of walking over to join Vivian Lane, now just entering a rectangular opening in the ruin to the machine's right. Then, as a sudden gust of wind whipped across the plateau, something wraithlike and white came trailing across the smooth surface of this superancient pavement on which the airplane rested; moving almost majestically, although with a certain nefarious certainty, as if to aver by its appearance that, while races might come and go and aliens populate a land, and customs vary and invention give the face of the material world a new and a magic flush, the immutable laws which decree the discovery of a crime still persist in their process of revealing the hollowness of concealment—no matter how cleverly conceived or adroitly carried out.

More weird by far than the rich fantasy of Archie O'Neill's stimulated ideas when hovering in the upper sky near the roof of the world was the next thing that occurred.

The thing propelled by the wind lodged against his leg.

Looking down he descried a flour-sack, with holes like the eyeless sockets of a skull and across the face of it in the crimson pigment of crime as yet unpunished the "3-X" testifying to the brand of the miller.

Aviator Frye at sight of it dropped to the ground, narrowing his eyes. Archie O'Neill looked down at the thing in an impersonal fashion and then raised his somber eyes to those of the man whose willingness and whose skill depended on getting both himself and Vivian Lane back to Gulchville.

He saw Frye's fingers tighten around the handle of the wrench again, tentatively.

"Please, don't," said Archie. "Because, you know, I wasn't aware that thing was up here. And, while I might think a lot of things, I couldn't prove them, could I?"

Frye hesitated. Archie stood with his hands in his pockets. Then the aviator laid down the wrench and said, in a voice grown perceptibly hoarser than when he had last spoken: "Over this way. I want to talk with you."

He walked ahead in an opposite direction to that which Vivian Lane had taken and paused under a bit of green, polished rock, with a concavity that again suggested confirmation that an ancient race had once lived on the summit of Mushroom Mountain and had fashioned this thing for some reason with infinite pains.

Archie followed, meekly enough, outwardly. But his concealed hand gripped the butt of a short automatic pistol in his coat pocket. He had a reason for putting that pistol in his pocket—a reason based on the unspoken thought which had flitted between himself and Three-Finger Flynn the night before.

Frye dropped down on a boulder, and coolly appraised him.

Around them hot, sharp colors with dominant green filtered. Archie, although considerably concerned, was more anxious for Vivian than himself. He had a vague idea of shooting Frye if the worst came to the worst. But that wouldn't get them back to Gulchville.

The very brilliance of the colors around him tended to a slight reassurance; for he again remembered it was not the hour of ill-omened chill and stagnation when the criminal usually plies his trade. Had it been night, Archie would not have been there, probably; but had it been night, he would have felt more depressed at the sardonic glance Frye gave him before he spoke.

"Have I ever seen you before?" he began.

"Before when?" parried Archie.

"Yesterday?"

"I've been out here about a year. If you

have only been here as long as you said, yesterday, it would not be likely, would it?"

"What did you do before coming out to Gulchville?"

"I don't know that it is any of your concern," said Archie. "Again, I don't know as there is any particular harm in answering. I worked at various occupations."

"Would you mind telling me what? I have a good reason for asking."

"Well, I clerked in a shoe store back in New York, and I drove a milk-wagon, once; and I went out with Sol's Big Shows on the ballyhoo for a palmist. And then I drifted to Albuquerque and tried working in the railway yards there, but gave it up and went to Gulchville. Why?"

"I guess," said Frye slowly, "I had a mistaken impression. I thought you once played polo against me, in Orange, New Jersey."

Archie smiled. "I'm a good dish-washer," said he, "and I've been time-keeper in a mine, and now I'm in a bank. As the politicians say, 'Whither are we drifting?'"

Frye did not seem inclined to reply. He said: "You picked up something, when you first went over for the rocks to block the wheels. What was it?"

Archie O'Neill suddenly felt sterile. His youth fell from him and he knew he was no match for this bland but indurated villain who was toying with him.

"A nut," said he, extracting it from his pocket and holding it out.

Frye nodded. "You think rather well of Miss Lane?" he observed softly.

"Suppose," said Archie, "we leave the lady out of our talk. What do you propose?"

"You're a man after my own heart," malevolently returned the other.

"Thanks," said Archie dryly. "I'll take that, as the old Romans used to say, with a grain of salt—only I'll make the grain a barrel. You have the edge, as Three-Finger Flynn might put it, at present. But we went away with you, and we're going back with you—I take it."

"There are conditions."

"Name them."

"You will forget about that flour-sack, and you will give me the nut."

Archie handed it over without a demur. Miss Lane was "in pawn," so to speak, and shooting Frye would not, most emphatically, get them back to Gulchville.

"I have your word?" asked Frye, balancing the lost nut in the palm of his hand.

"On the honor of a former dish-washer who reads Shakespeare," said Archie lightly. "What I know and what I surmise, I'll keep to myself—for her sake."

Frye bowed. "And the honor of a former polo-player," he satirically observed. "You didn't fool me, Archibald O'Neill Parker. I knew you, yesterday. But, if you choose to masquerade among Chinamen and hard-rock miners, it's none of my business."

CHAPTER VI.

"TOO UTTERLY REAL."

"NO," said Archie, "it isn't. And, if you please, I'd like you to keep my family name off your lips. I have reasons for not using it, but I don't like to see it profaned!"

"Granted," said Frye suavely. "Our mutual secrets are safe in our mutual bosoms, eh?"

"Yours is time-locked for—eternity," said Archie with equal blandness. "And now, shall be be getting back?"

"Not a bad idea. Yes. We will go back—on those conditions. Otherwise—well, you and Miss Lane remain and take up a tenancy in the apartment she is now inspecting. We won't bother about the terms of the lease, for the period will be—eternity—unless I have your positive assurance—"

"See here!" exploded Archie. "I'm not in the habit of having my honor questioned, and I'll thank you not to do so, even by implication."

"I merely wished to state the alternatives," smoothly replied Frye. "Mushroom Mountain, as is well known, is unscalable from below. No matter if your friends in Gulchville knew where you were, they couldn't possibly rescue you short of a week. There is no airplane like mine west

of the Mississippi River. I am stating the facts. There is not," he waved his hand airily, "anything to keep either of you from leaving. There is one projecting rock which rather overhangs the valley sufficiently to give an unobstructed drop. My altimeter shows it's only about four thousand feet to the next *terra firma*.

"But, as a matter of scientific fact, I may say that nature would give you her own soporific long before you would land. You would go to sleep in mid air for lack of air—if you tried that jump, and you'd never feel a thing when you crashed. Now that we understand each other, I'll state that I accept your promise of silence at its face value. I'll try out the plane to make sure of its dependability, then come back for you and Miss Lane. That ends the matter, I believe?"

Archie looked him straight in the eye.

"All but one thing, which you seem to have forgotten."

"Forgotten?"

"You have forgotten God! His ways are not our ways. That's all."

Frye laughed, uproariously.

"Why, you poor, superstitious simpleton! So that's back of your eccentric leaving home and former friends, is it?" He did not pause for a disavowal but went on, derisively. "I have forgotten—nothing. You prate of a deity. Why, the great god Carbon, the great god Nitrogen, and the great god Hydrogen are the trinity on which you came here—plus my small ability. And on those gods you depend to arrive home again, don't you?"

Archie did not reply directly. "I think I see Miss Lane's hat over in that prehistoric doorway. Shall we be getting back?"

He walked slowly across the space to the machine and they met the girl where it was standing.

"I don't think much of that particular apartment," said Vivian, with a playful moue.

"Is the furnace wrong?" blandly queried Frye.

"I think it's haunted," giggled Vivian, nervously, "for I'm sure I heard voices. Well, are we ready to start home?"

"As soon as I test out the machine," purred Frye, with an important, but reserved air. He looked aloft. "Not that I think it's not thoroughly all right, even now. But, in aviation, we cannot take chances. So—" He looked aloft, his gaze concentrating on a bit of cloud, as gauzy as a bridal veil, that floated absolutely alone in the zenith.

"—I'll take it up a little nearer the roof of the world to make sure," added Frye, "and then ripple down here again, and we'll taxi back to Gulchville. That bit of cloud—I'll hop over it and then volplane right back to you. Watch me!"

Archie O'Neill meekly obeyed instructions in aiding Frye to make the "take off," and so did Vivian. Vagabond and villain though he was, now that life had not benignly strangled both him and this girl in the full spray of a gorgeous sun on the summit of this otherwise inaccessible mountain, the bank clerk could not repress a transient admiration for the precautions Frye insisted upon, as he made ready to fly.

Well out of reach of the flying propeller, behind it, and beneath the outspread wings, Archie and Miss Lane poked or pulled the stones away from the wheels when Frye's hand signalled down to them from the fuselage above.

The machine quivered, the tail rose as the pilot gave the engine more gas, and then it shot straight ahead and off the mountain a half mile beyond, trumpeting like a herd of enraged elephants.

True to his promise, Frye rose a bit, circled and then in languid but graceful spirals, climbed aloft toward what he had termed "the roof of the world," where the bit of fleecy cloud now divided into two parts, one rather lower than the other.

Presently the roaring died to a drone, then to a hum, as on the day previous, on the steps of McNally's Hotel, when Archie had disguised his diffidence from the girl now at his side.

He looked at her and she slowly turned and looked at him.

Her lips were white. Her chin quivered ever so slightly, and her voice had the faintest of tremors as she asked: "Do

you think Frye will come back for us, Archie?"

The youth looked at her, uncomprehendingly.

Then: "Why, surely. Why not?"

She made a vague gesture toward the ruin from which she had so recently emerged.

"It wasn't exactly haunted," said Vivian, "for it was too—oh, too utterly real. Do you know that back in there I heard every word he said to you and you to him?"

Archie O'Neill Parker stared. For certain reasons he had been excluded from others of Miss Lane's type—bred to the refinements of what she had jestingly referred to only yesterday as "the effete East." However, despite all the back-slapping intercourse with the men of more primitive environment, on this, the last frontier of civilization, hardened by their struggles with reluctant and sometimes sterile nature, Archie had not wholly lost his sense of the fitness of things.

Having pledged his word to the blasphemous Frye, he must keep it at all costs. Life, which the day before by this girl's side, had savored of the quality of incense from an ancient and perfumed urn, now seemed strangely bleak and dreary. He could not even explain that he had agreed to silence for her sake.

Nor, he thought grimly, did his pledge include Three-Finger Flynn, whom Archie was certain had seen the livid scar on Frye's wrist, when the latter was straining at replacing the lost lock-nut on the engine-bed in the alfalfa field the day before.

That scar was a semaphore of evil to the youngster and he shrewdly divined that Three-Finger Flynn, as well, recalled seeing it clearly, the morning of the bank hold-up, when Archie with his smash on Frye's jaw, had knocked the villain through the door and down the steps.

Archie had seen it clearly. And he had never forgotten it, although he had never mentioned it to a living soul. He had, however, studied the wrists of every man in camp, at various times, looking for that solitary, incriminating scar.

Never until yesterday had he glimpsed it. Then, shocked by the familiarity bred of previous acquaintance, Archie forbore to speak of the matter, especially before Vivian.

Just what to do he did not know. Three-Finger Flynn's manner of looking at him, no less than the dissembling which the mine guard indulged in subsequently, complicated his problem.

He knew, when Three-Finger came to his room the night before that the other was waiting for some sign from Archie O'Neill which would touch off the explosion regarding Frye's real identity. Archie knew that Flynn knew that Frye had deliberately lied when he replied to Vivian's query that he had come out to that section of the country barely sixty days before.

From Frye's manner, also, Archie had a vague but no less assured idea that Flynn was "holding out" something on him regarding the bandits; for the old frontiersman's umbrage at being "waylaid from behind" had impelled him to make several excursions with posses and "on his own" in search of the bandits.

Circumstances, therefore, rather than deliberate intention, conspired to coerce Archie O'Neill into silence; especially his unexpected invitation—due to Vivian's impulse—to ask that he accompany her on this never-to-be-forgotten jaunt up toward "the roof of the world," to which Savage Frye was now so close that it fairly stupefied him to note the great height to which he had climbed.

"I had to make terms with him," said Archie lamely, as he tried to avoid Vivian's eyes. "How else could I be sure of your getting back? But how you heard what he said to me and what I said to him is beyond me."

He looked over in perplexity afresh at the gleaming bit of concaved rock.

"I have an idea," said Vivian, with an air more like her usual self.

"About getting down?" asked Archie, with solemn facetiousness.

"No. About the voices. It's like the 'Whispering Gallery.' I've read of it in Europe—was it in Venice?"

"I've never been there," said Archie, with a certain naive simplicity. After all, this whole affair, with its unfathomable circumstances and as yet unresolved ending,

was quite beyond one of his experience. He would feel better when he could look at Vivian Lane again on the steps of McNally's Hotel—a little less near to the "roof of the world." Being "up among the rafters" had a certain spice of novelty, at first, but since the eery whisking of that flour-sack across the plateau, coming hard on discovery of the evidence that Frye had certainly been there ere this landing, owing to the presence of his lost lock-nut, giving the lie unreservedly to his glib statements to Vivian on landing, made Archie's qualms gain headway, as he looked again aloft to watch Frye make good his quasi-boast, with the three gods whom he had declared obeyed his behests.

CHAPTER VII.

"INTO THIN AIR."

THE cloud was now not quite directly overhead.

And Frye was very close—at least they both judged so. Also, very, very high. Just why he should have so obstinately delayed their departure to indulge this whim under pretext of "testing the machine," Archie had no idea, unless it was to exhibit his prowess for whatever effect it would have on Vivian Lane.

That must be it, he decided. A sort of perverted pride, comporting well with the blasphemous references to the Deity whom Frye had sneered at in the lee of the concaved green rock.

And, as they looked, something happened.

Frye suddenly disappeared in the misty and mystical bit of solitary bifurcated cloudlet, which alone flecked the otherwise burnished vault of blue above them. It was an eccentric bit of vapor, on the whole, detaching itself from its parent on the other side of the majestic peaks by which they were hedged in from the north, and floating, gypsylike, by itself over the summit of Mushroom Mountain, to point the boast of one lost to the finer, rarer things with which a modest but deep-rooted spirituality endowed the former dish-washer.

For Archie O'Neill Parker, although far from his home, had never quite lost the pure and undying light of conscience which had been instilled in him by his mother. It vivified his imagination, when things were otherwise not altogether as he wished; it was within him always a fountain that fed his imagination with the sense of things unseen.

Vivian Lane gave a gasp which deepened into an incoherent but startled cry of alarm. The youth at her side thrilled, numbed, petrified. Incongruously enough, he seemed to hear Claude Dubois as he had heard him the day before commenting on the precipitate descent of Frye into the alfalfa field:

"He came shooting out of the sky like Beelzebub falling from heaven."

The statement was pregnant with prophecy.

For Savage Frye was falling, falling, falling, although with a certain alienated majesty, as if his half-barbaric brain had lost its power to function and the device he had driven with such abandon was now plunging back to the summit of the grotesque and unscalable mountain to mock the two imprisoned there.

It fell within two hundred yards of where they stood as if graved in the prehistoric rock itself—a chaotic, confused ruin.

"Please stay here, Vivian," said her companion. "I'll be back, directly."

He walked over to the wreck, dragging feet of lead.

The daze in which he plunged at complete realization of the catastrophe was reflected in his churning brain. For a moment he could think only of the conclusion of "The Tempest," and Prospero's last words as he broke his staff and drowned his book.

"'Into thin air,'" reiterated the youth to himself, "'and dissolved.'"

He was thinking of his hopes of a quarter of an hour before—of seeing Vivian, safe and sound, on the steps of McNally's Hotel in Gulchville.

The blackened face of the corpse of what had been Savage Frye, aviator and bandit, leered out at him from the mass of wreckage. Archie's first thought had been that

Frye had lost control of his machine—that some new and unavoidable accident had transpired which suddenly brought about his fall.

The Stygian countenance and the up-rolled ghastly eyes gave it the lie. The face was like a demon's from the bottomless pit. Frye had died, somehow, while yet in full control of the plane, and despite his aversion at the grisly sight, the mystified youth stepped closer.

He looked at the sector of the spark-gap which was somewhat like that of an automobile. The brass semicircle and the lever which should have moved freely upon it were fused—melted together. But, even this extraordinary sight did not account for the sootylike physiognomy of the man with whom he had pledged his word to retain, inviolate, "for eternity," the certain knowledge that he was a ruthless criminal.

It was both gruesome and uncanny.

Archie O'Neill Parker—to give him his full name—bent mechanically over the fuselage for closer inspection and put out his hand in a gingerly fashion.

His hand touched a cord.

A half hour later Archie and Miss Lane stood on the brink of the rock which Frye had mentioned ere he had flown to the "roof of the world" for the last time. Archie had a bit of cord in his hand and knelt to bind her skirts close around her slender limbs.

"It is much too far down to let me lower you, even if we had a rope of sufficient length and suitable strength," said he, trying to keep his tone casual. "So, there's nothing for it but to make the jump. You go first—I'll be right behind you."

Vivian looked at him with eyes in which the courage of a girl's soul tried to fight back a very natural feminine fear of consequences.

"How far is it?" she asked.

"According to Mr. Frye's statement, from his altimeter it is only about four thousand feet. You will be much safer than if you were merely dropping fourteen feet—or four hundred. Try and believe that."

"Why do you say that?" she demanded.

"You never did this sort of thing in your life, did you?"

"No. But recently I saw a picture in a scientific periodical in which a man was leaping from an airplane in full flight at an altitude more than twice as great. It said: 'If the parachute opens properly—why he's a good aviator.' Look up when you step off and not down. That way you'll see me when I follow you."

"What will we do when we get to the bottom?" demanded Vivian. "It must be a long walk back to Uncle John's."

"Oh, we won't have to walk it. They'll be out looking for us. These mountains are better known to the old-timers than Broadway is to you and me. Are you ready?"

Vivian inspected the loop around her skirts. "Yes. I guess so." She looked at him wistfully. Archie avoided her gaze, picking up the long cords attached to one of the two parachutes he had rescued from the wrecked plane, holding them straight out as he handed her to the bring of the giddy drop, as if they were about to indulge in an old-fashioned minuet on some dancing floor.

."Godfrey's bones!" yelped Three-Finger Flynn, as he drew down the binoculars which Claude Dubois had loaned him, when the rescuing party galloped out of Gulchville and took the old Aztec trail toward Mushroom Mountain, following the chemist's view of Frye's fall to its summit.

"What did you see?" demanded the chemist, who was riding by his side, but with a heavy heart, for he fancied every one had been killed in the cataclysmic fall from the clouds which he had witnessed.

"Look—quick!" shouted Three-Finger Flynn. "My eyes hain't so good as they usta be—or mebbe I'm seein' things. Mushroom Mountain has changed its crop. It's sheddin' water-lilies or I'm a submarine captain!"

Dubois looked. Then he gave a shriek of incredulous joy.

It was fully five minutes before he could make himself comprehended. And during all of the time, from the elevation at which he peered down into the cavity around the

mountain from which Vivian and Archie had tried the last of their incredible experiences of the morning, he kept his eyes steadily on the two whirling, gyrating forms, floating solemnly downward, through thin air, to the solid earth at the mountain's base.

It was only about ten miles from where the party were grouped. They made it within two hours by consistent riding, with Three-Finger in the lead.

Then they met the twain, Archie and Vivian, walking hand in hand like "babes in the wood," as Flynn characterized it, and heard from their lips the story of what had transpired, in part.

John Hopwood gasped.

"It is unbelievable," said he. "What killed Frye?"

"I don't know," said Archie.

"I do," said Dubois, "or, at least, I have a theory that will stand scientific analysis. When he went up to loop over that cloud, I saw him all the time. But the cloud had divided into two parts. In passing over the lower half he went beneath the upper half."

"Well," testily asked John Hopwood, "why didn't he keep on going? He was a good aviator, wasn't he?"

"The reason was this," explained Dubois, "and I'm rather sure of it. The two halves of the cloud were charged with electricity. The lower half on its upper side is positive—if my memory serves—and the lower half of the upper side is negative. When the airplane passed between them, this brought about a discharge of the electrically charged parts of the cloud—he was just like a mosquito caught between the two poles of a monster Ruhmkorf coil—his presence there made the discharge and the intensity of the spark, of course, not only killed him, but it fused, as Archie saw, the spark lever on his machine. His blackened body is proof irrefutable that is what happened, and I also saw a flash, just before he fell, as clearly as I see you, now."

"It was most unfortunate," shuddered Hopwood. "Poor chap. He seemed such an intrepid sort. Well, it only shows that fate is stronger than human volition. I dare say it's the first death of an aviator of the kind—"

"'Scuse me, John," rasped Three-Finger Flynn, interrupting. "Don't you go to wastin' any sympathy for a low-down ornary murderer!"

"*Murderer!*" gasped the bank president.

"I said it," obstinately returned the speaker, "and I kin take you to the graves of the three men he killed, too. I orter know. I buried 'em with these here hands—the other three that helped him hold up the bank. Frye was the leader of the gang. He was the man that Archie, here, knocked through the door. I trailed 'em to Mushroom Mountain base, after a long, hard pull. I was almost on 'em when they quarreled. He shot his three pals and when I sneaked in on him, we had a gun-fight. He got away in the dark. I was the one that found the horses, remember? And how he got away I never knowed, until yesterday. Then I seen him down in the alfalfa field. I knowed him by the scar on his wrist and I suspicion that Archie knowed him, too. But he ain't cracked a word—yit. Last night I thought he'd tell me suthin', but he only talked about a certain Shakespeare that never seen the cow-country."

He turned to look at the bank clerk.

But Archie O'Neill Parker, instead, was looking at the girl who knew his full name. On the way before meeting the rescuers he had been telling her why he used only two-thirds of it. It was his mother's idea that her son, although wealthy in his own right, should go out in the world and make his own way—a sensible idea, as Vivian admitted, when he beguiled the tedium of their walk with the narrative of odd things that had befallen him.

And, just now, as Vivian pressed his hand, sympathetically, Archie O'Neill Parker, for certain reasons which he did not care to reveal, felt that the whole matter had better be left where the blackened corps of Savage Frye reposed—on top of Mushroom Mountain, amid the inaccessible and decayed relics of a civilization long since vanished under the roof of the world.

(The end.)

Blackmail

by Hulbert Footner

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

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

EVAN WEIR, a young and unsuccessful New York artist, rescued Simeon Deaves, a millionaire miser, from an angry crowd, and took him to the Fifth Avenue home of his son, George Deaves. As a result he was engaged as a companion to the old man in his walks about the city. On his return to his rooms on Washington Square he was followed by a young man, who, upon being accused, disclaimed any such intention. His friend, Charley Straiker, told him that a music-teacher, Corinna Playfair, had engaged rooms in the house and that evening Evan met her —and lost his heart. But after he left her the girl cried, "I will not give in to him—and spoil everything."

Next day Evan learned that Deaves, Jr., had received a letter, signed "The Ikunahkatsihad," threatening to print a story of one of the miserly old man's pinch-penny escapades if five thousand dollars was not paid. It was to be left in a book in the public library. Evan advised that this be done, and that he be given the task of apprehending the blackmailers. He was supported by Mrs. George Deaves, a society woman, who threatened to leave her husband if the story was printed. The money was taken from the book by the young man who had followed him the day before, but when Evan had him arrested nothing was found on him, and he was released.

Next day the five one-thousand-dollar bills—which had been marked—were returned, and publicity threatened if a like amount was not sent to Carlton Hassell, a well-known artist, at the Barbizon Club. Deaves sent the money. An investigation showed that Hassell knew nothing of the matter, and that the money had been taken from the mail-rack by some one else.

In Corinna's apartment Evan met a Mr. Anway, a young man who seemed to be on terms of intimacy. Later, Evan forced Corinna to admit that she loved him, but the next morning she had gone away, and he could not find her.

Deaves received another letter, demanding another five-thousand-dollar contribution. He did not send the money, and the story was not published, but Mrs. Deaves was furious. Evan began to suspect that she had a hand in the blackmailing.

One day Evan followed Anway to a dock and followed him aboard a steam-boat that was taking poor children for an outing. The excursion was conducted by the "Ozone Association," but Evan could not learn who supplied the money for the work. Corinna Playfair was aboard, and most of the men assisting in the enterprise seemed to be in love with her. Evan had an unsatisfactory talk with her, and when the boat docked was pushed into an open hatch and held prisoner to prevent him following her. Later he was released by several grinning young men. "Just let them wait until the boat sails again!" he thought.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LITTLE DETECTIVE WORK.

AT first Evan had some doubts as to what ought to be his course of action in respect to Mrs. George Deaves. While it was true that her husband had definitely given him to understand that he was hired for the purpose of running down the blackmailers, he did not suppose that George Deaves would thank him for proof that his own wife was implicated. But that didn't alter his duty.

"I'm being paid to deliver them from the the gang," he said to himself. "As long as I take their money I've got to do what I can to earn it. It's none of my affair where the trail leads. If they want to kick me out for my pains, why, that's up to them."

It promised to be no easy matter to watch Mrs. Deaves. Evan rarely saw her. During the few hours that he spent in the house she was presumably either in her own rooms, or out in the motor.

One suspicious circumstance he did not have to look for, because everybody in the

house was aware of it. Maud Deaves was continually in money difficulties. Her creditors camped on her trail.

Two lines were open to Evan; to bribe her maid and to watch her letters. The maid, Josefa, was a light-headed creature, perfectly willing to plot or counterplot with anybody. Unfortunately she was very little use to Evan, because her mistress did not trust her in the least.

As for the letters, it was scarcely likely that if Maud Deaves were carrying on a dangerous correspondence she would have the letters come openly to the house. Nevertheless, Evan determined to get to the house early enough in the mornings to look over the first mail before it was sorted out and distributed.

On the morning following his trip on the Ernestina he found a letter addressed to her that gave him food for reflection. The address was typewritten. The envelope was of medium size "Irish linen," of the kind that never saw either Ireland or flax; in other words, just such an envelope as those which had brought the blackmailing letters.

In itself this was nothing, for many thousands of such envelopes are sold. But it was postmarked "Hamilton Grange," and it was addressed "New York City." The three little facts taken together were significant. Evan slipped it in his pocket.

But though it had the look of a mere business letter or a bill, he still had qualms about opening it. Useless to tell himself that it was his duty to do so. To tell the truth, Evan was not cut out by nature to be a detective. He finally decided to put up his problem to George Deaves.

"Mr. Deaves," he said, "am I employed to accompany your father on his walks or to discover the blackmailers?"

"Primarily to run down the blackmailers," was the prompt reply. "Merely to go with my father is not worth all the money I'm paying you."

"Very good. Then I'm supposed to follow the trail wherever it may lead?"

"Certainly."

"Even in this house?"

"Of course. I told you particularly to watch the servants. Whom do you suspect?"

"I have no evidence yet. I merely wanted to know where I stood. Would I be justified in opening letters that looked suspicious to me?"

"Why, yes. The guilty person wouldn't tell you of his own accord."

"Thanks. That is about all I wanted to know."

"Have you found out anything?" Deaves asked eagerly.

"Not yet."

"Mind, you are to find out everything you can, but you are not to take any action without consulting me."

"I understand."

While the servants were at breakfast Evan went to the water heater in the basement and opening the valve, steamed the envelope open. He took the contents to the little room off the library to read. This is what met his eyes:

Madagascar Hotel.

MRS. GEORGE DEAVES:

Dear Madam:

I am exceedingly sorry to be obliged to inform you that my customary fortnightly contribution to your charity must be omitted on this occasion, the reason being that the activity of a certain agitator has resulted in shutting off the income from my business, and I am without funds. I am sure you will agree with me that these agitators ought to be discouraged in every possible way. Let us make a stand against them. You can reach me at this hotel at any time.

Yours faithfully,

RODERICK FRELINGHUYSEN.

This had an innocent sound, and for a moment Evan supposed he had made a mistake in opening it. But he read it again, and began to grin as the various implications of the note became clear to him.

"Damn clever!" he thought. "If this was found lying about no one could suspect anything from it. Not even George Deaves. Why, it almost took me in and I was forewarned!"

Evan thoughtfully considered all that the letter meant. "First of all it shows that Maud is not a regular member of the gang, but that they have been whacking up with her just to gain her good will. That's why she supplies the pressure from this end. It all fits in!

"Of course I am the agitator that he re-

fers to, and he's suggesting to her that she get me fired. But why does he give her an address so that she can write to him? By George! I have it! He's giving her a chance to send him a story that can be used against the old man!"

He took a copy of the letter, sealed it up again and slipped it back among the rest of the mail matter in the hall.

During the morning he was obliged to accompany Simeon Deaves on one of his peregrinations. When they returned for lunch Evan sought out Josefa, the lady's-maid.

"What's your mistress been doing all morning?" he asked.

"Oh, Maud's got a new bug!" was the scornful answer. "Been practising on the typewriter for hours."

Evan picked up his ears. "The typewriter?"

"She went out right after breakfast and brought home a second-hand machine. Been beating the dickens out of it ever since."

"What is she writing?"

"Search me. Won't let me come near her. Looks like a story or something."

"Get a glimpse of it if you can."

"No chance. She's got eyes all around her head."

"Maybe you can get me a spoiled sheet of her writing."

"She's too wise to overlook anything like that."

"Can you work a typewriter?"

"A little bit."

"Well, when she goes out stick a piece of paper in the machine and strike every key once, see? I want an impression of every character."

"I get you."

After lunch Evan had to waste more precious hours walking around with the old man. When they returned Josefa reported that Mrs. Deaves had finished her typewriting about three, and had then done up the sheets in a large envelope and, after carefully destroying the spoiled sheets, had carried the envelope out, presumably to post it. Josefa gave Evan the paper he had asked for, with a print of each character of the typewriter.

It was then five o'clock. City letters require two hours or more for delivery and, supposing this package of Mrs. Deaves's to be an answer to "Mr. Frelinghuysen's" note, it would soon be due at the Hotel Madagascar.

Evan determined to go and ask for it himself. He did not suppose that Mr. Frelinghuysen was stopping at the Madagascar. That would be too simple. He knew, as everybody knows, what an easy means the "call" letters at a great hotel offers for the exchange of illicit correspondence.

The Madagascar, as all the world knows, is one of our biggest and busiest hotels. Evan went boldly to the desk and asked if there were any letters for Mr. Roderick Frelinghuysen. The name sounded imposing. The busy clerk skimmed over the letters in the F box and, tossing him a bulky envelope, thought no more about it.

Evan in high satisfaction wended his way to another hotel in the neighborhood, and there at his leisure tore the envelope open and read—well, very much what he expected; a story designed to be used for blackmailing purposes against Simeon Deaves. No letter accompanied it; none was necessary.

This story dealt with ancient history, and contained uglier matter than mere ridicule of the old man's avarice. It had to do with the circumstances of the marriage of George Deaves to Maud Warrender and what followed thereupon. In other words, Maud had been engaged in the amiable occupation of fouling her own nest.

According to this account Simeon Deaves had instigated his weak and complaisant son to woo Miss Warrender because her father was president of a railroad that Simeon Deaves coveted. As a result of the marriage Deaves, who up to that time had only been a money-lender, had succeeded in entering the realms of high finance. No sooner was his own position secure, so the story went, than Simeon Deaves set himself to work to undermine Warrender, and in the end ousted him from his railway and ruined him.

This tale had none of the finesse and humor of that written by the blackmailers; it was simply abusive. Yet Maud had not so far forgotten herself as to show her hand.

The facts were such as many might have been aware of.

Evan painstakingly compared the sheets of the story with the paper Josefa had given him. Every typewriter, save it is just from the factory, has its peculiarities. There was enough here to make out a case; " e " was badly worn and had a microscopic piece knocked off its tail; " a," " w," " s," and " p " were out of alinement; there was something the matter with " g," so that the following letter generally piled up on top of it.

In short, Evan held in his hands positive evidence of Maud Deaves's treachery. But upon consideration he decided not to put it before her husband, at least, for the present.

In the first place, he didn't relish taking the responsibility of breaking up the Deaves family, and in the second place, it was clear that the woman was only a tool in the hands of a rascal far cleverer than she. To deprive him of his tool would not break up the rascal's game; he could get another. Therefore Evan decided to keep his discovery to himself, and use it if possible to land the principal in the affair.

He considered whether he should have the desk at the Madagascar watched with a view to apprehending " Mr. Frelinghuysen " when he asked for his letter, but decided against that. He would send an innocent agent for it, while he watched in safety.

On the whole, it seemed best to do nothing that might put him on his guard, but to wait until he attempted to use his story, for a chance to land him.

He procured another envelope, had the hotel stenographer address it and, sealing up the manuscript, carried it back to the Madagascar and handed it in at the desk " for Mr. Frelinghuysen," careful to choose a different clerk from the one who had given it to him.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PLAN OF ATTACK.

IT must have been called for shortly afterward and acted upon at once. Next morning when Evan arrived at the Deaves house the story was already back there. The customary violent family conference was in progress in the library. Evan guessed from their expressions that his name had entered into this quarrel.

Indeed, Mrs. Deaves was for ordering him out of the room again, but the old man too quick for her. He placed the latest letter in Evan's hands. Mrs. Deaves turned away with a shrug.

" Well, you know what I think of it," she said.

Evan read:

MR. GEORGE DEAVES:

Dear Sir:

You thought we were bluffing, didn't you, when we said we had a chapter to add to your father's biography. Well, here it is. Your rejection of our proposal was received during the absence from town of our chief. That accounts for the delay. Upon his return our chief instructed that you were to be given a chance to read the matter before it was published. So we enclose it. In the absence of any further communication from you before noon, it will appear in this evening's edition of the *Clarion*.

To-day your procedure for communicating with us must be as follows: Bring the specified sum in cash to the house at 11 Van Dorn Street. It must be enclosed in an envelope or package. You must approach on foot. Ring the bell; hand it to the woman who opens the door with the words: " For the gentleman up-stairs " and leave at once. You may bring a single attendant with you if you choose—you would probably be afraid to come without one. But neither you nor he must linger, nor question the woman, nor seek to penetrate beyond the front door. If you do so, or bring any other persons with you or after you, let the consequences be on your own head.

Yours as ever,

THE IKUNAHKATSI.

" What are you going to do?" asked Evan of George Deaves.

Maud snatched the answer from her husband's lips. " He's going to pay!" she cried. " He can take you with him if he wants, as there's no one else available. I've no objection to that. But if you go you're to do exactly what the letter tells you and no more!"

As Evan continued to look to George Deaves, the latter was obliged to nod a feeble assent.

" He hasn't got the money," put in Simeon Deaves.

" Then let him get it from you!"

" Not if I know it!"

"Well, I don't care where he gets it from. This story is ruinous—ruinous! This story hits directly at me! If this is published it would be impossible for me to go on living with George!"

"Bravo, Maud!" thought Evan. "You're some actress! What a bombshell I could explode in this room if I wanted to!"

Maud's parting shot was: "At ten o'clock when the bank opens I will take you there myself in the car."

When she had gone the wretched George mumbled to his father: "No use my going to the bank. I've overdrawn there. I can't ask for another loan unless you'll guarantee it."

"Not another cent! Not another cent! Let 'em publish and be damned!" He shuffled out of the room.

Evan could not but feel sorry for the unfortunate George, though his pity was mixed with contempt. George's first impulse was to apologize for his wife.

"You must make allowances," he said. "Mrs. Deaves is so dreadfully upset by this matter."

"So I see," said Evan dryly.

"I don't know what I'm going to do!"

"You don't need any money," said Evan quietly.

"Eh?" said Deaves dully.

"You've got a real chance to catch them now!"

"What do you mean?"

"Trap them in this house in Van Dorn Street! I was sure they'd get careless in the end."

Deaves began to tremble. "But how can we? How do we know how many there are?"

"You'll have to call in the police and have the house surrounded."

"Oh, no! no!" Deaves cried in a panic.

"But that's what they're counting on, that you're afraid to call the police!"

"The whole story would come out in the papers!"

"Not necessarily. Those matters can be arranged. And if they should slip through our fingers, we can buy up the story at the *Clarion* office later. We'd be no worse off."

"What could I say to Mrs. Deaves?"

"Don't tell her anything. She couldn't help but approve after we land them behind the bars." Evan said this with an inward smile.

"But she'll insist on my going to the bank."

"Let her take us there. She won't come in."

"I can't! I can't!" he quavered. "The risk is too great!"

"But if this payment is hard to meet, how about the next, and the next after that?"

"Oh, they'll ruin me!" he groaned.

"Then strike for your freedom while there's time!"

George Deaves would not positively consent, but he was so spineless that Evan was able to rush him along the path that he wished him to follow. Evan telephoned to police headquarters and made an appointment with the inspector in charge of the detective bureau to meet them at the bank.

Therefore when Mrs. Deaves dropped them at the bank, and drove away, satisfied that things were going as she wished, instead of obtaining the money, they went into consultation with the inspector in plain clothes in the manager's office. Evan did the talking.

"Mr. Deaves is being hounded by a gang of blackmailers!" Evan began.

The inspector bowed as if blackmailing was a mere bagatelle to him. He had the mannerisms of the army. Evan was not so sure, though, of his capacity. But one must take an inspector as one finds him.

"He received this letter this morning." Evan handed it over.

It was read and handed back with a military nod.

"The opportunity seemed a good one to land the crooks."

"Quite so."

"We asked you to meet us here, because if we were seen going to headquarters the news would soon reach them. They were counting, you see, on Mr. Deaves not being willing to consult the police. But of course Mr. Deaves has nothing to hide."

"Of course not!"

George Deaves began to look anxious at

this, but Evan did not intend to be taken too literally, as his employer soon saw.

The inspector was not so stiff and correct but that he could feel an unregenerate curiosity. "May I see the enclosure the letter speaks of?" he asked.

"It has been destroyed," said Evan, coolly. "It was merely scurrilous, and Mr. Deaves saw nothing to be gained in keeping it. The criminal intent is shown in the letter."

The inspector looked disappointed, but bowed as usual. "Nevertheless, I should be informed as to their previous activities," said he.

"Certainly," said Evan. "But if you will excuse me, the time is so short! I thought we should immediately take our measures. All the facts will come out at the hearing, of course."

Their plan was soon made. It was arranged that, in the first place, a man in plain clothes should be sent through Van Dorn Street to locate the position of No. 11. Being an odd number it would be on the north side of the street.

He would then spot the corresponding house in the next street to the north, Carlton Street, and four men would be sent to that house to be in readiness to take the Van Dorn house in the rear.

Six other men would follow George Deaves and Evan to the front door. In order to avoid warning the inmates of the house these six would be sent through the block in a covered van, to leap out as the door was opened.

"What signal will there be for the concerted attack?" asked Evan.

"No signal," said the inspector. "The double approach will be timed at a fixed moment, military style. You will ring the door bell at eleven o'clock precisely. Let me see, we'll give them forty-five seconds to open the door. Zero for us will be forty-five seconds past eleven. You can depend on us. Are you armed?"

Evan shook his head.

"As you are to be the first to enter the house it would be as well. Take this."

"This" was a neat and businesslike automatic. George Deaves shuddered at the sight of it.

The inspector compared watches with Evan and departed in his automobile to make his arrangements.

CHAPTER XX.

NO. 11 VAN DORN STREET.

EVAN borrowed a newspaper at the bank and cut from it five pieces of the size and shape of bills. These he enclosed in an envelope and gave it to George Deaves. The latter was already longing to turn back from this expedition, but Evan gave him no chance to do so.

It was about ten-thirty when they left the bank. In case they were under observation Evan had to find some plausible reason for delay. They taxied back to the Deaves house as if they had forgotten something, and then down-town again. They dismissed their cab in MacDougall Street, and proceeded on foot according to instructions.

Few people in New York could lead you to Van Dorn Street, but Evan happened to have marked it during his wanderings with Simeon Deaves. It is only three blocks long from MacDougall Street to the river, one of the forgotten streets of the real Greenwich Village, not the spurious. Down the first block extends a double row of little old red brick dwellings; No. 11 was presumably one of these. The remaining blocks are given up to great storehouses.

It was not any too easy to time their arrival to a second without rousing the suspicions of any one who might be watching them. Evan dared not consult his watch too often.

He made careful calculations of the time they took to walk a block. As it was he arrived in sight of the corner some seconds too soon. He used up this time by asking the way of an Italian grocer who had no English.

It was ten seconds to eleven when Evan guided the shaking George Deaves into Van Dorn Street, and they mounted the steps of No. 11 precisely on the hour. A great bell was tolling as Evan pulled the old-fashioned knob. In the depths of the house a bell jangled. Evan's heart was beating hard in his throat; George Deaves

was as pale as a corpse—nothing strange in that, though, if anybody was watching.

The little brick house with its beautiful old doorway and wrought iron railings was the very epitome of respectability—they had left the swarming Italian quarter around the corner. With its shining brass knobs, neat window curtains and scrubbed steps one would have sworn that good, churchgoing people lived here—but you never can tell!

There was no wagon or van in the block that might have contained the police, but it was only a hundred feet or so to the corner. Evan had faith in the inspector. As a matter of fact the van was about half a minute late in arriving, not a very long time, but long enough to make a fatal difference in modern tactics.

They heard steps approaching the door from within—still no sign of the police.

"Fumble for the envelope," Evan swiftly whispered. "It 'll gain time."

The door was opened by a woman as respectable in appearance as her house; in short, a hard-working, middle-aged American woman with an expression slightly embittered, perhaps, as a result of the influx of foreigners in her neighborhood. She looked at them inquiringly. George Deaves fumbled assiduously in his inside breast pocket.

"What is it?" she asked sharply.

"I have something for the gentleman upstairs," he muttered.

"Oh!" She waited five seconds more. "What's the matter?"

"I can't seem to find it."

Still no sign of the police. Evan was on tenterhooks. To create a diversion he asked:

"Has the gentleman lived here long?"

"Only took the rooms yesterday. Hasn't moved in yet."

Evan's heart went down. "Oh, then he isn't in?"

"Yes, he and his friend are up there waiting for the furniture."

She was evidently a victim rather than an accomplice. Still no sign of the police! George Deaves had not the assurance to keep up his pretended search.

Evan signaled to him with a look to hand over the envelope. He did so with trembling hands.

At the same moment Evan, whose ears were stretched for sounds from within the house, heard a voice say, not loud: "They're coming over the back fence!" And another voice answered: "Beat it, then."

To Evan it was like the view halloo of the huntsman. He could not resist it. Never thinking of the danger, he pushed past the astonished landlady, and sprang for the stairs, pulling out his pistol as he ran. As he left the stoop he had an impression of a motor van turning the corner from MacDougall.

The woman screamed, and George Deaves yelled to Evan to come back. The woman slammed the door in Deaves's face with the impulse of keeping out at least one intruder. This was unfortunate for Evan, for it delayed the entrance of the police.

As Evan went up the first flight he heard flying feet on the stairs overhead, and he made no pause on the second floor. He heard a door on the third floor slam. It was in the front. Houses of this type have a window on the stair landing and Evan had no difficulty in seeing what he was about.

On the third floor there were four doors on the hall, all closed. Evan went directly to the door he had heard close, the door of the principal front room, and throwing it open, stepped back, half expecting a fusillade from within.

But none came. After a moment he stepped to the door and looked in. The room was empty. But there was a door communicating with the rear.

That was as far as his observations carried him. Suddenly a suffocating cloud was thrown over his head from behind and drawn close about him. He struggled in vain.

A voice said: "Give him one, he's heeled!"

A sickening blow descended on his skull. His strength became as water. Still he did not lose consciousness.

A different voice said: "Let him lie! Come on!"

The first and more determined voice re-

plied: "Bring him, I tell you. It's too good a chance to miss!"

A rope was hastily wound around Evan's body, as he was partly dragged, partly boosted up a ladder and through a scuttle to the roof. The last sound he heard from the house was the tramping of heavy feet in the entry below.

He was put down on the roof. He was still incapable of helping himself, but he heard all that went on as in a dream.

He heard them cover the scuttle. He heard the more resolute voice say: "Help me lift this slab from the parapet." The other replied agitatedly: "Oh, what's the use! Come on! Come on!" The first said: "Do what I tell you! Only one man can stand on the ladder at a time; he'll have all he can do to push this up!"

A heavy object was dropped on the scuttle. Evan was then picked up between the two, and carried over the roofs. They laid him down on the low parapet that separated each house from its neighbor, and, jumping over, picked him up again. In this manner they crossed the roofs of six houses. Evan heard vague sounds of excitement from the street below.

He was put down again. One of his captors climbed above him; he heard his voice come down. With one pulling from above, and one boosting from below, with strenuous efforts Evan was hoisted to a higher roof. The second man climbed after. As he did so he said:

"They're out!"

The other replied: "Bolt the door as you come through."

A door slammed to behind them and was bolted. Evan was jolted down many stairs. Some one began to pound violently on the door above. Other doors on the way were opened. Women exclaimed in astonished Italian.

"Out of the way! Out of the way!" commanded the resolute voice, and none sought to interfere.

They ran down a long passage and down a few steps to the open street again. Evan was carried across the pavement and flung into an automobile. The door was slammed. Running feet were heard from another direction. The resolute voice said:

"Beat it!"

The car jerked into motion. A hoarse voice ordered them to stop. A pistol was fired. The bold voice said:

"Step on it hard!"

The car roared down the street with wide open exhaust, turned a corner on two wheels, and another corner, and soon outdistanced all sounds of pursuit.

The power of movement was coming back to Evan; he still lay quiet; he was at too great a disadvantage to put up a struggle. That which enveloped him was a thick, cotton comforter; it clove to his tongue, and the stuffy smell of it filled his nostrils.

Moreover he had a lively recollection of the blackjack or whatever it was that had laid him out in the beginning. It was useless to cry out; even if he should be heard above the noise of the engine, who could stop the flying car?

As his wits cleared he set them to work to try to puzzle out the direction in which he was being carried. He could tell from the lurch of the car whether they turned to the right or the left. In the beginning they turned so many corners that all sense of direction was lost, but after a while they struck a car-line and held to it for a long time.

He knew they were running in car-tracks, by the smoothness of their passage, broken by occasional bumpings as they slipped out of the rails. It was a street with little traffic, for their progress was rapid and uninterrupted.

Presently he heard an elevated-train roar overhead, and he knew where he was. "Greenwich Street or Ninth Avenue," he said to himself. As they still held to their car-line he knew they were bound up-town: headed the other way they would have reached the end of the island before this.

By and by they coasted down a long hill and puffed up the other side. He guessed this to be the valley between Ninety-Third Street and One Hundred and Fourth, and presently knew he was right, when he heard the wheels of the elevated-trains grinding on a curve high overhead. The Hundred and Tenth Street curve, of course; there is no other such curve on the island.

The car turned to the right and then to

the left again, still running in the rails. "Eighth Avenue now," he said to himself, "and still heading north."

Later he heard a car-gong of a different timbre and the unmistakable hiss of a trolley wheel on its wire. There are no overhead wires on Manhattan Island except at the several points where the off-island railways terminate.

"Union Railway," Evan said to himself. "We've reached the Harlem River." Sure enough, they passed over a draw-bridge; the double *clank-clank* of the draw could not be mistaken. "Central Bridge," thought Evan.

But in the smoothly paved streets of the Bronx he lost every clue to his whereabouts. They ran in the car-tracks for a while, then left them; they made several right and left turns and crossed other tracks. Evan guessed they were in a well-traveled motor highway, for he heard other cars, but that told him nothing; there are a dozen such highways radiating from Central Bridge.

He lay against the feet and legs of his two captors. He listened eagerly for any talk between them that might furnish him with a clue. But if they conversed it must have been in whispers. On one occasion though he heard he of the milder voice say:

"He's so quiet! Do you suppose he's all right?"

"Search me!" was the indifferent response. "His body is hot enough on my feet I know."

"Hadn't I better look at him?"

"Sure! And print your face on his memory forever!"

"I believe that comforter is half suffocating him."

"What of it? You can't make a cake without breaking eggs."

Gradually the noises of the street lessened, and Evan gathered that they were getting out into the sparsely settled districts. They were bowling along rapidly and smoothly. About twenty minutes after they had crossed Central Bridge (if Central Bridge it was) the more determined voice suddenly said to the chauffeur:

"Don't turn in now. There's a car behind. Run slow and let it pass. Then come back."

This was evidently done. They turned in the road. As they came back the voice said:

"All clear. Go ahead in."

The car turned to the right and jolted over what seemed to be a shallow ditch. The road that followed was of the roughest character, if indeed it was a road and not a field. But it was a road, a wood-track; Evan heard the twigs crackle under the tires.

They lurched and bumped alarmingly. Once they had to stop to allow the chauffeur to drag some obstruction out of the way. Evidently they had not had the car that way before, for the chauffeur said anxiously:

"Are you sure we can get through?"

The resolute voice answered: "We've got to."

The chauffeur said: "I couldn't turn around here."

The other voice replied: "There's a clear space in front of the house."

This way was not very long, a quarter of a mile, Evan guessed. They came to a stop, and the two men climbed out over Evan.

He was unceremoniously dragged out feet foremost. They carried him a short distance—Evan heard grass or verdure swishing around their legs. They entered a house and laid him down on a floor, a rough, worn floor.

Here Evan heard a new voice, a woman's voice with strange, slurred accents and a fat woman's laugh. The strong-voiced man said:

"Here's a guest for you, Aunt Liza."

"Lawsy! Lawsy! What divelment you been up to now!"

A general laugh went round. To the bound Evan it had a blackguardly and infamous sound.

He was abruptly turned over on his face. While one man held the folds of the comforter tightly round his head, the other two knelt on his back, and pulling his arms behind him, tied his wrists together. Evan put up the best struggle he could against such heavy odds. The man who had taken the principal part against him laughed.

"You see there's life in him yet," he said.

After his wrists they tied his ankles, and got up from him. The comforter was still

over Evan's head, and he was powerless to throw it off. The same voice said:

"After we're out of the room you can uncover his head, and give him air. And feed him when dinner's ready."

A door closed.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CLUBHOUSE.

THE coverlet was thrown back from Evan's head, and breathing deep with relief, he saw bending over him a grinning, fat negress, not evil-looking, but merely simple in expression.

She exclaimed like a child: "Laws! It's a pretty man!"

"Where am I?" asked Evan.

"'Deed, I don' know, chile!"

"I'll pay you well if you'll help me out of here."

"Deed, I cain't help you, honey. I'm here, but I don' know where it is no more than you do. White folks brung me here, and white folks will take me away again, I reckon."

Evan looked around him. He seemed to be in a room of an ancient abandoned farmhouse. There was no furniture. The ceiling was low; the great fireplace was certainly more than a century old.

The smell of rotting wood was in the air; the plaster was coming down, revealing the rough hand-split laths beneath; the floor was full of holes. There were two windows with many missing panes. The sun was streaming in. From Evan's position flat on his back on the floor he could only see the sky through the upper sashes.

In contrast with the wreckage that surrounded them the old negress was neat and clean. She wore a black cotton-dress and a gingham-apron and on her head was a quaint, flat-topped cap made from a folded newspaper. She seemed neither ill-disposed nor well-disposed toward Evan, but regarded him simply as an amusing curiosity.

It ought not to be difficult to bend one so simple to his will, Evan thought, and set to work to conciliate her.

"Aunt Liza, you seem like a decent woman. What are you doing in a den like this?"

She affected not to understand him. "Excuse me, suh, I don' understand No'the'ners' talk very good."

"I say this is a funny looking place."

"Well, I reckon they's gwine fix it up some. Ain't had time yet. The other rooms is better than this."

"Who lives here?"

"Nobody lives here. It's a club."

"What club?"

"Ain't got no name as I knows. It's a private club."

"Well, who comes here?"

"Jes' my boss and his friends."

"What's your boss's name?"

"Mr. Henry."

"What's his other name?"

"Henry."

"What's his first name then?"

"Henry, too. Mr. Henry Henry."

Evan looked at her sharply, but her face was black and bland.

"What do they do here?" he asked.

"Same as gemmen always does in a club I reckon; smokes and talks and plays cards and mixes juleps."

"Well, do they generally bring their guests here tied hand and foot?"

Aunt Liza dissolved into noiseless fat laughter. "No, suh! No, suh! That's somepin new, that is!"

"Well, what do you think of it?"

"Laws! I never thinks, suh. I leaves that to the white folks. I jus' looks on and 'preciates things!"

Evan was sure now that she was simply using her simplicity as a cover. In such a contest he could only come off second best, so he fell silent. He was anxious to get her out of the room now that he might get a glimpse out of the window.

"Somebody said something about dinner," he said. "How about it?"

"Ready d'rectly, suh. I'll go look at it."

She went out. The room had but one door, which she locked after her. After a series of struggles Evan succeeded in getting to his knees. If this sounds easy let the doubter have his hands tied behind him, and his ankles tied together, and try it.

This brought his head above the level of

the window-sill, but the view out the window scarcely repaid him for his trouble. It was much what one might have expected from the condition of the house, a door-yard grown high with grass and weeds, a clump of tiger-lilies, some aged lilac bushes, a few rotten palings marking the line where a fence had run.

Beyond the fence was the road, only a slight depression now in the expanse of weeds. The automobile that had brought Evan was standing there. It was a shabby little landaulet with the top up. It looked like a taxicab, but carried no meter. Beyond the line of the road the view was shut off by second-growth woods, with a larger tree rising here and there.

It looked like a spot long forgotten of man, yet Evan doubted if it were more than eight miles from Harlem River, and the chances were that it was actually within the New York City limits. Indeed while he looked he heard the faint far-off chorus of the noon whistles in town.

Hearing the old darky's shuffling step in the hall, he hastily lay down again. But her sharp eyes instantly marked the change in his position, and detected the dust on his knees.

"Ah reckon the sun's too strong for yo' eyes," she said dryly. There were stout, old-fashioned wooden shutters folded back into the window-frames. These she closed and hooked, and Evan was left in gloom.

There was nothing the matter with the dinner she presently brought him; corn soup, fried chicken and hominy. She fed him with the anxious solicitude of a nurse.

Indeed Aunt Liza throughout evinced the greatest willingness to make friends; she was so fat and comfortable she just couldn't help it. It was only when Evan started to question her that she showed what a tricky spirit inhabited her solid frame.

After dinner Evan heard the automobile leave. He guessed that he and Aunt Liza were now alone in the tumbledown house. During the long, hot afternoon she left him pretty much to his own devices. He could hear the bees humming outside, and the twitter of birds.

In stories Evan had read when the hero was captured and tied up he always succeeded in "working himself free" at the critical moment. Well, Evan patiently set to work to free his hands, but after hours of effort, as it seemed, he had only chafed his wrists and his temper and drawn the knots tighter.

The extreme stillness of the house suggested that Aunt Liza might be indulging in a siesta, and he determined to reach the window if he could. Patiently rolling and hunching himself in the desired direction, he finally made it.

He then by a course of gymnastics finally succeeded in getting to his feet. With his chin he knocked up the hook that fastened the shutter, and after many attempts succeeded in pulling the shutter open with his teeth.

Even then he was no nearer freedom, for the sash was down, though most of the panes were missing. And Aunt Liza came in and caught him in the act.

"Sho! Honey, what yo' tryin' to do?" she said reproachfully. "Turn around and sit down."

There was nothing for Evan to do but obey, whereupon she coolly seized his heels, and pulled him across the floor. She fastened up the shutter again. After that she visited him more frequently, and as long as he was a "good boy" was disposed to be quite friendly and sociable.

Toward the end of the afternoon the "club members" began to arrive. Evidently they came on foot, for there was no sound of an automobile. Evan, whose only useful sense was hearing, thought he could distinguish eight or nine individuals at different times.

None opened his door. The principal gathering place seemed to be the room over his head. A low-voiced hum of conversation came down to him, but he could distinguish no words. Frequently there was laughter, which had a particularly devilish and unfeeling ring to Evan.

Aunt Liza served another meal.

Later she entered his room carrying a bandanna handkerchief.

"What's that for?" demanded Evan.

"To blind yo' eyes, honey."

"What for?"

"The gemmen wants to see yo' upstairs."

Any prospect seemed better than lying bound alone in the semidark, and Evan submitted. Aunt Liza made very sure that he could not see under the bandage over his eyes. Then untying the knots that bound his ankles, she helped him to his feet, and steered him out through the door.

Placing his foot on the bottom step she bade him mount the stairs. At the top she led him toward the front of the building and through a doorway into the middle of a room. Here she left him. He heard her steps recede, and heard her close the door behind her.

There he stood bound and blind, facing—he knew not what. Excitement choked him. Nobody spoke, but his senses told him that he was surrounded by people.

He heard them breathe. The continued silence was cruel on his nerves. He imagined them moving cat-footed about him, smiling meaningly at each other as they prepared to attack. If he only had a wall at his back!

"Keep cool! Keep cool!" he told himself. "They're trying to break your nerve. Stand fast! Make them speak first!"

Finally one spoke. It was he of the resolute, cynical voice. "Well, Weir, here we are! What have you got to say for yourself?"

"It's not up to me to say anything," coolly retorted Evan.

There were several chuckles in the room. Their laughter was hateful to Evan. He gathered from the sounds that the room was of considerable size. Evidently this house was a more pretentious building than he had supposed. The voices echoed as they do in a bare room.

"You are in the presence of the Ikunahkatsi," the voice went on, "that is to say, of some of them. We're not at all ill-disposed toward you personally. On the contrary we admire the pluck you've shown. It's been some fun to get the best of you. Confess, we fooled you neatly in the library that day."

Evan thought: "This is the humorous guy that writes the letters!" Aloud he said: "Say your say and have done with it!"

The voice resumed: "As I say, it's been a good game. We'd be willing to go on indefinitely matching our wits against yours, but the dice are loaded against us, you see. We're outside the law. With that advantage on your side you'd be bound to get us in the end.

"It's not all fun with us, you see. We have a serious purpose in view. You are in the way of that purpose and so, regretfully, we've got to remove you.

"You're much too good a lad to be in the pay of an old rascal like Deaves. You ought to be on our side, with the free spirits. But there you are. I know you wouldn't switch now."

"To a gang of blackmailers? No thank you," said Evan.

"It would be just as well for you to speak civilly," the voice warned him mildly. "All the gentlemen present are not as patient as I am."

"What do you want of me?" demanded Evan. "Say it."

"You are absolutely in our power here, yet we are willing to release you on a certain condition."

"What's your proposition?"

"Give me your word of honor that you will leave Simeon Deaves's employ, and have no further relations with him or his son."

Evan considered what trap might be concealed behind this seemingly fair offer.

"What will the old miser ever do for you?" the voice went on, "or his slack-twisted son, for that matter? Let them stew in their own juice. Give me your word, and you'll be taken home to-night."

"And if I won't?" said Evan.

"Oh, we'll have to keep you prisoner until we have pulled off our big coup. I can't say how long that will be."

Evan said coolly: "Well, I'll see you all damned first."

There was a stir in the room. "Ah!" said the voice that fronted him, coolly. "As a young man of spirit I suppose you feel that is the only possible answer. It's too bad. You may go down-stairs."

He called for Aunt Liza. Evan was returned to his prison on the ground floor.

Aunt Liza said: "Sit down, honey. Be

a good boy and let me tie yo' feet together. If you acks ugly I'll have to call the gemmen."

Evan submitted. His ankles were bound, the bandage over his eyes removed, and he was left to his own devices.

CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE THIRD COUNT.

THE leaden minutes slowly added themselves up to hours. For a long time in his rage he could not think clearly. He was all for defiance, defiance though his life paid the forfeit. But in the end he was bound to cool off and a craftier voice began to advise him.

"I owe this gang neither truth nor loyalty," he thought. "They struck me from behind. They carried me off. They trussed me up like a fowl for roasting. They're about a dozen to one against me.

"By fair means I haven't a ghost of a show against them. Very well, I'll use foul. If they are simple enough to let me lie myself out of their hands, I'll do it."

Late in the evening he was sent for again. He was eager now to face his jailers. As before his eyes were blindfolded, and his ankles freed. Aunt Liza took him up-stairs and retired.

The mocking voice said: "Well, Weir, I didn't want to leave you in that rat-infested room all night without giving you a chance to change your mind. Wouldn't you rather sleep between your own sheets?"

"I would," said Evan coolly. "I have changed my mind. As you say, Simeon Deaves and his son are nothing to me. I will let them be hereafter."

"Good man," said the other. "You promise to have nothing further to do with them?"

"I promise to have nothing further to do with them."

A new voice spoke up, a voice that vibrated with anger and hate: "That's too thin! He's trying to fool us! Can't you hear the lie in his voice?"

"Wait a minute," said the other, "I'll put him under oath." Addressing Evan he said mockingly: "I don't know what your attitude toward the Bible is, but I'll take a chance. Will you swear it on the Bible?"

It suddenly came to Evan that they were just playing with him, that they had no intention of letting him go. Moreover that hateful voice had roused a fury in him that was incapable of making further pretences.

"I'll swear nothing," he said sullenly.

"That's too bad!" said the man who faced him, with hypocritical regret. Evan was sure now that they were grinning among themselves. "I'll have to return you to your luxurious chamber."

The harsh voice broke in again: "We're taking too big a chance, leaving him here. We can't stay here ourselves, and the woman is no match for him. He'll break out."

"What do you propose then?" asked the other man.

"He'll never let up against us. Look at that stubborn jaw. It's us or him!"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Put him out of the way!"

Evan thought: "They're bluffing!"

But he heard the gentlest voice among them murmur: "Oh, no! No!" And that was more convincing than the other man's abuse. A chill struck to his breast.

The angry man turned on him who had protested. "You be quiet! Your chicken-heartedness has spoiled our game more than once! What's the use of half measures? We're all good for prison sentences if we're caught. Mark my words! this man will put us all behind the bars if we don't put him where he can do no harm."

He whom Evan had taken to be the leader said: "This is not a question for us to decide. Put it up to the chief."

So he was not the chief then. One of them left the room. Evan wondered with a kind of awe at the leader who held himself so far above his men that he disdained to take part in their meetings.

Meanwhile he waited for the return of the messenger as an accused murderer waits for his jury. Silence filled the room. Through the windows came the voices of the cheerful katydids and the shrill tree-toads. A sudden sense of the sweetness of life stabbed Evan like a poniard.

The man was not gone long, nor did he keep Evan waiting for the verdict. "Chief

says I am right!" he blurted out—it was the harsh-voiced one. "Orders are let him pass out before we go home to-night."

A pent breath escaped from all those in the room. A rush of conflicting emotions made Evan dizzy; fear, the determination not to show fear, and that unmanning sense of the terrible sweetness of life. Oh, for a wall behind his back!

"So be it!" said the man in front of him soberly.

The other went on: "The arrangements are left to you. How are you going to do it?"

"I have the pistol that I took from him."

"What will we do with the body?"

"Let it lie. We're ready to flit from here anyway. It will be unrecognizable before it's discovered."

Evan visualized his own body putrefying, and the heart shriveled in his breast. He clenched his teeth. All he had left was pride. "I will show nothing," he repeated to himself.

With too much suffering, the whole scene became slightly unreal to him. He heard their talk as from a little distance:

"We will draw lots. Who's got a sheet of paper? Anything will do. This will do. Tear it in eight pieces. No, seven. Leave P. D. out. He couldn't pull the trigger if his own life depended on it.

"I mark a cross on one piece, see? Now fold each piece in four. Call Aunt Liza up-stairs. A hat? All right. Drop them in. Shake it up. Don't let anything on to Aunt Liza.

"Here she is. Aunt Liza, hold this hat above your head, so. Now come up to her, one at a time, and draw a paper. Do not open it until the last one is drawn."

A dreadful silence succeeded. The hard breathing of many men was audible in the room. Little cold drops sprang out in front of Evan's ears. A horrible constriction fastened on his breast, so that he could scarcely draw beath.

"Am I a coward?" he asked himself—and that caused him the sharpest pang of all. "Other men have died without flinching. Why do I suffer so?"

The resolute voice said: "Leave the room, Aunt Liza."

Evan heard the old negress shuffle out. She was the nearest thing to a friend that he had there.

"Now!" cried the man, with a sharp catch of excitement.

Evan heard the crackling of the little bits of paper, and heard their breath escape them variously.

"Who has it?"

"I have!" It was the harsh voice. "It's no more than fair, since I proposed it."

"Oh, it's too horrible!" sobbed the gentler voice. He ran out of the room.

"Let him go," said the harsh one. "This is no sight for kids."

"Here's the gun," said the other.

Evan thought: "Well, I won't take it standing still!"

Somewhere behind him the door was open. Putting his head down he charged for it. Instantly half a dozen pairs of hands seized him.

He was borne back until he crashed against a wall. He felt of it greatefully. A deep instinctive need was supplied by the feeling of something solid at his back.

"Take your hands off him," said the principal voice.

Evan was freed, but he knew they still stood close beside him. The voice went on peremptorily. "Stand still if you don't want to be pinned against the wall like an insect."

"Unbind my eyes!" cried Evan. "Let me see what's coming to me."

The voice replied in its grim drawl: "Sorry, but we can't let you take mental pictures of us, even to the other side."

"You're afraid to face me, you cowards!"

"Maybe. If you want to send any messages I'll transmit them."

Evan snatched at the chance. "I'd like to send a letter."

"All right." There was a pause while the speaker presumably found pencil and paper. "Go ahead."

Evan dictated Charley Straiker's address:

"DEAR CHARLEY:

"I have cut loose. I have taken to the trail. You will not see me again. I leave everything I have in my room to you. It will not make you rich.

"With one exception. I want to send my least-bad picture to a friend. It's the one I call 'Green and Gold,' the view of the square from my window in the morning light. There's a little frame that fits it. Write on the back of it—write— Oh, don't write anything. Wrap it up and address it to Miss Corinna Playfair. Take it to the steamboat Ernestina which will be lying at the pier, foot of East Twentieth Street on Saturday morning up to nine-thirty. Be good, old son. Here's how.

"EVAN."

"Are you ready?" demanded the harsh voice unexpectedly close.

"Shoot and be damned to you!" said Evan.

He felt a little rim of cold steel pressed against his temple. With that touch all Evan's agony rolled away. After all, what was life but a jest? Thank God! he was not a coward!

The other man was still speaking. Good God! would he never have done! "I will give you the word." Then he began to count: "One, two, three!"

Evan cried gaily: "So-long, all!"

"Fire!"

There was a deafening crash. Everything went from him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BACK TO EARTH.

LIKE a thin, torn rack of cloud scurrying across the night sky; like music so far away that the instrument and the air were alike unrecognizable; like an underexposed photograph; like the kiss of wind—such were Evan's vague impressions.

"What existence is this?" he asked himself. Consciousness was sweet and he was afraid to question it for fear of slipping back into nothingness. He lay exulting in his sensations.

As these sensations became stronger the questioning spirit would not be denied. "I breathe," he thought. "I feel my breast rise. Therefore I have a body. I hear a sound like the stirring of a breeze among leaves, and another sound, a strange, faint hum. And I see, though I am surrounded by darkness. It is night and out-of-doors."

The feeling of having awakened in a new existence wore off. He accepted that which surrounded him as the same old world. He found that he was lying on a soft bed of leaves in a woods. He was wrapped in a bed covering, a cotton coverlet, in fact.

He did not recognize it. He instinctively felt about for his hat and found it near. He stood erect, and found that his legs were able to perform their office. He started to walk blindly through the woods. There were no stars.

A certain part of his brain had stopped working. It was that part which reasoned from memory. He remembered nothing. He did things without knowing why he did them. He came to a road; he knew it was a road, and knew what roads were for.

He followed it. He was dimly conscious that he was not in a normal condition, but the fact did not distress him: on the contrary he experienced a fine lightness of spirit; it was enough for him that the blood was stirring in his veins, and the night air was cool and sweet.

Presently he heard a whirring sound familiar to his senses, and saw the oscillating reflection of a bright light around a bend in the road; an automobile. He hastily dived into the underbrush at the side. He had no reason to be afraid, but in his present state he felt a shivering repugnance to showing himself to his fellow-creatures.

When the car had passed he returned to the road. A few paces farther on, the trees at his right hand opened up, and a wonderful panorama was spread before him; a great, dark, gleaming river far below, and on the other side myriads upon myriads of fairylike white lights, like fireflies arrested in mid-flight. From this direction came the faint hum he had remarked.

Evan knew instinctively that this was the city, and that he must get there. He saw further that he was bound in the wrong direction. The way he was heading the lights were thinning out; the thickest clusters were behind him.

His instinct further told him that where the lights were thick he would find a way to cross the river. So he retraced his steps.

By and by houses began to rise alongside the road, all dark-windowed and still. "It is very late," thought Evan. Finally

the road came to an end at the gates of a ferry-house.

Evan automatically produced a coin to pay his fare, and passed on board the boat. There were but few passengers. He gave them a wide berth.

Reaching the other shore he started walking toward the center of the city. Coming to a place where trains of cars passed to and fro on a trestle overhead, he climbed a flight of steps to a station, and producing another coin, entered a train.

He was perfectly able to see, to hear, to read the advertising cards in the train, but it was all new and inexplicable to him. Some power outside of his consciousness was directing his steps. In the brightly lighted car he shivered under the gaze of his fellow-passengers, but nobody paid him any special regard.

At a certain station something stirred his feet, and they bore him off the train, down the steps and through certain streets to a certain door facing upon a little park. Fronted by this door his hand dived into his pocket and brought forth a key which opened it.

Like a sleep-walker he mounted to the top of the house and entered a room there. Something in the aspect of this room caused a deep sigh of satisfaction to escape him; he knew where everything was without lighting the gas. Undressing and climbing into bed, he fell into a dreamless sleep.

He was awakened by a pillow flung at his head. He beheld a grinning, sharp-featured face under a shock of lank, molasses-candy-colored hair, a face as dear and familiar to him as the room, and he knew that the owner of it was called Charley.

"Aren't you going to get up to-day?"

"Go to hell!" said Evan, grinning back. Oh, but the sight of his friend was good to his eyes. Something real, something familiar, something that identified this poor wandering soul and gave it a locus.

"You must have made a night of it," remarked Charley.

Some deep instinct still bade Evan to conceal his condition. "What's for breakfast?" he cried, jumping up.

"Same old stunt! Beggs and acon."

"Gee! I'm as hungry as a hunter. Break me three *Humpty-Dumpties* and fry them sunny side up."

Charley perceived nothing amiss. Breakfast was partaken of to the accompaniment of the usual airy persiflage. Evan knew very well that Charley could supply the clues to his lost identity, but he couldn't bring himself to ask him directly.

He kept his ears open for any chance remarks that might throw light on the matter, but Charley's style was so flowery he didn't get much. Charley finally departed on some errand of his own.

Left alone, Evan went about his room, touching the familiar objects, looking into everything, trying to fill in that blank space in his mind. As soon as he saw the paraphernalia he knew he was a painter.

His pictures interested him greatly. He knew they were his own pictures, but he had lost all sense of kinship with them. In a way it was a great advantage; he brought a fresh point of view to bear.

"I see what's the matter with them," he said to himself. "You have been trying to convey the inner spirit of things without being sufficiently sure of their outward form. What you've got to do is to study the outsides of things further, and invite the spirit to express itself."

So interested was he that he put a fresh canvas on his easel on the spot, and started to paint. Any object would serve to prove his new theory; their brown pitcher with a broken spout and a green bowl beside it on the table. An hour passed without his noticing its flight.

Charley returned.

"Hello!" he said. "Had another row with your old man?"

"Old man!" thought Evan. "Oh, nothing much!" he said aloud.

"Well, I must say you take your job pretty lightly," said Charley.

Evan thought: "So I have a job."

Charley went on: "There was a story in the paper this morning about one of your lot. I brought it in. Sounds fishy."

Evan pricked up his ears.

Charley read:

"A reporter assigned to police headquarters happened to see Inspector Durdan, chief of the Detective Bureau, and five plain-clothes men climb-

ing into a covered motor van on Mulberry Street yesterday, and scenting a good story, followed in a taxicab. Naturally, the inspector does not personally take part except in raids of some importance. The chase led to No. 11 Van Dorn Street. Van Dorn is an obscure little street on the far West Side.

"An agitated individual was discovered on the steps of this house, whom the reporter recognized as Mr. George Deaves, son of the multimillionaire. He cried out to the police: 'He's gone in! He's gone in!' The police forced their way into the house. One was left at the door, and the reporter was not allowed to enter. Through the open door he saw other police inside, who must have entered from the back. They were searching the house. One called down-stairs: 'They've gone over the roofs toward Macdougal Street,' whereupon several of the police started to run down the block to the corner of Macdougal and the reporter followed.

"He was just in time to see two men issue from a tenement house, carrying what looked like a corpse of a third between them. The body was wrapped in an old cotton comforter. They threw it in a waiting taxi and make a getaway, though the police fired in the air and ordered them to stop.

"At police headquarters all information was refused. At Mr. Deaves's residence word was sent out that Mr. Deaves had not been out that morning. The woman who keeps the Van Dorn Street house, a Mrs. Patten, either would not or could not tell what had happened."

At this point in the story Charley looked up to see how Evan was taking it. Seeing Evan's expression he forgot to read the rest.

Evan was staring into vacancy as if he saw a ghost. As a matter of fact, complete recollection had returned in a great flash, and the reaction was dizzying. His first conscious act was to feel of his temple. It was whole.

"What's the matter with you?" cried Charley.

"I—I was that corpse," stammered Evan.

"Have you gone crazy?"

"Here, I've got to see about this!" cried Evan, and seizing his hat he ran out.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TREACHERY.

EVAN took a taxicab to the Deaves house. He took out his pocketbook to pay the driver. It was the first time he had used it.

The money in it was intact, but something had been added, a little note. Evan read it while the driver made change:

> You've got good luck. When the pistol missed fire we decided to let you off. Take warning. Keep away from the Deaves outfit or next time you'll get a ball.

Evan thought: "The pistol did not miss fire. It was loaded with a blank. The whole scene was staged just to break my nerve. I passed out temporarily just as a result of self-suggestion.

"Lord! What a weak-minded fool I was! But, by God! I'll get square with them! This is how I answer their threat!"

He glared around him defiantly, hoping he was watched, and rang the bell of the Deaves house.

The servant who opened the door looked at him queerly. This successor to Alfred was more respectful, but Evan did not trust him much further. "Where is Mr. George Deaves?" asked Evan.

"I don't think you can see him just now, sir," was the answer. "He's up-stairs."

"And Mr. Simeon Deaves?"

"He's in the library, I believe."

"I'll go up there."

As they got further into the house shrill cries, muffled by several doors, reached Evan's ears.

"What's that?" he asked, startled.

"Mrs. Deaves, sir," said the man demurely.

"What's the matter with her?"

"Hysterics, I believe, sir."

"Ah!" said Evan.

He found Simeon Deaves in the library. The old man greeted him with the unvarying, sly grin. There was something inhuman about that grin. Nothing could move the old man much—save the threatened loss of money.

"So you got here," he said with cheerful indifference. "George told me they carried you off. How did you get clear?"

Evan told him briefly what had happened—keeping certain details to himself.

"Pooh! Sounds like a melodrama!" said the old man. "Don't believe a word of it!"

Evan, well used to his ways by now, simply shrugged.

"There's the devil to pay here this morn-

ing," the old man went on, grinning like a mischievous boy at others' misfortunes. "Maud got a letter from them, and went into hysterics."

He pointed up-stairs and laughed his noiseless laugh. "Hear her? George is up there slapping her hands and begging her to come to, and he'll pay the money. That's no way to treat hysterics. George is a fool."

Evan heard a heavy step on the stairs. "Here he comes," he said.

The old man, notwithstanding his expressed contempt for his son, was not anxious to face him. "Well, well, I've got to go down-stairs," he said, shuffling rapidly out by the small door.

George Deaves entered. Evan could not but feel sorry for him, absurd figure though he was. He looked as if his backbone had lost its pith; he sagged. His necktie was awry, and his hair hung dankly over his forehead, his mouth hung open; he looked like a man nauseated with perplexity.

"So you're here," he said to Evan, not any more concerned about his fate than his father had been.

Evan repeated his brief tale. George Deaves made no comment; scarcely seemed to listen to it in fact.

Evan said: "I suppose the police are looking for me?"

Deaves nodded.

"Then I had better report to them?"

This partly roused Deaves from his apathy. "Leave that to me," he said. "I will see that they are told what is necessary. I don't want any more fuss."

"Mr. Simeon Deaves tells me another letter has been received this morning."

"I can't discuss that with you," said George Deaves stiffly.

Evan's eyebrows went up. "Indeed!" he said.

The weak man could not face out Evan's indignant stare. "Oh, I don't blame you," he mumbled. "But I'm sorry I listened to you yesterday. Mrs. Deaves is heartbroken at what she considers my deception."

Evan reflected grimly that a broken heart does not customarily take itself out in hysterics, but he kept the reflection to himself.

"You will have to go," said George Deaves.

Suddenly a hurricane blew into the room in the person of Maud Deaves with her hair and kimono flying. The innocent Evan stood aghast at the terrible secrets of the boudoir that were revealed.

The magnificent Mrs. Deaves was reduced by rage to the level of a furious fish-wife, yet lower, for no fish-wife ever so far neglects self-interest in her rage. Mrs. Deaves's face was splotched and livid; unbridled passion had added fifteen years. She addressed her husband with a ridiculous assumption of calmness.

"They told me this person was here. I came down to see that you did your duty! This clever rascal has twisted you about his finger once too often for me!"

Evan flushed up. "Are you referring to me?"

"Yes, I am!" she cried. "You've been a nuisance in the house from the first with your officious meddling! You take too much on yourself! You forget your place!"

"Good Heavens, madam, *I* didn't write the story about your marriage!" said Evan with meaning.

It never reached her. In the fury she had worked up, she had conveniently forgotten that she had written it herself.

"Don't answer me back!" she cried, beside herself. "I don't know whether you did or not. I don't know whether you're more a rascal or a fool! But I know we're done with you. You're discharged, do you understand? You can go!"

Evan stared at her in frank amazement. Then he laughed. He was sorely tempted to tell what he knew, but when he looked at the crushed figure at the desk, he hadn't the heart. He wasn't going to take his dismissal from her, though.

"Mr. Deaves, do you wish me to go?" he asked.

George Deaves nodded.

"Very well," said Evan. "It suits me!" He bowed ironically to each of them, and left the room.

In the lower hall on his way out he was arrested by a cautious "Sst! Sst!" The old man appeared from around a corner. With many a furtive look over his shoulder, he pulled Evan into the small reception-room off the hall.

"Did they fire you?" he asked.

"They did," said Evan grimly.

"Well, well, well!" said the old man with that unalterable grin. "You're a good boy, too! I always said so! But what can anybody do with a wilful woman! So we've had our last walk together, eh?"

He really seemed to be sorry. So was Evan. In spite of all Simeon Deaves was a funny old cuss. "Our last walk!" said Evan.

"But of course you're not worth what George pays you," he added quickly. "Nothing like! Nothing like!"

The old fellow was incorrigible. Evan laughed. "Well, good-by," he said without any hard feeling.

"Wait a minute. Say, I hate to think of those blackguards getting away with the money afer all."

"So do I," said Evan quickly.

"Why don't you go after them yourself?"

"Where is the money to be sent to-day?"

"To the library."

"Do you remember what book was mentioned?"

"Yes. 'The Life and Letters of Turbit Slaughter,' Riverside edition."

"Well, maybe I will," said Evan. "I owe them something on my own account."

"That's right! That's right. If you land those rascals behind the bars, I'll mention you in my will."

"That's kind of you," said Evan dryly.

Evan didn't care to show his eagerness to the old man, but as a matter of fact his heart jumped at the suggested chance of getting back at the gang. He could hardly hope to do anything at the library in his own person, but Charley's assistance might be enlisted. Evan hastened home to get him.

An hour later Evan and Charley called upon the librarian who had assisted Evan and George Deaves on the former occasion. In the mean time Charley had been told the story of the previous night's happenings, and he was eager to take a hand in the game.

Evan said to the librarian: "Mr. Deaves received another demand for money this morning."

The librarian naturally assumed that Evan was still in his employ, and it was not necessary for Evan to lie in that connection.

A similar arrangement to the previous one was made. An inquiry revealed the fact that Turbit Slaughter's Letters had just been returned to the shelves.

They were brought to the librarian's office, and Evan found that the bills were indeed in volume one. He marked them and the books were returned with instructions that they were to be notified when they were again called for. Evan and Charley waited.

They were called for in an hour, and from the same seat in the reading-room as on the former occasion, No. 433. Charley and the librarian departed for the reading-room. Charley's instructions were to make very sure that the bills were actually abstracted from the book, and then to apprehend the man who took them, without waiting for him to get out of the building, and to call on any of the library attendants for assistance if need be.

Meanwhile Evan waited in the librarian's office, prepared to take a hand when the alarm was raised.

But no alarm was raised. Evan waited half an hour in the keenest impatience and then the librarian returned alone.

"What happened?" demanded Evan.

"Nothing—as yet," was the answer. "I took your friend around through the American History room, just as I took you that day, and explained to him the location of seat No. 433. Since there was no danger of his being recognized he went right into the reading-room and took a seat at the same table.

"I scarcely liked to show myself, so I waited in the adjoining room. I had an attendant there in case he needed help.

"But we heard no sound, and when I finally looked into the reading-room I saw that your friend had gone, and that seat No. 433 was also empty. The books were lying on the table. The money had been taken. So I came back here to tell you."

Evan was anxious and perplexed. "I don't understand what could have happened," he said. "If the crook got away in

spite of him, why didn't he come back here to report?"

"Perhaps he's still on his trail."

"But he was told not to let him get out of the building. There's nothing for me to do, I suppose, but wait here."

Evan waited in the librarian's office until after lunch, but Charley neither came back nor sent any word. By the end of that time Evan, divided between anger and anxiety, was in a fever. He decided to make a trip home.

By the time he reached Washington Square anxiety had the upper hand. The gang must have got the better of Charley, he told himself, or he would have had some word.

Evan had had experience of the desperate lengths to which they were prepared to go. Would they now put their final threat into execution upon his hapless friend? Evan blamed himself bitterly for having sent Charley into danger.

"If I do not hear from him during the afternoon, I'll send out a general alarm at police headquarters," he thought.

When Evan opened the door of 45A, Miss Sisson, according to her custom, stuck her head out into the hall.

"I suppose you haven't seen Mr. Straiker," said Evan.

"Yes I have," she answered. "He came in about lunch time."

"What!" said Evan staring.

"He came in and packed his trunk and took it away in a taxicab. Said he was going away for a few days. Wouldn't tell me where he was going.

"Seemed funny to me he wanted his trunk if it was only a few days, but of course I couldn't object, for his rent is paid up and he left his furniture anyway, though that wouldn't bring much.

"I will say he acted funny, though, to an old friend like me. Wouldn't give me any information."

Evan stared at the woman as if he thought she had suddenly lost her mind. Then without a word he ran up the three flights of stairs.

A glance in Charley's room confirmed what she had told him. Things were thrown about in the wildest confusion. But all Charley's clothes were gone, as well as all the personal belongings that he treasured.

Evan never gave a thought to the five thousand dollars; what cut him to the quick was the suggestion that his friend had betrayed him. There is nothing bitterer.

"I needn't have been so anxious about him," he thought grimly. "This is more like treachery!"

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.

LOVE'S ETERNITY

BY H. THOMPSON RICH

LAST night a bird flew through the hall,
Hung like a shadow on the wall
One moment—and was gone.

Swift as a bird is love to pass,
Swift as the turning of the grass.

As summer comes, so summer goes,
Nor heeds the petals of the rose—
All crimson on the lawn.

Then come, why think of days to be?
To-day is our eternity.

Clung

by Max Brand

Author of "The Untamed," "Children of the Night," "Trailin'," etc.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DRUNK.

"LISTEN," said John Sampson, and held up a warning forefinger.

Then from the next room there came a thrilling voice:

"What made the ball so fine?
Robin Adair;
What made the assembly shine?
Robin Adair!"

"She's up at last," commented Kirk. "Well, isn't it time? Near noon, Sampson."

"Time!" grunted the financier in disgust. "Kirk, there isn't an eye left to you, no, nor an ear! D'you ever hear of a girl waking up at noon and starting to sing?"

"Why," said Kirk, "Winifred always had a cheerful disposition."

"Until she started on the trail of Clung," corrected her father.

"That's right again."

"Well?"

"I don't follow you."

"Kirk, you're a total loss."

"Sorry."

"The devil you are! Sorry for nothing these days. You go about with your head in the air and fire in your eyes like a man about to make a million dollars. What do you do with yourself? Still spending your time in Yo Chai's house?"

"Part of it," said Kirk, non-committally.

"In fact," said the gloomy millionaire, "you act so much like Winifred that sometimes I think there's a secret between you. Out with it, Kirk! What's the secret?"

The big man started and eyed the other carefully for a moment. Then, convinced that there was no covert suggestion in the remark, he answered: "No secret. None between us, at least. You've grown suspicious, Sampson. This Clung business is getting on your nerves."

"I've lost twenty pounds," groaned Sampson, "because of that damned man-killer. You came down here to help me. Why the devil don't you do it?"

"Tell me where to start," suggested Kirk.

"If I knew where to start for him," responded the other, "I'd send a posse and not one man."

His manner changed; the father came into his voice as he laid a hand on the shoulder of Kirk and went on: "As a matter of fact, I'm seriously worried, Kirk, and I need your help."

"You can count on me to the limit."

"I know I can, I know I can, my lad, and there's a lot of comfort in the thought. I always prized you, Kirk, in a good many ways—but since you've come South this time you seem much more of a prize than before. You seem more alert—stronger—keener—more of a man; you seem, in a word, to have come into your own!"

"I think," said Kirk softly, and his eyes smiled rather grimly into the distance, "that you're right."

"Enough of that," went on Sampson. "My trouble just now is less with Clung than with Winifred herself. Listen! You'd think the girl were in love! That phrase, there! Gad! she could bring down a New York audience with singing like that!"

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for April 10.

"She could," nodded Kirk. "She's devilish rare in more ways than one, sir."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Why, nothing."

"Here's my point, Kirk. You know how little she's said about Clung the last few days—ever since we reached Kirby Creek, in fact?"

"Yes. But she's found something else to think about."

"You don't know her, lad. She's a veritable bulldog for hanging on to an idea. Nothing but death will part her from something she wants. Haven't I raised her, confound it? Well, Kirk, I've wondered at the way she allowed Clung to lapse, and I've watched her closely for the last few days, and last night after she'd gone to bed I sat up for a time thinking. Finally I decided to confront her pointblank with a question. I went to her door and knocked. Gad, man, what do you think happened?"

"There was no answer," nodded Kirk.

Sampson started violently.

"By the Lord," he cried, "you and she are playing some sort of a midnight game together! You're right, there was no answer, and when I opened her door and went in I found the room empty and there was no sign of Winifred. The bed had not been touched. Kirk, what's the meaning of this?"

"I think I can tell you—in a way."

"What do you mean, 'in a way'?"

"Just this. The first night we came here you remember we came back pretty late after going down to Yo Chai's gaming house and seeing the shooting scrape?"

"Exactly. The same night you went back and played the wheel. That's what started you on this gambling, Kirk."

"I wasn't the only one who went back to Kirby Creek that night."

"Winifred!" gasped Sampson.

"Exactly. She left the house just before I did. I saw her horse disappear; before I could get mine out and follow her she had disappeared toward the town. I rode hard for Yo Chai's place, but she wasn't there. I stayed a while to play the wheel, you know, and on my way back I saw Winifred come out of a house and climb on her horse."

"Come out of a house?" repeated Sampson, white of face.

"Exactly! I rode up to her. But she turned her horse and galloped like mad up the valley. She beat me home."

"And you said nothing about it to me?" asked Sampson hoarsely.

"If she had wished you to know it, she would have told you," said Kirk coldly. "I waited for her to speak."

"God!" breathed the elder man, and straightened to his feet.

He sat down again with a thump, and his eyes remained mutely fixed upon Kirk.

"You think—" he whispered.

"I think nothing," said Kirk, and shrugged his shoulders. "But the house she came out of that night was Yo Chai's. Perhaps Clung was inside it."

"Damn him!"

"It's only a guess."

"It must be right," groaned Sampson, "and now she knows everything about Clung—knows he's white—knows—"

He stopped and blinked his eyes.

"Kirk, I'm in hell!"

"Nonsense," said the younger man, and he frowned. "I'd trust Winifred to the end of the earth. If I thought—"

"If you thought Clung was in Yo Chai's house," suggested Sampson dryly, "you'd go there with a gun to find him, and be shot from behind a door, eh? I suppose you would, Kirk. That's your way. But I know that Winifred has been at Yo Chai's house every night for this week or more and she's been seeing some one there who—"

He looked to Kirk for help, but the other was blank.

"Don't you see?" suggested Kirk. "She likes to do strange things. She's gone secretly to see Clung because he's an out of the way sort? That's all there is to it; and she doesn't dream that he's white. If she did, don't you suppose that she'd run to you to tell it? What keeps her from speaking to you now is because she knows you're only interested on the surface in a half-breed outlaw."

"I'll follow her to-night," said Sampson, hurriedly. "I'll follow her to-night, if she goes out, and if she goes into the house of Yo Chai—"

"Well?"

"Then God help me!"

"Bah!" snorted Kirk, and he rose as if this conversation wearied him. "In the mean time I'm going to find out all about Clung—if Yo Chai really has him in shelter."

"How?"

"Well, you know that I've been playing the machines in Yo Chai's place?"

"Yes, and beating them with fool, blind luck."

"And to-night I'm going down with a mule load of gold and play old Yo Chai himself. I'm going to break him, and after he's broke, I'll offer him all his money back if he'll tell me what he knows of Clung."

"And *if* he tells you?"

"I'll take Clung and serve him a handsome horsewhipping and send him out of the country. The puppy needs a lesson for playing about with Winifred in this manner."

The elder man searched the face of Kirk with the beginning of a sarcastic smile which gradually died away.

"By gad, Kirk," he muttered at length, "I almost believe that you're man enough to do it. And then Winifred? You're my last hope with her, Billy!"

"When the time comes," said Kirk calmly, "I'll go to her and take her."

"Take—Winifred?" gasped the financier, his emphasis rising.

"Once," said Kirk harshly, "she promised to marry me. It's a bond on her still. She's my woman!"

"Are you drunk, Billy?" asked the other anxiously.

"Drunk?" thundered Kirk suddenly. "Yes, I am drunk!"

He threw his great arms above his head in a gesture of exultation.

"Drunk with life, Sampson, and drunk with living. I've crept out of the little rat-hole I used to call the world, and now I'm seeing things as they really are. Drunk? If this is drunkenness I hope to God I'm never sober. Winifred? Bah! What is she but a woman—a pretty girl. When I want her, Sampson, I'll come and take her!"

"There will be a fine little war over this," answered Sampson. "I suppose I ought to be irritated to hear you talk of my daughter like this, but I'm not. It rather pleases me in a way to think of the little tyrant finding a master. But, gad, Kirk, what a war there'll be when you come to her like this!"

He chuckled at the thought.

"D'you think so?" asked Kirk carelessly. "Not a bit, sir, not a bit. We've handled our women too gently. What they need is a master who'll show 'em their right place—and that place is at the foot of the table. S-long."

"Wait!" called Sampson, and he trotted up to the side of the big man. "I've got a dozen things to ask you."

"*Mañana!*" snarled Kirk. "To-day I'm busy. I'm going down now to break Yo Chai!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE LOAD OF GOLD.

HIS broad shoulders bulked in the door, blocking it from side to side, and then he swung down the path to the stable. In a few moments he was trotting down the road to Kirby Creek leading a pack mule behind him. It was a small pack, but a weighty one, for it contained in gold all the tens of thousands of dollars which Kirk had won from the gaming house of Yo Chai.

In the street of the mining town many men knew him, for he had grown the most conspicuous figure in the gaming house of Yo Chai. They shouted their salutations and he waved a hand back at them. A tipsy miner stopped him and proffered a drink from a flask. Kirk accepted and half drained the flask at a single swallow.

"Where you bound?" asked the miner, who was too drunk to recognize the lucky gambler.

"Bound for Yo Chai's," said Kirk, "with a mule-load of gold. I'm going to break him."

It was too spectacular an announcement to be overlooked. Rumor took up the tale with her thousand tongues, and the tongues of rumor in Kirby Creek did not whisper. They shouted aloud and men heard the an-

nouncement with a joyous cheer. This was better than gold-digging. Some of them had seen Yo Chai break Skinny Wallace. All of them had heard the tale. Now they flocked to see the Chinaman "get his." They swarmed across the street in front of William Kirk like the vanguard of an advancing army. And Kirk, his flannel shirt open at the throat, his face darkened with the unshaven growth of two days, cheered them on, and they cheered him to the echo in return.

Into the doors of Yo Chai's place the host poured. Kirk dismounted at the entrance, tethered his horse, and strode on through the doors, leading the pack-mule straight to the center of the gaming house. The place was in riotous tumult. From every table the players stood up, staring at the strange host of invaders, and finally joining their voices to the clamor. The drunken miner who had stopped Kirk in the street now went forward like a herald. Instead of a baton he carried his nearly empty whisky flask. Climbing onto the dais at which Yo Chai sat, he flourished the flask around his head and brought it down on the table; it crashed in a million splinters of shivering glass, and the gamblers at this central place shrank back from the deadly shower.

"Get up!" yelled the drunkard. "Get up and let a gen'lmun with a mule-load of gold play ag'in' the damn' Chink!"

They rose willingly enough and turned to gape at Kirk, who stood with his mule behind him wagging its long ears. Clung rose also, and smiled on the drunkard; under that cold smile the fumes of whisky receded suddenly from the fellow's mind.

"Get off the platform," said Clung gently.

"D'you think," yelled the miner, "that any damn' Chinaman this side of hell can make me take water?"

The smile persisted on the face of Clung and his head was tilting back.

"Quick!" he said.

The miner staggered backward, keeping his eyes, as if fascinated, on the face of the proprietor. He tripped on the edge of the platform and tumbled headlong to the floor, raising a shout of joy from the crowd.

"Take him," said Clung.

Two servants grasped him by either arm and dragged him from the place. The hubbub rose to an inferno. Through it the voice of Clung cut like a knife, not loudly, but with a sharp, metallic sound distinct from the hoarse roaring of many throats.

"Silence!" he calls.

He repeated it once more, and the confusion died away, falling to a hum in the farther corners.

"Yo Chai," said Clung, turning his smile upon Kirk, "has been waiting for you. Name your game."

Kirk stepped onto the dais, laughing.

"For a game chap," he said to Yo Chai, "you rank with the best, and I hate to do it. But a gambler takes his chances. And because of that I'm going to break you, Yo."

"This," said Clung, "is pleasant talk to Yo Chai. What is the game?"

"Something quick," answered Kirk. "Stud-poker, eh?"

"You can pick your dealer," said Clung, and waved toward the crowd.

Kirk chose at random from the faces nearest him, and he selected a small man with white hair and beard and wrinkling eyes that shone with honesty. They settled at once around the table. So the game began.

As for the rest of the house, there was not a single table in action. Every one stood up and waited. A self-elected talesman mounted the dais where he could command a view of the game and proceeded to enlighten the listening crowd in a voice of thunder: "Ace to Yo Chai, seven of spades to Kirk; jack of hearts to Yo, king of clubs to Kirk, etc."

And people cheered when Kirk won and groaned when he lost.

Which was not often. He won the first three hands in a row and the table in front of him was piled high with chips, for the betting ran a hundred dollars at a clip. It was worthy of Monte Carlo at its reckless best. The fourth hand Yo Chai won. The fifth hand Kirk wagered a thousand on a pair of sevens, was called by Yo Chai, and won over a pair of fours. The whole house went wild.

Manifestly there was little of skill in

this. It seemed the point of honor for each man to take the bet of the other, no matter how high the bet might be placed. It was gambling raised to the *n*th power; it satisfied even the hardened heart of the Southwest.

The spectators began to pool their money and gamble recklessly on the side, for the high stakes of the central table set the pace. Gold gleamed and rang on all sides, and changed hands as the voice of the stentorian announcer boomed out the results. The gold on the back of Kirk's mule had not been touched, and the chips before him were stacked high.

Already the spectators were beginning to imagine what the place would be in the hands of the new owner. He would be hard to beat, they all agreed. And they waited breathlessly for the time when Yo Chai should rise with his head tilting back and his lazy smile announce: "Gentlemen, the bank is broke!"

A red-letter day even among the sensations of Kirby Creek. Something to be remembered. A dozen men lined the bar drinking the luck and health of Kirk. Every man's voice and hand was against the "damn' Chink."

But the certainty with which he had entered the house was rapidly leaving the heart of Kirk. It was the unshakable calm of Yo Chai which daunted him. It was the very size of his own winnings which unnerved him. First it began to seem to him that Yo Chai had resources which even his greatest winning could never drain. Then, again, he felt that the half smile on the lips of the seeming Oriental was a continual mockery. Perhaps Yo Chai had a reason for consenting to this game. He wondered if all his successes had been purposely planned so that he would be led on and on until he began to lose, and then he would give doubly all that he had taken.

Surely there must be some trickery in the business, hidden from sight. How else could any mortal man, Occidental or Oriental, sit there so calmly and see good dollars depart by the thousands. He began to hate Yo Chai; he began to wait for the turning of the game.

Then he wished that he had not chosen this day for the game. Then that he had not brought so much money to wager. Then that he had not brought more. He decided to cash in the chips that were before him, and was on the very point of doing it and turning away, when he remembered the breathless crowd which waited for his victory. He could not leave. He turned in his chair and saw on every side scores of burning eyes fastened upon him, waiting, waiting. They burned their way into his brain. He called for a drink.

"It is waiting beside you," said Yo Chai.

"You knew I'd drink?" thundered Kirk, suddenly and unreasonably angered. "You Chink devil, d'you think you can beat me, drunk or sober? T'hell with you and your crooked plans!"

He raised the glass from the tray which the patient Chinese servant held, tossed off his drink and turned to wager a thousand on the hand. He lost.

The chill of that loss counterbalanced the flushing heat of the whisky. He decided to play cautiously. With care he could so husband his chips that when the house closed that night he would still save a comfortable margin. From now on he would not wager high on anything lower than three of a kind.

But once more he remembered the hungry, waiting eyes of the crowd. He dared not start a conservative game after that wild, spectacular opening. From the tray beside him he raised another glass.

After that there came a time when he played automatically, scarcely knowing what he did, until he finally caught his voice saying: "Call a hundred, raise a hundred."

And the soft rejoinder of Yo Chai: "With what, sir?"

He looked up with a start from his trance. The chips had disappeared in front of him. They were piled now before Yo Chai.

"Lead up the mule!" he shouted to the crowd.

And when the mule was led up he wrenched open one of the hampers and dragged out a ponderous canvas sack, chiming as he jounced it down on the table. The whole house rang with the cheer of the crowd.

And as if that cheer had brought him luck, he began to win again until half the pile of chips had drifted back to his side of the table. He drank again, and ordered drinks for every one in the house. And there were hundreds. Another cheer for Kirk, but this time he lost.

Lost three heavy wagers in a row.

A heavy, sullen anger possessed him, and with it a certainty that he would lose. He felt, also, that if he could break away from the table only for a moment he would change the luck of the game. Now he knew that it was the eye of Yo Chai, steady, inflexible, which was breaking his spirit and making him play stupidly.

"I'm cramped from sitting down so long," he said. "Besides, I'm hungry. I'm going over to the bar to eat."

"It is good," nodded Yo Chai, and smiled encouragement.

He wanted to take that yellow throat and crush it. It would not be hard to do; hardly the work of a moment.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A PLEASANT EVENING.

WHEN he turned from the dais and glanced over the heads of the crowd toward the doors he was astonished to see that it was already dark; yet the crowd still hung about the place, waiting. Assuredly they wished him well, but it seemed as if his mind was breaking under the burden of their anxiety. There was a dull ache above his eyes as he turned toward the bar.

They accepted the recess in the game with approbation and fresh rounds of drinks. They literally fought their way to get close to the gambler as he walked toward the bar, and he had to lean forward and shoulder his way through them in a manner that reminded him of his football days. A thousand good wishes rang at his ear, but he said: "Give me room, boys, and a chance at a sandwich. I'm starved."

A dozen hands reached to supply his wants and there were clamors to learn how much he had lost. He did not know that himself, and he shrugged the questions away with carefully assumed indifference and set himself to eating. Seeing that he would not talk they turned to other topics; moreover, the game had proceeded so long that some of its interest was now worn away. Finally he heard a voice near him, at the bar, lowered in the way that proclaims something of vital interest.

And another man said in surprise: "That little old chap?" And he pointed.

Kirk turned his head in the direction of the pointed arm and made out a withered fellow of about fifty, evidently as hard as tanned leather. He made his way unobtrusively through the crowd, which gave way before him.

"Yep," said the first speaker beside Kirk, "that's Charlie Morgan himself."

"Speakin' personal," mused the other of the two, "he don't look much to me."

"He don't," agreed the first man, "but I've seen him fan his gun and knock over a rabbit at twenty yards. That's straight. They's a lot of talk about these fast gun-fighters that fan a gun, but outside of Charlie Morgan I ain't never seen it done."

"And him you've seen do it once?" suggested the other, scornfully.

"A dozen times, I tell you. I was out with him trappin'. Maybe there's some that's faster on the draw than old Charlie, but there ain't none surer, and I bet twice on the sure shooter for once on the feller that makes a snappy draw and can't hit the side of a barn when he gets his iron out."

"So he's going out after the Night Hawk?" queried the other.

"You don't have to talk low. Charlie wants the whole of Kirby Creek to know it. He's going right down the ravine to-night with his pack-mule and he's going to have a bit of dust in the pack. He *wants* the Night Hawk to know he's coming, and he swears he'll get Dave Spenser's hide to-night. You see, 'Happy' Lynch was Charlie's partner, and when Charlie heard that Happy 'd been bumped off by Spenser, it made him so riled he couldn't sleep of nights. So he come up here to bag the Night Hawk."

"Here's wishin' him luck," said the other, "but I got my doubts."

"I ain't," said the first speaker. "Of course the Night Hawk might down him from behind, but that ain't the Night Hawk's way. He tackles his meat from the front. And give 'em a square break like that and I bet on old Charlie Morgan."

"What time's he go up the valley? I'd like to see him start."

"Says he's going at moonrise. I dunno jest when that 'll be."

"Seems to me," said a dry voice near Kirk, "that Yo Chai is about used up his patience waitin' for you, partner."

Kirk turned and went back to the table. The mouthful of food had strengthened him; the drink seemed to have cleared his brain, and as he settled into his chair at the table it seemed to him that he could break Yo Chai through the sheer force of physical strength and superior size.

He started again with the old recklessness, but it was as if his brief absence had broken his power over the cards. He was losing now two hands out of three. He emptied one of the mule's hampers. He began on the other.

In spite of himself the mental stupor returned, the feeling that he was being hypnotized into stupidity, and with it rose the sullen anger—the desire to kill. The occasional drinks he took, instead of clearing his brain, were like oil on the fire. Half the time he sat with his attention fixed on the loose sleeves of Yo Chai, waiting for the appearance of one of the cards which he was sure must be buried up the sleeve of the Chinaman. But there was never the least flickering of cardboard there to give an excuse for the gun-play. He lifted the last sack of gold from the hamper; it followed the course of the rest; he was broke. And all that he had won from Yo Chai had flowed back to the gaming house. He rose, forcing himself to smile. One must lose at cards gracefully in the Southwest.

"Yo Chai," he said, "there's some golden lining for you. And here's thanking you for a pleasant evening."

There was a little hum of approval, almost stern, from the bystanders. Clung rose and bowed deeply.

"It is true," he said, "but it is not the last."

"No?" asked Kirk sharply.

"You will come again to Yo Chai," said Clung, "for the luck may run another way. It is like water. It cannot always run uphill."

And he made a little smiling gesture to indicate the inferiority of his height.

"You will come," said Clung, smiling still, and nodding, "again, and again, and still again. To-night there was a time when Yo Chai had only ten chips—ten pieces of gold—one hundred dollars—that was all."

"By God," groaned Kirk, "did I come as close as that?"

"Ah," smiled Clung, "the heart of Yo Chai was cold many times to-night."

"I believe," frowned Kirk, "that you're mocking me, you old scoundrel, but I *am* coming back, Yo Chai, and I'll bring more money the next time—a check-book, Yo."

"It is very good," sighed Clung, "your paper is better to Yo Chai than another man's gold. It is true."

"There's a double meaning in you," mused Kirk, "but I'll think it out some other time. *Adios.*"

He turned and strode from the room. There were men who stopped him, who clapped him on the shoulder, and every touch went through his heart like a bullet. He had been beaten, and the thought kept him writhing. Kept the automatic smile steadily for his well-wishers, and buried the murder in the shadow of his heart. In the dim shade of the door, away from the crowd, he looked back and let his hatred twist his face. Already they were flowing back to the games around the tables. He saw Yo Chai standing at the central table welcoming a group of players in the usual draw-poker. He had been the sensation of half a day and already he was forgotten. Beaten, and by a yellow-faced Chinaman!

He thought of old John Sampson and the quietly superior smile with which the old man would greet the news of his bad luck. That thought alone was enough to send Kirk running amuck. Like Caligula, he wished for the moment in his blind rage that humanity had only one neck. Grinding his teeth, he swung onto his horse and spurred him savagely up the valley toward the shanty where they lived. He was hardly

past the outskirts of the town when a growing light to the East drew his head to the side. It was the rising moon.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CHARLIE MORGAN.

AND though the valley in the daytime swarmed with a thousand laborers, in the moonlight it showed only a blank and sandy waste. The little huts scattered everywhere showed not at all, or only as blacker spots against the gray background; the hum and faint clangor of iron against rock had died away, the silence of night was complete. And by that light all things were magnified. The mountains grew taller, rougher, blacker. So black that by contrast with them the dull sky overhead took on a shade of mysterious blue.

This in turn changed, for as the moon rose the stars went out by myriads, like camp fires of a great army, extinguished at a signal. The dull sky was now a metallic gray and from the mountains thick shadows swung out and across the ravines.

Even at night there was no peace among those mountains. The eye of William Kirk swept up their jagged summits or plunged down dizzy heights to the floor of the valley in swift change. Those crests lunged against the sky like spear-points; they seemed possessed of motion, restlessness, sullen change. They were a revolt against eternal order; they nodded their heads against the sky like a menace, and they roused a fellow feeling in the heart of Kirk.

He, also, needed action, sudden and strong and terrible, to pacify the sullen fire within him. He wanted to destroy, overthrow. For he stood at the end of his third stride in the primitive. That night he had been baffled and beaten in the gaming house of Yo Chai, and since he could not wreak his hate on the gambler he cast about for another object which he could seize and crumble. It was the rising of the yellow moon as it rolled like a wheel up the steep side of an eastern mountain, that gave the hint to him, for he remembered then Charlie Morgan, who by this time must be riding with his pack-mule up the valley. A challenge to the Night Hawk!

And in a sudden outburst of exultation and rage, Kirk threw back his head and shouted. The sound was muffled behind his clenched teeth and came like the roar of a beast. It would have frightened Kirk in any other humor to feel this madness rising in him. Now it stimulated him to a sort of hysteria of joy. He whirled his horse, plunged the spurs deep and galloped at full speed down the valley. He took off his sombrero and with it beat against the neck and flanks of the frantic horse, which snorted and grunted in its wild excitement, but could not run faster. He waved his hat to the broken heads of the mountains, he brandished it against the stars and yelled drunkenly; and the thunder of his heart kept pace with the clangor of the hoofs of his racing horse against the rocks of the ravine.

Out of the upper ravine he turned into the lower, with no more boulders to dodge, and a straight path for the cave of the Night Hawk. In a moment he was there, swung from the saddle and stumbled down the passage.

It was strange how easily he entered it now. He knew by instinct every turning of the rough, rock walls. In the apartment within he found at once the matches, kindled his tinder, and flung the saddle upon the neck of the black stallion. And the horse turned his head to watch the process, and as the light shone full in his fine face, his eyes seemed to glow yellow in fierce anticipation of the coming battle. He whinnied; he caught the shirt of Kirk at the shoulder with his teeth and pulled at it softly as if to urge his flying hands to a still greater speed.

There was no need to lead the charger out of the tunnel. He had been many days standing without exercise, and now he followed at the heels of Kirk like a trained dog. His fore hoofs rapped many times against the hurrying heels of Kirk; his hot breath whistled down the back of the man in front.

At the entrance the stallion crouched and crawled through the low hole with uncanny agility. Once outside Kirk vaulted into the

saddle, and the black reared straight up and struck at the air with fighting forehoofs.

There followed a wild burst of pitching here and there. Not the stiff-legged bucking of a horse which strives to throw its rider, but rather the overflow of joyous energy. And Kirk laughed and shouted encouragement, and enjoyed the wild sport to the tips of his toes.

Then he realized that it was time for action, for by this hour Charlie Morgan, if he had made good his boast and his challenge to the Night Hawk, would be far up the lower ravine, and making good time on the level going. He called in a stern voice to the black, and the horse, as if it realized that the hour for playfulness had passed, stood instantly still—an image—a horse carved of shining black rock in the moonlight. His head was high—his ears lay flat back on his neck. It needed only a slight loosening of the reins and he was off at once down the cañon with a gait as swift and easy as the dipping flight of a seagull. Never had Kirk backed such an animal. His heart beat faster; he was as happy as a boy.

Moreover, the stallion seemed to know every foot of the way and chose a path where the sand was hard and smooth, fit for rapid travel. That long, elastic stride, also, muffled the beat of the hoofs, and, comparatively speaking, they moved down the valley as silently as a great black shadow, rider and horse one creature bent on destruction.

The impulse which had made Kirk wave his hat and shout to the stars was still hot in him, but now it kept him silent. He held the spirit in him behind his teeth until it gave a cold purposefulness to him; his eyes swept the valley before him. He seemed to have gained the power, in that brief ride, to pierce the darkness of the night and search out the objects of his prey with the eyes of a wolf.

How else could he have seen, so far away, the small shape which moved up the ravine, close to the wall, under the very shadow of the eastern rock? But he saw it, and knew at once that it was Charlie Morgan, already past him and heading at a dog-trot up the ravine. His hurry seemed to tell William Kirk that the old gun-fighter somewhat regretted the vaunt he had made in the town of Kirby Creek that day. To be sure, he was making his boast good, but the touch of haste showed something of uneasiness.

The upper lips of Kirk writhed back in a grin of malicious joy. He had no more thought of failure than the mountain lion has when it scents a solitary calf, lagging far behind the driven herd in the night—a calf not large enough to race away, just large enough to fill the teeth of the lion.

Kirk swung his horse around and galloped to the western wall of the ravine. Once in the shadow he urged his stallion again to full speed, and the fine animal, as if it guessed the purpose of the master, hugged the course of the rock wall closely, and never once went a half dozen yards from the edge. Still Kirk could make out across the narrow floor of the valley the moving shadow of Charlie Morgan and his horse and pack-mule. He himself might be more easily visible, for he had no shadow over him to shelter him from the keen and experienced eye of the trapper. But he trusted with absolute certainty that even at this distance his shape would be blent with the wall of the valley and he would escape notice. He felt the superiority, indeed, of the night hawk, which sees unseen.

The point he made for was a narrowing of the ravine some distance ahead. Here, among a cluster of mesquite, he left the horse, and slipped on foot to a point of vantage among the shrubbery. His hand struck one of the sharp thorns, but he felt the little warm trickle of the blood and not a vestige of pain.

Then came a crunching sound of the jogging animals, the creak of saddle leather, the grunt of the horse as the rider swung it sharply back and forth through the sharp-thorned bushes, the low voice of Charlie Morgan cursing at the lagging mule behind. A low voice—almost trembling—as if the man hated the mule for the noise which it forced him to make. And Kirk knew that he was the cause of this fear—the heart and center of it. It was a reversion of all the course of his life. He remembered with chilly distinctness the times in his boy-

hood when he had lain awake at night listening—all ears—to the creaks of the stairs—approaching sounds so distinct that he could even visualize the form of the night-walker, could see the size of his bony hand on the banister, the mask across his eyes. But now he was himself the walker of the night, and the terror which he had felt in those old days had fallen upon other men, upon Charlie Morgan, hunter and trapper and familiar of the wilds.

Out from a dense growth of mesquite came the trapper; his quirt cracked loudly on the side of the horse, which broke into a canter and passed Kirk in his hiding-place so close that he could have reached out his hand and touched the flank of the animal, or seized Charlie Morgan by the leg and dragged him from the saddle. A maddening temptation came to do the thing; and then another temptation to yell aloud in exultation for the danger which was coming.

That temptation also he restrained and stepped boldly out into the narrow path which Morgan was following.

"Charlie Morgan!" he called. "I'm here!"

And he waited with his revolver poised.

All at once he knew that he could not fire on the fellow first. He would wait until Morgan had drawn and blazed away. And a perfect certainty came to him that Morgan would miss. Then he would shoot—and he could not fail.

At his shout Morgan whirled in the saddle; his steel gleamed very brightly in the moon, and by the same light Kirk glimpsed the teeth of the man. His lips were twitched back into a hideous grimace of terror.

"Who?" shouted the trapper, and his voice was a scream of harsh uncertainty and the will to kill.

"The Night Hawk!" answered Kirk, and still he stood motionless with his revolver poised.

It seemed that there were minutes between everything that happened—the course of Morgan—the levelling of the revolver—the spurt of flame from the mouth of the gun—the hum of a bullet beside his arm—giving the cloth a little tug.

There were other minutes of pause while his own gun descended, while his finger pressed on the trigger, and then the bark of the bullet, kicking up the muzzle of the gun. Charlie Morgan threw up his arms. His revolver dropped through the moonlight like a bit of fire from the hand of the trapper. Then Morgan leaned forward, struck the pommel of the saddle with a grunt of suddenly expired wind, and flopped heavily on the ground.

Kirk twirled the gun. His first emotion was merely joy in the easy action of the weapon. No wonder that the Night Hawk had killed many with such a gun. He shoved it leisurely back into the holster, and went humming to examine his work of the night. The horse sidled uneasily away and stood snorting and sniffing at the figure fallen in the path. There was gold in the pack of the mule, but Kirk had no desire for it. His purpose in coming out there to-night had merely been to uphold the honor, in a way, of dead Dave Spenser. He kicked the saddle horse brutally in the stomach and the poor brute lashed out once more with its heels and then started off at a broken gallop, tugging the pack-mule after it. All at once a panic seemed to seize on the two animals. They burst into a racing pace and fled crashing through the shrubbery. Kirk watched them with a grin and then leaned down over the fallen body.

It lay on its face. He turned it. There, exactly where he had intended, was the red mark of the bullet. It had passed through the chest, directly in the center, or a little to the left. If he had located the spot with a line and compass he could not have planted the shot more carefully.

"A bull's-eye," grinned Kirk, and with his toe caught under the shoulder of Morgan he flopped the body back upon its face.

"And so," finished Kirk, "exit Charlie Morgan."

A soft whinny came to him through the night.

"And so," he muttered to himself thoughtfully, "reenter the Night Hawk?"

He shrugged his broad shoulders and the burden of the murder before him slipped off his conscience.

"After all," he said, "perhaps the Englishman was right."

And he went back to the black stallion.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SMILE OF YO CHAI.

ALL that afternoon there had hung before the mind's eye of John Sampson a problem like a problem in geometry, one of those perplexing things in which the lines and circles are simple enough, but in which the axioms of explanation refuse to come to mind. The problem was a certain relationship between Clung and Yo Chai. It had dwelt in his memory since the evening when Yo Chai shot down the two Mexicans and thereby gained a proud name in Kirby Creek, that there was some connection between the gambler and the outlawed man-killer.

Ever since that time he had turned and twisted the thing back and forth in his mind, but it had never become an object of vital interest until to-day, when he learned that Winifred had been going regularly at night to the house of the gambler. Now he sat for hours with his head dropped between his hands and tried to work out the puzzle. It was like the man who sat in the robber's cave and strove to think of the magic name which would open the door, but all that he remembered was that the name was that of some grain, so he sat calling: "Open, barley; open, wheat; open, oats," but he could not think of the right one, the "open, sesame." So he remained perforce in the cave until the robbers returned and cut him to pieces with their sabers.

In such a quandary was John Sampson. He cudgeled his brain; he ground his teeth; he took to walking up and down the floor, but still he could not find the little watchword which would admit him to the secret. All that he knew was that the relation between Clung and Yo Chai, if he could call it to mind, would prove the undoing of Yo; and with a lever to work on the Chinaman, he could gain the reason of Winifred's comings and goings to the house of Yo Chai in the night.

Evening came, but still the key to the locked room was not his. He and Winifred ate supper in silence, gloomy on his part and gay on the part of the girl. Now and again her eyes went through the window to dwell on the rapidly fading outlines of the hills. There was complacency in her gaze, and a certain expectation which stopped the heart of John Sampson in mid-beat.

He looked so worn and tired that she asked after his health. He cursed the hot nights, but made no other reply. And all the while his stern old heart was breaking in him, for he felt that his girl was being stolen away from him. And by a damned Chinaman!

It was some time after supper before his sharpened ear heard a stir in the room of Winifred, to which she had retired under the pretext of a headache. A headache! She who had never known a sick day!

A stir and then a sound suspiciously like the creak of a slowly raised window. Still he waited. Far off he caught the snort and stamp of a horse from the barn. A little later, listening, with the front door a little ajar, he caught the hoofs of a horse crunching faintly upon soft sand. That was all.

The weight of fear turned to a burden of despair in the heart of John Sampson. He felt helpless, disarmed; and this in conjunction with a wild hatred of all the world, and particularly of the patient, half smile of Yo Chai. He remembered the whimsically wrinkled forehead, the highly arched brows, the sparse mustache of the Chinaman, with an urgent desire to murder.

Finally he could stand it no longer, and went out of doors. Before him, farther down the hill and the side of the ravine, glimmered the thousand evil lights of Kirby Creek. For a time he walked up and down in front of the house. Then he started down the ravine. Not with any purpose, but because he could not bear to be too close to the lonely little shack from which Winifred had stolen away.

His hands were clasped behind him and his head bent sadly as he entered the first street of the village. It led, like all the streets of the town, to the gaming house of Yo Chai, and down that street John Samp-

son strolled. He was quite heedless of all around him, yet every picture that he saw this night was imprinted forever, indelibly, in his subconscious brain. In the door of one hut stood a very tall woman, her figure swaying out in front, her arms akimbo. One lock of hair straggled down her cheek, plastered against it with sweat. She chuckled at the sight of a little boy rolling and wrestling with a big, shaggy dog in the center of the street, and her laughter was like a succession of grunts, a struggle between weariness and mirth. Farther on a group of youngsters, having found a streak of clayey ground which would hold the peg, were playing mumble-the-peg, and their faces were besmeared with mud. The heart of John Sampson ached in envy of the parents who had these thoughtless youngsters for their own. At least they were too mindless to lock secrets inside their hearts.

Still farther down the street he passed an old Indian, blind, with his shapeless squaw squatted beside him. The Indian thrummed on a guitar from which several strings were lacking, and he sang in a whining guttural snatches of popular airs —almost unrecognizable because the words appeared only here and there, and the blank spaces between were filled with humming. Yet there was a smile on the face of the Indian, and contentment on the face of the greasy squaw with her hand held forever straight before her, asking alms. And an envy even of these two came to John Sampson. They were near to the soil; they had not even the capacity for great pain.

A crowd had gathered before the jeweler's window. In imitation of the shops in great cities, he kept his window lighted all night, and he displayed his full assortment of gleaming wares, guarded by two armed men, one on either side of the window. It was the only piece of plate-glass in Kirby Creek. Three large lanterns supplied the illumination. And in front of the window was a large group. They were all talking at the same time; they were picking out the stones they would buy on the morrow, or when they made their big strike. They were all happy, and Sampson hurried past. Happiness in others was painful to him this night.

Now the distant roar of the gaming house reached him plainly, like the sound of distant surf. Straight to the door of the house he went, and looked in toward the central table with a malevolent eye. But Yo Chai was not there. That was the meaning, then, of the early hour at which Winifred had left the house.

He had a man point out Yo Chai's private dwelling behind the gaming house, and in front of it, across the street, he stood for a long time, purposeless, helpless, meaningless. And still the problem surged through his brain, maddening him. The relation between Yo Chai and Clung—what could it be? What was the one word —the open sesame?

Yet he could not be absolutely sure that Winifred was in this house. Certainly Kirk said that he had seen her come out of the house on one night, but that was not a sufficient proof to his aching heart. There was nothing better for him to do. It would be at least a sort of semioccupation. He decided to sit down on a rickety box nearby and wait for a time to see if Winifred would come out of the house. Yes, and if he confronted her suddenly was there not a possibility that she would tell him everything—all the reasons which made her come to the house of Yo Chai—whether or not Clung were actually concealed there?

The thought made John Sampson almost happy. He sat down on the box and composed himself for a long wait, for hours, if necessary.

Yet to his mind, busied as it was every moment by the problem, it was not a very long time before the door of the house opened. At the entrance stood a tall, bulky Chinaman with his hands stuffed in the alternate sleeve. He looked slowly up and down the street, and then, as if satisfied that there was no one in plain sight, he stepped back through the door.

Almost at once a woman slipped out upon the steps, and turned back toward the door. Her face was away from him, and the light which fell upon her was very dim, but he knew with strange certainty that this was Winifred, just as a child knows the step of its father on the pavement and runs to the door prepared. So

Sampson stared through the gloom and knew that it was Winifred who stood there, poised on the steps of the Chinaman's house. He started up from the box and made a step across the street when another form appeared in the door and he stopped his progress.

It was Yo Chai. The light at the entrance fell plainly across his face, showing with distinctness even the sparse black mustache of the Oriental. And he stood with his head tilting back, smiling down upon the girl. She waved her hand. A hand, thin to frailty, appeared from the loose sleeve of Yo Chai and waved adieu in response. Winifred turned and passed down the street; the door closed upon Yo Chai.

Yet Sampson made no effort to turn down the street and intercept his daughter. His mind was filled with an image which had started out suddenly upon it, of Yo Chai, pushing back his chair in the gaming house on that now distant night, and smiling.

The clue to the problem was upon him with a rush. It was in the smile of Yo Chai and the smile of Clung.

One smile and one man. Clung and Yo Chai—they were one and the same. And Sampson shook his clenched fist above his head and then started almost at a run for the door of Yo Chai.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE GAMBLER'S SPIRIT.

THE door was opened to him by the bulky Chinaman he had first seen there, and in his excitement he would have pushed past the fellow had not a vast arm shot out and blocked the way as effectively as a stanchion of wood.

"Go tell Cl—go tell Yo Chai that John Sampson will speak with him—at once," commanded the financier.

The big Oriental turned his head leisurely and spoke in a tremendous guttural, changing to a whine of question, ridiculously thin and high at the end. From the interior of the house a soft voice which Sampson could barely hear, made answer, and then the bulky arm was withdrawn and he stepped into the little, boxlike hall of Yo Chai. The servant pointed to a screened doorway at one side of the hall, and stepping past this, Sampson found himself in front of Yo Chai, who sat among a heap of cushions reading from a large book of Chinese characters. Sampson found himself at once perfectly at ease. It was rare, indeed, that he was embarrassed in an interview. It was his stock in trade. He measured the lean face of the other with a critical eye.

"I suppose," he said with a half-smile, "that you won't pretend that you don't know me?"

"No," said the other, rising. "Yo Chai remembers when you sat at his table and played a little game. There were two Mexicans who came behind us. It is true."

And he bowed very low to John Sampson.

"Just now," said the businessman, "I don't give a damn what Yo Chai remembers. I'm more interested in what Clung has to say."

The bow of Clung was still under way, and he remained a moment with partially bent head. When he raised his face it was expressionless.

"When I look into your face," said Sampson with some admiration, "I'm almost puzzled again to know you, but I've seen through the riddle, my friend, and it can never puzzle me again."

Clung silently pointed to the low divan.

"Thanks," said Sampson, and he seated himself with a sigh of comfort.

Manifestly he was complete master of the situation.

"I was perfectly certain," he went on, smiling upon Clung, "that the age of disguises was past. But I see that you've resurrected it again. And very well done, Clung. Very well done, indeed."

Clung bowed as profoundly as before, his eyes going past Sampson and apparently focusing on the screen behind him, as if at that moment another person were entering the room.

"To put you entirely at your ease," went on Sampson, "I'll tell you that it's unnecessary to be quite so Oriental before me. I know you're a white man, Clung."

And still the eyes of Clung remained immovably fixed upon the wall behind his visitor. Sampson shifted in his chair a bit uneasily and flashed a glance behind him. There was only the barren wall. However, the bullets in Sampson's armory were almost inexhaustible. He was confident that at his will he could break through the calm of Clung.

"There is a certain advantage in method," he began again, "so we may as well start by admitting that there is a disadvantage in your present position, my friend. The disadvantage is that if the crowd of Kirby Creek knew that you were Clung they would promptly send a posse to nab you."

Clung smiled gently upon John Sampson.

"See," he said, and he waved his hand to the four corners of the room. "There are many doors, and there are many roads from Kirby Creek."

"Cool devil, aren't you?" said Sampson. "But you'll admit that it might be rather a close call, even for an artist like yourself?"

"Only a pig," said Clung, clinging to his picturesque metaphors, "loves safety—and a sty!"

"Good again," grunted John Sampson, "but granting that you'd like to have the boys give you a run after a while, it would be rather inconvenient to leave all your coin behind you."

"What is money?" said Clung contemptuously. "It is lead around the neck. It sinks the man who swims. Clung will not sink."

"You'd cut and leave all your loot behind?" queried John Sampson with wide eyes. "Gad, boy, I almost believe you would!"

"Not all," said Clung, with another of his gentle smiles, and from one of his loose sleeves he produced at once a little box no larger than the palm of his hand, and square. It opened with a snap, and John Sampson glimpsed a flare of colorful jewels before the box was closed and restored to the sleeve.

"Guarded on all sides, eh?" he remarked, scowling a little now. "I see that you have the true gambler's spirit, Clung. Perhaps you're not in such a good position as you claim; however, I've not come here to do you any injury or to make any threats—unless I'm forced to it. And I won't be forced. You must be a man of *some* reason, Clung, or you wouldn't have lived as long as you have and done the things you have done. They still talk of the way you slipped away from under the nose of Marshal Clauson."

He chuckled, and so doing, he failed to see the little flush which showed through even the yellow stain on Clung's face, nor the lowering of the other's eyes.

"We'll get down to business at once," said Sampson. "I've come for this reason: I want to know why my daughter—Winifred"—he choked a little over the name—"has been coming to see you so often in the night."

For the first time the equanimity of Clung was disturbed ever so slightly. His eyebrows raised a trifle.

"No," explained Sampson quickly, "Don't trouble yourself on that score. But I've been missing her, and to-night I saw her come out of your house. Clung, why has she been coming?"

He barked out the last words and leaned forward with jutting lower jaw. He was like a bulldog in more ways than one. Many a Wall Street power would have shuddered to see that expression on the face of John Sampson; but Clung merely smiled and a glint of study came in his eyes.

"Clung has heard," he said, "that in the old days when books were rare, they were often chained to the walls in libraries. And students came and read the books in the libraries and could not take them home to read them when and where they pleased. Your daughter—Winifred"—he paused before and after the name, so that it stood musically by itself—"has found Clung a book which she could not take from the wall and carry home to read when and where she pleased. So she has come to Clung's house, and there she opens the book whenever she pleases and reads in it, and closes the book, and goes home, and forgets Clung."

There was a long pause.

"Well," said Sampson slowly, drawing out every word, "damn my eternal eyes!"

"That would be a great sorrow," said Clung."

"Are you mocking me?" barked the financier.

Clung waved a slim, deprecatory hand.

"Don't put me aside with any asinine trivialities like this. I haven't come to listen to poetry. I want some hard facts. Clung, why does the girl come here?"

And like the hard facts which Sampson demanded, the face of Clung grew stern and expressionless.

"Listen to me," said the older man with a sudden change of tactics. "I am her father, Clung. Haven't I the right to know?"

It was like the melting of ice in spring—so swift was the change of Clung's eyes. He bowed once more, and then stood erect, his eyes at the feet of Sampson.

"Clung had forgotten," he said softly, "but now he will make himself open. You can read in me."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SAMPSON HUNTS COOL AIR.

"LAD," answered Sampson more gently, "I see you *are* white—in more ways than one. Now tell me frankly. Why does my girl come to you?"

"To talk to Clung."

"Come, come! What do you mean by that one word?"

"To talk to Clung," said the other, with a certain contemptuous emphasis—"Clung, a dog of a Chinaman!"

The eyes of Sampson widened marvelously.

"You mean to say that you haven't told her that you are white?"

"If she knew that Clung is white," he answered, with a touch of sadness, "she would come no longer."

The mind of Sampson whirled; and there was an infinite relief which struck him like a cool breeze on a very hot day.

"I think I understand, but make it clearer. I must know exactly what you mean to her."

Clung waited, searching for the clue.

"A horse you know," he said at last, "you have no pleasure in riding. He is yours. He will run straight. He will not buck or shy or balk. There is no pleasure in riding him. Is it not true?"

"Ah! I begin to see. Go on!"

"A man you know, he may be your friend, but you will not go a great distance to see him or to hear him talk. But a man you do not know, you may not like him, you may hate him, you may be afraid of him, but you will go a great ways to see him and to hear him talk. Is it not true?"

"Exactly!"

"Your daughter—Winifred—she finds me a strange book—because I am written in Chinese!"

He stopped and laughed, a little scornfully, a little bitterly.

"It is true," said Clung again, "my words are strange to her. She looks at me as if she saw me at a great distance and wished to see me closer. It is because—Clung is a dog of a Chinaman. But if she knew Clung to be a white man she would shrug her shoulders—so!—and never come again."

"I wonder," said the other thoughtfully, and then he shook his head. "Clung, I'm afraid that you're not altogether right."

He smiled with a sharp interest at the younger man.

"I wish I could believe it, but I can't—altogether. I'm afraid there may be—something else."

"What?" asked Clung, with a ring in his voice.

But Sampson shrugged his shoulders.

"I am going to ask you to stop her from coming here, Clung."

The other straightened, his lips drawing to a thin line.

"Give her up?" he asked in a dull voice that alarmed Sampson. "Suppose a woman has one child—would you ask her to give the child up? Suppose a painter has one great picture—would you ask him to give it up? Could you borrow or beg or buy the picture from him?"

"If it was for the betterment of the child," said the other anxiously, "the woman would give up the child."

The pause came again.

"It is true," said Clung in a faint voice.

Then his eyes rose and met the gaze of Sampson with such intensity that it was like the shock of a physical force.

"Why must Clung give up seeing her?"

"Because it is bad for her."

"Is there poison in this air? Is Clung a dog who bites? Answer!" and the ring in his voice, though it was not loud, shook Sampson tremendously.

"For the oldest reason in the world," he answered, "and for one which you have already named yourself. Her way of life is not your way of life. How would people speak of her if they knew she stole out by night to visit—a Chinaman?"

He brought out the word with a brutal force.

"Then I shall no longer be a Chinaman. I shall be Clung, a white man!"

"Clung, a hunted outlaw, reputed a half-breed. Her friends would turn her from their doors."

There was that solemn pause again, and then the bitter voice of Clung: "It is true, and the opinions of other people are very loud in the ears of women. My father, Li Clung, has said it."

"Then—" queried Sampson with something of pity softening his voice.

"I shall tell her to-night that I am white," said Clung simply.

"No, no, no!" cried Sampson. "Not that, Clung, in the name of Heaven!"

"And why?"

"For many reasons."

He stopped, stammering. It was hard and shameful for him to speak the fear which was in him.

"Speak quickly," said Clung, "and tell Clung what he must do. Every minute is like a whip on a raw place; Clung is very tired!"

"I will be as brief as I may," said the other, "and I expect you to keep on meeting me half-way, as you've done so far. In the first place, she has been very often to see you, has she not?"

"It is true."

"And she is glad to be with you?"

The head of Clung tilted—the familiar musing smile touched his lips.

"She seems very glad," he murmured.

"Gad!" said Sampson to himself. "What a rotten mess it all is—for all of us!"

He said aloud, gruffly: "I'm going to ask you to have a woman in here with you the next time Winifred comes. And when Winifred sees you with a woman I'll guarantee that she'll never come back."

"A woman?" said Clung blankly, and then he started. "A concubine?"

"Not a bit, not a bit!" said the other, reddening furiously. "But only a girl—a Chinese girl—there are plenty of them around the town—who will *seem* to be—er—familiar with you. You get my point, Clung?"

"It would certainly be a lie," said Clung hoarsely.

"Sometimes a lie is excusable. Besides, my dear boy, you've certainly told little lies before."

"I have never told a lie," said Clung quietly, "except to say once that my name was John Ring, and once again that my name was Yo Chai."

It was so naive that Sampson had to bite his lip to keep from smiling.

"Is it the only way to drive her away?" said Clung.

"It is the only sure way," answered Sampson.

Clung stiffened, and his hands straightened at his sides; he stood like a soldier at attention.

"If it drives her away," he said, "it will mean that she thinks of me now as—a white woman might think of a white man!"

"Eh?" grunted Sampson.

"For why," said Clung rapidly, "should she care if a dog of a Chinaman has a concubine? Is it not true?"

"I don't mean that she thinks of you in that way," answered Sampson with a hurried anxiety. "God forbid! I'm merely telling you the sure way of sending her back to me and away from you. And you admit that that is a good thing."

"It is true," said Clung, panting, after another of those deadly pauses.

And he added: "But it will prove—if she goes when she sees the Chinese girl—that

she has thought of me as—a white girl thinks of a white man!"

"I'm not denying that!"

"And at the very time when I know it," whispered Clung, "I will kill that thought in her!"

"I suppose so," admitted Sampson miserably, "and yet not altogether. Mere disgust would send her away."

"And her thoughts of Clung afterward would be ugly thoughts—pah!—unclean thoughts, like a disease!"

Sampson could not speak.

"Then to the house of what white man would you let her go?" asked Clung in the same faint voice.

"To one of her equals—a man who moves in her own social circles," said Sampson carefully. "Well, to a man like William Kirk, for instance."

He was sorry he had used that illustration, for a fire came in the eyes of Clung.

"Is Kirk a clean man in your eyes?" he asked scornfully.

"I admit," said Sampson hastily, "that he did one rather rotten thing—with you. It was a slip such as any one in Winifred's circles would understand. She herself has forgiven him for it."

"Is it true?"

"It is true," answered Sampson, falling into Clung's own manner of speech.

"And if Clung were a man like William Kirk?" asked the younger man.

"Then," said Sampson, "I assure you I would not have a word to say. She could come to see you every day—and at night also."

He smiled genially on Clung.

"Clung does not understand," said Clung. "He will not try to understand; he is sick and cold inside."

"And the girl?" asked Sampson as gently as he could.

"I know no woman," said Clung.

Sampson stared.

"You can hire her to come in and stay about your house for one evening surely."

"There is no other way?"

"If there were, I'd accept it with open arms, upon my word of honor."

"Then Clung will do it."

It was said with such simplicity that Sampson could hardly believe what he heard.

"You will?"

"It is true."

"Then, by God, Clung, you're a gentleman, and as such I'd like to have the privilege of shaking your hand before I go!"

But the hands of Clung were once more thrust into his sleeves, and Sampson was suddenly aware that during the entire interview his host had never once sat down.

"Clung had rather," said Clung, and his head went back with that familiar, musing smile, "Clung had rather remain a dog of a Chinaman than be such a gentleman."

The teeth of John Sampson clicked with his anger, and then, grown suddenly hot about the face, he turned and stumbled out of the room and into the street. It was a warm night, but the air felt strangely cool to his forehead.

CHAPTER XL.

A WOMAN FOR YO CHAI.

SOMETHING above the door of Yo Chai's house stopped Winifred at the very moment when her hand was on the knocker the next night. She bent her head back and peered anxiously up through the gloom, and then she made out that there were wreaths of flowers overhanging the doorway; the sweet breath of them was sharp and pleasant. Strange flowers such as she had never smelled before, and she wondered how they had been brought to the desolation of Kirby Creek. But then, Clung was a man of mysteries, and as such, capable of anything.

When the door opened to her she was smiling in anticipation, and her expectations were correct, for in the little hall she found at either side tall vases filled with flowering shrubs, and the scrolls above the table were almost covered with festoons of greenery. A festival occasion, this night of her coming, and guessing at the pretty tribute, a flush went up from her throat to her cheeks and stayed there as she entered the inner room.

But Clung was not there, and she had been on the divan for several moments before he appeared, hastily, and bowed before her.

He relaxed on his usual pile of cushions and sat with folded arms staring straight before him; and he made her think of a pleased child which waits to be questioned about the meaning of a surprise. Everywhere about the room were the flowers, the green things which seemed so priceless in the middle of the desert; they must have been conjured into existence; they could not have grown. And the very dress of Clung showed that it was an extraordinary occasion. His robe was a rich brocade rustling so stiffly that it was almost a crackle when he moved. The pigtail was of enormous length and braided with perfect symmetry; the skull-cap was embroidered with golden thread. At length she could keep in her questions no longer.

"What is it, Clung?" she asked impetuously. "Is all this in honor of my coming? Tell me?"

"When one of my fathers took a woman into his house," said Clung, and for the first time his eyes rose from the floor and rested gravely upon her, "he always made the place pleasant for her coming. Clung, also, has done this."

"*Take* a woman in your house?" she queried, with sudden alarm and, rising, she noted again that the doors behind her, as usual, were locked. "What do you mean, Clung?"

"Only what Clung says, that to-night he takes a woman in his house."

The eyes were very blank as they rested upon her, but the old tales of the treachery of the Oriental swarmed back upon her mind and made her blood cold.

"Clung, have you dared—" she began, until her voice grew weak and she stopped perforce.

Every door was locked behind her. What could she do?

"Have you dared to think of keeping me here?" she asked at length, with as much grief as fear in her voice.

"You?" queried Clung in gentle surprise, and he tapped softly, once, on the gong beside him.

The answer was a little Chinese girl who came slowly through the doorway—slowly, for her feet were painfully small. Her trousers and all her dress were of the whitest of white silk, and they, like the robes of Clung, were everywhere broidered with rich thread of gold. A necklace of jade, earrings of pearl, bracelets of woven gold with little emeralds in the design of a tiny dragon—she had never seen so rich a costume. The face was round and the features diminutive, but not unpleasant, and there was about her that air of infinite refinement, milleniums of culture, which the Chinese sometimes bear about them.

And still Winifred could not or would not quite understand.

"Who," Winifred asked sharply, "is this person?"

And Clung made answer carelessly, making the girl sit down beside him in obedience to his gesture:

"This is a woman of the house of Clung."

"A woman?" repeated Winifred slowly. "A woman?"

And then, after a breathing space: "I never dreamed that you were married, Clung!"

"Married?" he repeated, and his eyebrows arched a little. "No, no! Why should Clung take a wife, a burden upon his shoulders? This is only a woman, a handmaid for Clung; he has often been lonely."

"A woman!" whispered Winifred, and her eyes dwelt on the face of the girl, pale for one of her race, with a tint like peach-bloom in her cheeks, slant, dark eyes, and little, white teeth.

"But let us talk," said Clung. "You may talk very freely before the girl. She will understand no more than the image of the Greatest!"

He rose and bowed to the hideous, grinning idol and sat down again.

"Or if you wish," went on Clung amiably, "Clung will send the girl away. She is here to come and go at the will of Clung. Is it not true?"

He turned to the girl and spoke sharply to her in Chinese, and she nodded slowly—and very low, and all the while her eyes

were fixed in mute submission upon the face of the master.

Winifred rose, and she had to remain standing a moment, gripping the back of the divan and squinting her eyes tight while her senses cleared.

The voice of Clung, concerned, eagerly inquiring, broke in upon her.

"There is a sickness upon you?" he asked. "You are faint? It is true? The sight of the girl sickens you? Clung will send her away!"

She forced her eyes open, at that, and it seemed to her that the face of Clung had changed, grown grim, and all the features were more sharply defined, as though a pain were etching them more and more deeply.

"No," she managed to say at length, "keep the girl, keep her by you always, in case you should grow lonely again."

"But," said Clung, stepping beside her as she went feebly toward the door, feeling her way, "but you do not go so soon from Clung? He has many things to say!"

Her strength returned with a sudden outburst; she whirled on him.

"I've heard the last of your talk," she said fiercely. "It is tiresome to a white girl. Stay here and herd with your yellow cattle. I shall never see you again."

And she walked quickly to the door and out of the house, but as the door slammed it seemed to Clung that he heard something like a sob. Or was it only a natural sound of the night, for the wind was rising?

He remained where he had been standing, his hand stretched out after the girl, but his arm fell almost at once to his side, and his head lifted. He saw the little Chinese girl staring at him with wide eyes and blanched lips—blanched in spite of their rouge.

"What shall I do?" she asked faintly in Chinese.

He heard the words, but not the meaning.

She rose and came to him with her small, painful steps.

"The white woman," she said, "is possessed of a devil. She has cast a spell upon my master. But I will burn incense and drive the devil away!"

"Could you do that?" he asked dully.

"Ah!" she said with a little smile. "The heart of Wu is very great to serve her master."

"Then go away from me," said Clung, "I have no more need of you. I need nothing but silence."

"This is the voice of the devil the white woman has thrown upon you, and not the voice of Yo Chai," she said wistfully.

He drew his purse from the loose sleeve, the purse of wire net worked with the figure of the dragon, and from it he took gold pieces and placed them in the small palm of the girl.

"You are paid," said Clung. "Go!"

Still she hesitated, her eyes large, and fixed steadily upon him; her lips moved, but no words came. Then she bowed to the floor and, turning, went with her small, painful steps from the room. She stopped at a table of ebony and on it she laid the gold which Clung had given her. When she went on, her head was bowed, and Clung, standing with his head back, and that half-smile upon his lips, heard the beginning of a sob as the door whisked to behind her. He laughed softly.

"Clung also," he said, "Clung also; the sound of it is growing big in his throat. But why should be he a woman?"

He gathered himself and pulled the robe tightly about his breast. He rose almost to tiptoe and cast out his hand, palm up, to the mocking face of the idol.

"I am Clung," he said defiantly—"I am Clung, the son of Li Clung. It is true!"

And he sat down in the divan and produced his long-stemmed pipe, placed a pinch of tobacco in the bowl, lighted it, puffed twice or thrice deeply; knocked out the ashes, and refilled the miniature bowl, and so on and on, smoking until the blue haze formed in front of him and rose like heavy incense and drifted across the face of the idol until it observed the grin and left only the bright, beady eyes staring down through the smoke.

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 Best Horse Wins

by Ernest Edward Nelson

MY wife an' I was just sittin' down to dinner th' other evenin' when in blows th' family pest from up-State, my brother-in-law, Ambrose Gilhooley.

"Aha," he says, hangin' up his hat an' throwin' his cane in th' corner, "just in time for soup, ain't I?"

"Yeah—as usual," I returns, as he seats himself on th' vacant chair an' prepares fer business. My wife sent me a meanin' look at this last remark o' mine, which was calculated to freeze me into silence, but it didn't take.

"Ann tells me you've got a new job," I resumes. (Ann is my wife.)

"Yeah," he returns, attackin' th' soup. "I'm head stableman now fer th' G. Wotta Dubb string o' ponies out at Sheepsneck Bay."

"Gosh, you're gettin' into fast company now," I remarks.

"Oh, well," he returns cockily, "it 'll be all right fer a time till I get somethin' better."

That made me sore, comin' as it did from a guy that was only off th' farm a few weeks. An' I was just about to say somethin' snappy in return when I caught my wife's eye an' decided I wouldn't say it.

After dinner Ambrose an' I adjourned to th' library fer a quiet smoke, while my better half was removin' th' dishes. (Th' high cost o' servants prohibits us from usin' 'em.)

Well, after we had become comfortably settled, an' Ambrose was drawin' well on his Havana—one o' his, not mine—he suddenly leans over an' says in a stage whisper:

"Do yuh ever play th' ponies, Jim?"

I pulls a bit on my stogie before I answers. "Oh, now an' then," I says finally.

"Well, listen," he comes back at me confidentially, "if yuh want a tip on a winner, try Silver Heels; she's got th' goods."

I puffs pretty hard on my stogie fer about a half of a half-minute. I've got sportin' blood in my veins, all right, but since I got married I've had to change my habits somewhat. Furthermore, my wife's th' treasurer of our institution, an' if I want any spendin' money, I've got to go to her to get it, so yuh see they ain't so much chance o' dissipatin'.

"Well," I says finally, "th' big doin's ain't comin' off afore Saturday, so I got two more days to reckon on. I might be able to plunge some, an' again I might not, 's hard to tell."

Th' next mornin' at th' office I was workin' away over some papers when in comes my old sportin' pardner, Lem Boggs.

"Mornin,' Watts," he says, addressin' me. "Are yuh goin' to th' races tomorrow?"

" 'S hard to say, Boggs; hard to say," I returns, chewin' hard on my cigar. " Yuh know, my wife's got me pretty well tamed now; I ain't th' sportin' man I used to be."

" Yeah, I know," he says. " But lissen, I got some inside dope last night on what this party claims is a sure thing, an' you an' I have been friends a long time, Watts, so I'm goin' to pass it along to yuh."

Here he comes closer, an' gettin' th' right gage on my ear, whispers, " Play Silver Heels." With that he gumshoes out.

I stared after him. " Silver Heels!" I says to myself. " Why, that's th' pony Ambrose was tellin' me about last night. They must be somethin' to all this confidential dope I been gettin' on that pony."

Well, after dinner that evenin' I tells my wife I'll have to draw on our bank fer about ten dollars, account o' club dues, an' I shows her th' card which I had received that mornin'.

" All right," she says, " I'll get it."

Where she kept th' money I didn't know, but I knew it was up-stairs somewheres, so after some little time when she starts up-stairs, I puts down my paper, takes off my shoes, an' follows, givin' her about a minute's handicap. When I comes to th' bedroom door, which was closed, I puts my eye to th' keyhole an' there I sees her takin' out th' family savin's from under th' mattress. That was all I wanted to know, so I gumshoes back down-stairs an' tries to get interested in my paper again, but a sort of a mental picture of Silver Heels kept racin' across th' page, causin' me to finally give up in disgust. About this time the wife comes down an' hands me th' ten.

" Mrs. Smith an' I are goin' to the movies, Jim," she says. " If you go out, be sure an' lock up good."

" Leave it to me, Ann," I says, " an' don't wake me to go to th' office in th' mornin', cause it's a holiday."

Th' door had no more 'n closed behind her when I was on my way up-stairs.

" I've got a hunch Ann's goin' to thank me for this," I thinks to myself. " I hate to rob th' bank, but when they's a chance o' doublin' our money like this I ain't goin' to pass it up."

In countin' it over I discovers they is just six hundred dollars, so takin' out two one-hundred bills an' a fifty, I puts 'em in th' watch-pocket of my pants an' then puts th' rest back.

It was about midnight before I got home from th' club that night an' I went to bed to dream about the money I was goin' to clean up th' next day.

Well, when I woke up th' next mornin' th' sun was shinin' in my face, th' clock had just registered ten bells, an' my wife was callin' me fer chow.

" Comin'?" I yells, an' I jumps out o' bed a cussin' an' wonderin' why she hadn't called me before.

I had got to th' point where my pants was necessary when I discovers a substitution has been made. My wife had taken away th' new ones an' put an old pair in their place.

" Ann," I calls, " where's my new pants?"

" Why, I sent them to the tailor's, Jim," she answers, comin' to th' door an' causin' me to slide under th' covers. " I'm expectin' company, an' want you to look nice."

I tried to say somethin', but my jaws wouldn't work.

" Why, what's the matter with you?" she exclaims. " You stare at me like a crazy person."

I finally found my tongue. " Ann," I says, " did yuh take everythin' out o' my pockets?"

" Why, yes, certainly," she returns. " All I found was a receipt for your club dues, your keys, check-book, and some small change; I left them on your dresser. But, oh," she went on, " I just happened to think, I didn't look in the little watch-pocket of your trousers. Did you have anything in there?"

I shook my head weakly. Visions of two one-hundred an' a fifty-dollar bill floated away before my eyes. I come to just as my wife was going out, sayin' somethin' about " bughouse." Well, I hustled into my clothes, had breakfast, an' after doin' a few chores told my wife I was goin' down to the corner store to get some cigars. Instead o' that, just as soon as I was out o' sight I hits fer th' tailor's. Th' car had just gone, so I had to walk about four blocks, but when I got there th' shop was

closed. I was desperate fer about a minute, but as they was a little shop next door I finally goes in an' asks if they knows where Weinstein, th' tailor, lives.

"Yeah," says th' boss. "Out on Greenleaf Street, 2313; about six blocks from here."

"Nice number," says I, an' dashin' out I just manages to catch th' tail end of a car.

After what seemed an age or so, more or less, I found myself at Mr. Weinstein's home, an' talking to th' gentleman himself.

"Well, you know this is a holiday," he says in his broken Jewish. "Now, if you'll come down to-morrow morning—"

I slips out my check-book. "Suppose I put your name down on this slip o' paper," I says, "with figures representin' five dollars, would that help any?"

His face begins to beam like a searchlight in a fog.

"Well, Mr. Watts," he says, tryin' to appear unconcerned, "I never like to refuse my old customers a favor. I'll be with you in just a minute."

About an hour or so later I was walkin' away from Weinstein's tailor-shop with my new pants nicely pressed an' th' missin' bills still in my watch-pocket, where they had laid undisturbed.

It was now about one o'clock, so I decided to have my lunch at Himmelberger's Café instead of going home. I wasn't exactly anxious to see company, anyway.

Fritz, th' proprietor, an' old friend of mine, was on th' job, an' after I had satisfied th' inner man, he invited me into th' back room an' into his private den, where he produced some choice old stock.

When I finally got away I found I was beginnin' to experience again that peculiar exhilaration of olden days. I wanted to fly or somethin'.

But I just managed to keep both my feet on th' ground, though I had a hard time steerin' at times.

When I finally gets up on th' Elevated platform I spies a train just ready to pull out. Not knowin' whether it was my train or not, I points to it an' then hollers at a youngster, "Sheepsneck Bay train?"

"Yeah," says th' kid; so I make a run for it an' gets inside th' gate just in time. Makin' my way to th' smoker I sits me down with a stogie an' proceeds to smoke away th' time. Th' conductor finally comes through, an' I asks him how far it is to th' bay.

"Well, you'll never get there on this train," he returns. "An', besides, you're some twelve miles from there right now."

I was so mad I couldn't talk. It was too late to try to get there now. Th' only thing to do would be to get off at th' next station an' take a return train home, which I did, with a clearer head, but mad clean through.

When I arrived at th' house I found it deserted, which puzzled me some, as I knew we was to have company; but thinkin' they might have gone to a show or somethin', I goes up-stairs an' puts th' money back, thankin' my lucky stars at th' same time that I had a clear field.

Some time later I was sittin' in th' library readin' when in comes my wife. I could see somethin' was up, too, as she was unusually happy an' cheerful.

"Jim," she says, as she seats herself on th' arm of my chair, "you can't guess where I've been."

"I give up," I says. "You know I'm no good at guessin' nohow."

"Well, I've been out to th' races."

I looks at her in astonishment.

"Yes," she goes on, "Virginia Ross, an old schoolmate of mine, and her husband, from Kentucky, were here, and they wanted me to go out with them. Mr. Ross had brought one of his best horses up from Kentucky, one that has never been beaten, and, Jim, his horse won."

"Uhuh," I says grouchily, "but that don't help us any." I was feeling kinda Bolsheviki.

"Is that so?" she returns, an' she holds out a wad o' greenbacks big enough to choke a cow. "I decided to play the game once myself, Jim, and as a result we're just five hundred dollars richer."

"My dear, you're th' brains o' this house," I says admiringly; "but what was th' name o' that horse?"

"Let me see," she says, beginnin' to think. "Oh, yes, 'Go Getter.' He beat Silver Heels by a half-length."

The Shadowers

by David Fox

NOVEL I—THE MAN WHO CONVICTED HIMSELF (*Concluded*)

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE TREASURE OF THE MANCHUS.

A STRANGE, indistinguishable sound issued from Punderford's lips, but he was unconscious of it; his protruding eyes stared as if fascinated at the changing scenes before him and he seemed utterly oblivious to his surroundings.

The Chinese city faded and a man appeared clad in white duck, with a pith helmet upon his head. As the face grew more distinct Punderford gave a gasp of horror. He was looking upon a vision of the past: *himself* as he had been nearly twenty years before! It was his own face which stared back at him from a crystal!

It faded almost instantly and there appeared a cascade of jewels scintillating in a burst of sudden light; great glowing rubies, the sheen of pearls, the living fire of opals. Punderford gasped again.

"Treasure!" George's tones were exultant, gloating as though the riches he spoke of were within his grasp. "The treasure of the Manchus! See, there are the seven pearls of Kang Hsi, the Whirling Ruby from the Upper Ganges, the opal which drips blood! The ransom not of a king but of a dynasty!

"Ha! Darkness once more, but what are these three bright spots which seem to burn? Look! They are the three famous Burning Black Pearls, supreme treasure of all the possessions of the emperor! But there is no longer an emperor, the reign of the Manchus is over. What has become of the treasure, the greatest that history has known? What has become of the three Burning Black Pearls? See! You are looking down now from an eminence just outside the walls of the Forbidden City, from the summit of the mysterious Coal Hill.

"Do you see that go-down there in the northwestern part of the city? It is there that the treasure lies, well hidden by the eunuchs of Prince Ching. Ah! The darkness descends once more; it is night. There is the go-down again, the crystal has brought us close to it.

"Look! Is that a lantern bobbing there? And that figure in the flowing robe—is it a Chinaman, or an American in a Chinese robe? I cannot tell, and the crystal grows dark. But see! There in the swirling darkness are those three glowing pin-points of light, the three Burning Black Pearls! They have been looted from the treasure of the Manchus, for the safety of which the head of Prince Ching is forfeit!

"Who is the thief? Who has the three Burning Black Pearls? See! The crystal will answer, the crystal will reveal the truth! There stands the man, but his back is toward us. Do you see him? Look deep, deep into the crystal! See! He is turning, but slowly, slowly! In another moment we shall see his face—"

"A-ah!" With a sharp, quavering cry Punderford flung both arms up in the air and fell back into his chair. "It was I—I! I bargained with Chien Wai! He had the secret from one of the eunuchs who escaped the massacre which Prince Ching ordered after the treasure was buried.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for April 3.

"He brought me the pearls and the sacred stork with the coral beak, and I paid him his price, but it was not my fault that his throat was cut that same night! I did not take a leaf from Prince Ching's book and hire Tuang Lung to kill him that he might tell no tales. I swear that I did not!"

The words uttered in the falsetto of a man in delirium came from his lips in a mad rush as though the floodgates of years of repression had opened at last. A panel in the wall behind him moved slightly but he was oblivious to it. His staring eyes were fixed inwardly upon the past which he was reliving, and the babbling voice went on:

"I did not want the pearls of the Manchus, God knows, but the wealth that they would bring to me! They had been famous for centuries; I thought that millions would be paid for their possession. Fool! What an utter fool I was!

"The markets of the world were closed to them! Their very fame rendered them unsalable. Dealers, royalty, men of vast wealth—all spurned them in fear of the yellow horde which would come after them when their loss became known, and the vengeance which would follow.

"I dared not return them; the Manchus are dethroned but powerful in many ways still, and I had defiled that which was sacrosanct. I would have thrown them in the sea but that I feared worse torture when the little yellow men should come if I could not produce them.

"For nearly twenty years they have burned into my soul, even as they burn through very substance known in the world save baked mud from the bottom of the sacred river!

"Day or night I dared not leave them out of reach of my hand, lest *they* come for them! I bought a safe, an ordinary safe such as any gentleman might have in his home, and I hedged them about with curios of little or no value, thinking that no one would look for vast treasure there. Now they are gone! Gone!"

At the sound of the buzzer—a signal from Lucian—George suddenly flooded the room with light and Punderford started upright in his chair like a man awakening from a trance. His blinking eyes traveled dazedly about the gaudy, unfamiliar room until they encountered George's grave face and then they dropped to the crystal which had become once more a mere globe of transparent glass. He staggered to his feet.

"It was a trick!" he shrieked. "Damn you all, it was a trick to wring the truth from me!"

Almost simultaneously the three panels behind him opened and he whirled about to find the five other members of the Shadowers confronting him. His jaw dropped and he reeled backward.

"You are—their agents?" he cried huskily. "You are the agents of Prince Ching's adherents?"

"We are *your* agents, Mr. Punderford." Lucian came forward reassuringly. "We desire only to save you from further harm. That is what you have engaged us for, and the ethics of the manner in which you came into possession of the pearls is of no moment to us. It was a trick, yes, but you would not tell us the truth unless we dragged it from you, and without absolute frankness on your part we cannot serve you.

"I had heard of the Burning Black Pearls and the sacred stork and I guessed almost from the start what your secret was, but I had to learn the truth from your own lips. Now we can take measures to protect you."

Punderford groped weakly for the nearest chair and sank into it.

"No one knows except my wife—and Chien Wai, who is dead." He passed a tremulous hand across his brow. "For years I bore the burden alone, and then one night I told her in my sleep. For years we have lived in terror, loathing the pearls yet not daring to dispose of them. Now they are gone, and I am tired—tired! I do not care how soon the yellow men come."

"That is only weakness, Mr. Punderford," Lucian said earnestly. "If they were again in your possession and you were promised immunity, would you restore them to the Chinese government?"

"Would I?" Punderford gripped the

arms of his chair. "I would give half of the few years remaining to me if I might return them and feel free to walk without glancing over my shoulder, to lie in the dark without seeing grinning yellow faces all about my bed! But the present government is not that of the Manchus, and their hatred will follow me when they know; besides, the pearls and the sacred stork are gone!"

"But if we could recover them for you?" Lucian insisted. "If one of us happened to have enough influence with the Chinese government to persuade them to turn over to a representative of the Manchus the pearls and the sacred stork on condition that they demanded no explanation, will you authorize us to act for you? As a matter of fact I saw the Chinese ambassador in Washington last Tuesday morning and arranged for just such a contingency."

"You did?" Punderford rose from his chair. "Mr. Baynes, gentlemen, do this for me and there is nothing you can ask of me to my last penny that I will not gladly give."

"The question of our fee can be settled later," Lucian assured him hurriedly, with a quick side-glance at Rex. "I am not even certain that I can recover the pearls and the stork and I do not want to raise your hopes too high, but I believe that it will be possible to do so. In the event that it is, we have your authorization, then?"

"With all my heart!" Punderford openly wiped his eyes. "I do not resent the trick you played upon me; I wish now that I could have brought myself to trust you fully from the start.

"I feel that a burden has been lifted from me already, for it has been a relief to tell it to some one. My wife and I have got so of late years that we do not speak of it, we dare not, and yet the shadow of it has hung over us always!"

"Do not tell her a word of what has passed this morning until we have definite news for you one way or the other," Lucian warned. "I will not keep you in suspense an hour longer than is necessary. Mr. Nichols will take you home in the car now. Be assured that you will hear from me the moment we have anything to report."

When the shaken but grateful old man had departed with Cliff, George flung himself down on the dais in an attitude of utter exhaustion.

"Phew! I never worked harder in my life!" he exclaimed. "I thought the old codger never would come through! Did I ball up the patter, Luce? I stayed awake all last night studying it."

"No. You were great! Did the pictures project themselves all right into the crystal?"

"Without a hitch." George sat up and grinned at the others. "What did you think of the session? I was as nervous as a cat for fear that Phil or Henry would let out a whoop when they learned what those three bright spots of Solo Dan's were, and bust up the show."

"I'd like to know how you knew about it, Luce." Phil returned to him. "How could you tell? I don't believe you ever knew that the stuff had been disturbed where they buried it!"

"I didn't," Lucian confessed. "And it's a safe bet that the surviving members of the Manchu family don't either, or their emissaries would have scoured the world for the sacred stork alone. It is too bad that Punderford didn't sell it to that collector friend of his who, according to Mrs. Fraser, would have paid him his own price for it, but it's my opinion that he was in a funk about it and didn't dare let it out of his possession.

"I think he showed it now and then to some of his friends in the same spirit that makes a murderer haunt the place where he killed his man. He never showed the pearls, however."

"And you propose to get them back?" Rex asked thoughtfully.

"I do." It was confidence, not braggadocio, which rang in Lucian's tones. "I admit that I haven't an iota of evidence against the person I suspect, and I have learned to my cost that he is more than a match for me.

"I vote that we go to lunch and when Cliff gets back we'll talk it all over and decide what to do. I don't know whether it will work or not, but I have a plan. If my suspicions are correct and the guilty

man is the one I think he is, I could never convict him in a thousand years, and I don't even intend to try. I'm going one better than that; I'm going to make him convict himself!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SIX SLIPS OF PAPER.

AT two o'clock that afternoon the half-dozen regular members of the Shadowers, Inc., were gathered together in Rex's office, and the single newly appointed honorary member was seated in the outer room, placidly chewing gum and reading the latest best-seller.

"I wonder," Lucian looked from one face to another about the table, "if any of you have formed an opinion as to the identity of the man we are after? I haven't heard the later reports of any of you except George, for I was too ill yesterday and too busy to-day. But to pass that over for the moment; have any of you an idea you would care to express?"

There was silence for a moment and then Phil looked up.

"I've got a pretty good hunch," he remarked. "I'm not going to make any break, though. You guys go to it."

"I haven't a bit of evidence to support my theory—" Rex began, but Cliff interrupted him.

"I have, but you would probably throw it out of court."

"And I shouldn't care to express mine," George added.

"I'm afraid my notion wouldn't be worth expressing." Henry pulled out a fat cigar. "It is only a wild guess from something Ethel said."

"Yet we each have a theory, at least." Lucian smiled. "I propose that we each write down the name of the man we think is guilty on separate slips of paper, jumble them all together and let Rex read them out. It will clear the atmosphere anyway, and then we can give our reasons, if we like, in turn."

"Good enough." Rex opened a drawer in the table and producing a pair of library shears and a large sheet of paper he began cutting narrow slips from it. "Here you are. Everybody got pencils?"

He passed the slips around and for a brief space there was no sound but the rustle of the paper. When all the slips were folded and tossed across the table to him again Rex scattered them lightly about, then picked up the one nearest to his hand and unfolded it. As he read the name written upon it he laughed.

"Somebody evidently agrees with me," he remarked.

The second slip made him smile again but with the third a thoughtful look came over his face. The fourth was his own and after a glance he laid it aside; at sight of the fifth the thoughtful look gave way to one of blank amazement, and with the sixth he leaned back in his chair for a moment and stared about at the others as if scarcely believing the evidence of his eyes. Then he bent forward once more and spread the slips slowly out upon the table.

"Gentlemen," he said, gravely, "it is unanimous. We have all written the name of the same man—Ralph Scaynes."

"No!" Always the most excitable, Phil sprang to his feet. "You can't mean it! I'd like to know how everybody else got the same hunch that I did?"

"For the Lord's sake!" Henry dropped his cigar and retrieved it with a grunt. "Did I hit it? It was just a shot in the dark on my part!"

A broad smile had spread itself over George's lean face, but he said nothing, while Cliff too was silent.

"That is gratifying anyway." Lucian smiled. "I had hardly expected that you would all be of the same opinion with me, especially as we must all have arrived at our theories by different means. Rex, you're first. Tell us what made you suspect Scaynes?"

"Some marks on the dining-room carpet," he replied slowly. "Do you remember how they all had been seated around the table at the séance as Mrs. Punderford described it to us? She was sitting with her back to the door leading into the hall, and the library door was on her left at the farther end of the room.

"Stephen Leacraft was seated directly

at her left and young Alan Goodhue at her right, with Miss Mildred next to him, of course, then Scaynes, Mrs. Fraser, Horace Punderford—who was nearest the library door—then Miss Hornbottle with Mr. Leacraft on her right, making the circle complete. It was pitch-dark and they were holding each other by the hand.

"It occurred to me, while Mrs. Punderford was explaining the layout, how easy it would have been for any one who was so minded to get out of that circle simply by slipping the hand of the person on one side of him into that of the one on the other; people are bound to be restless and move about a little when they have been sitting like that for twenty minutes in a tense, strained atmosphere. George can tell you that it is one of the easiest stunts worked in his former profession."

"That's right," agreed George. "As a matter of fact, young Alan did free his hands—or one of them—for a minute just before the crash came, but I'll tell you all about that later."

"I noticed," continued Rex, "that three chairs were overturned; Miss Hornbottle's, Punderford's, and Scaynes's. The button of the light-switch which Scaynes pressed when the alarm came was in the wall midway between his chair and Miss Mildred's.

"Mrs. Punderford advanced the theory that when her sister fainted and fell to the floor the chair went with her and that Punderford had inadvertently overturned his in his anxiety to reach the library in the darkness after the sound of the falling body came, which were both likely enough.

"That lady is shrewd and sharp-eyed, but when she said that Scaynes must have deliberately kicked his chair out of the way when he rose to turn on the light because it lay so far from the table, she did not take into consideration the long streaks which were left in the heavy pile of the velvet carpet. It was plain that he had pushed his chair back with all his weight in it and then overturned it.

"Now, suppose he wanted to open the safe. He could have switched hands as I have told you, pushed his chair back slowly and noiselessly and tiptoed into the library; suppose he found a rival there in the person of Solo Dan, dashed the chhota maut in his face and slipped back quickly before the body had even fallen to the floor.

"Then when the sound came and the uproar arose, he might have kicked his chair over and switched on the light. That's the way I figured it out, and I've learned nothing since to contradict my theory."

"I never noticed any tracks in the carpet, at all," confessed Phil. "I was too anxious to get to the safe myself."

"Nor I," Henry supplemented. "All I could think of was the body in the library, and those two people up-stairs."

"By the way, Henry, what was it Ethel said that put you on the same track as the rest of us?" asked Lucian.

"It was when she told us about going into Scaynes's room to examine it when he was at dinner and prying open the locked drawer. According to her, it contained only some articles left by a female guest; a jar of paste rouge, some knotted cord, a pair of soiled gray silk gloves, and a rusty nail-file and scissors.

"Now, I knew about the hashish, of course, and I suspected about the chhota maut and the means by which it had been thrown into the air before Solo Dan's face. They were both Indian drugs, remember, and with them in mind, I could very easily associate those other articles with them.

"As I told you, it was only a wild guess, but what if that jar had contained, not paste rouge but betel paste, from the betel nut which all the lower caste chew in India? What if those soiled gray gloves had been put on to obviate the danger of finger-prints in opening the safe? Silk draws on much more quickly than kid, you know, and if the second thief were Scaynes he was working against time.

"It flashed over me, too, that the knotted cord might well have been the 'rumal' of the thuggees, and I think Luce's experience proves that part, at least. As for the 'rusty' nail file and scissors—well, Rex and Cliff have seen my sample of chhota maut, and they will agree with me that it looks more like powdered rust than anything else.

"Scaynes is naturally a fastidious man and he must have allowed his nails to grow

abnormally long in order to conceal the chhota maut beneath them. I've no doubt that he carried enough to impregnate the air in both dining-room and library and cause suspended animation in every one present if anything went wrong and he were discovered, in order to make his get-away.

"I calculated that his first act on regaining his room after the excitement had died down and he had secreted the stolen stuff, would be to cut and clean his nails. But he couldn't clean the nail-file and scissors, because by an odd chance, chhota maut stains steel indelibly.

"I've been listening to everything since with the one idea in my head that he was the man, and the more I heard the more I was convinced that I was right. That pose of his was great! He mixed up a dozen different cults and creeds because they suited his purpose, and he deliberately laid it on so thick that people who really had made a study of those things would think that he was crazy but not a faker. Those who were ignorant and gullible would only be the more impressed.

"When I went yesterday for my talk with the swami, he introduced me to Scaynes, and during the interview I studied his as thoroughly as I could. I couldn't see a trace of insanity about him, but I could see that he was posing by the minute, and once when he yawned I saw that his tongue was stained red with betel juice."

"That was a mighty bright thought about that stuff in the drawer, Henry," Lucian commented. "Of course, it isn't evidence, any more than Rex's tracks on the carpet, but it all counts. George, how did you reach the conclusion that he was the guilty man?"

"Well, I admit that he had me going good and plenty when I first met him. I've never gone in for that intellectual patter, you know, never had the opportunity to learn it, and I couldn't make out whether he was a faker or just a nut." George paused. "I found out differently, though, the day before yesterday, when I went out again as a book agent.

"I found that Punderford's life had been a perfectly open one since that first little slip he made at Kotoba and Jennings's, and the only significant thing about it in the light of this morning's revelations was that he was abroad two or three times, the last trip having been made at the time of the Boxer uprising in China. But everywhere I went from one shop and importing house to another where Punderford had worked his way up from office boy to head of the firm, I found that within the last year some one else had been before me, asking the most minute incidents about his work and his every-day life; and the description of that person fits Scaynes like the proverbial glove.

"That isn't all. Two of these shops employ Hindus in native costumes to sell certain Indian importations, and I learned that my predecessor had conversed fluently with them in Hindustani. If he weren't Scaynes he must, as I say, have been a dead ringer for him, but if he were, then as sure as you're born Scaynes has been in India, and not only been there, but *lived* there.

"People can't pick up the Hindu language and customs in a day, or a year for that matter. I got so interested in this man who had been so curious about Punderford, that when I got all the dope about the old man's career that I thought Luce would want I trailed down to the banking district and made a few discreet inquiries.

"I discovered that here again my enterprising friend had been before me, but he hadn't been so curious about how much money Punderford had as where he kept it and other valuables; what safety deposit vaults he had, and that sort of thing.

"It seemed pretty obvious to me, after that. Of course, Scaynes might have wanted to find out incidents of Punderford's past career in order to impress him at those séances and mind-reading stunts, but the later inquiries showed that he was trying to find out where Punderford kept something that he wanted to lay his hands on.

"Now, there is one more thing that I would like to call the attention of you fellows to; although it is only a surmise on my part I base it on my own experience in running the same kind of a game. Ask any one to think of some numbers at random, and he will invariably think of the num-

bers that are most often in his mind, and nine times out of ten a man will mention the numbers of the combination of his safe.

"Do you remember, Luce, when we saw Punderford on Wednesday and he was singing the praises of his friend Scaynes, he told us how he had thought of a whole string of numbers and Scaynes had read his mind without a mistake? Knowing what was preying on his mind, isn't it natural to suppose that semi-automatically he would think of the combination of that safe where the stolen pearls were?"

"It's perfectly logical. I wonder if Punderford would remember?" Lucian looked around the table. "It's piling up, isn't it? Of course, it is only circumstantial and much of it cannot be proved, but it all dovetails. Cliff, on what did you base your opinion?"

CHAPTER XL.

PLANS.

"ON his handwriting," Cliff responded promptly. "To tell you the truth, I grew so interested in this new line that Rex has opened up for me, and was so absorbed in the effort to find out who wrote those blackmailing letters that the rest of the investigation paled into insignificance in my mind, and I left it for you fellows to worry about.

"When by a lucky chance I found that Mickens was the blackmailer, I thought—as I believe some of you did, too—that he was the inside man for some one else, but of course, not having an inkling of the nature of what had been stolen, I couldn't draw any conclusions as to who the principal might be.

"One possible factor did impress itself slightly upon me, however. India is the birthplace of theosophy, and the drug hashish comes from there. Scaynes purported to be a theosophist. It was a thin and tenuous thread, I know, and I only gave it a passing thought until the day before yesterday, when you sent me up to enroll myself as a satellite of the swami.

"I was late because I stopped off at the Public Library to read up a little on the activities and religion of the swamis so that I should be able to bluff him a bit. When I arrived he had gone out and Scaynes himself admitted me to the studio. He had been writing a letter—the ink wasn't dry on it—and when he was called out into the hall by the ringing of the telephone I slipped a page or two of the letter into my pocket.

"I couldn't examine it very well that night, but yesterday morning I got down here early and went to work on it, and to say that I was astonished is putting it mildly. It's the weirdest writing I ever saw!

"I looked up every line and quirk and if those books Rex got for me do not lie the swami is the most thoroughly evil person I ever heard of! We're whited sepulchres compared to him, in spite of his wonderful voice and magnetic manner.

"His is a typical murderer's hand, yet thievishness and greed almost predominate. He is totally lacking in a moral sense, of course, but he doesn't kid himself along; he knows what he is doing every minute and why he is doing it, and he never tries to blink the motive. Ruthlessness is strong in his hand, and so are caution and a passion for detail.

"Right then and there I discounted that pretty little tale the janitor of the studio building told Phil, although I don't doubt he honestly believed what the swami had told him. It isn't natural for a sly fox like that to make a confidant of the janitor and brag about his victims to him.

"Privately, I think the swami is only a cover for Scaynes's activities. I'd like to put that letter in the hands of a real expert and see what he thinks of it!"

"Is that all?" demanded Phil. "Haven't you anything more to go on than just what you thought you saw in his handwriting?"

"It's enough for me!" responded Cliff firmly. "Of course, because a man has possibilities of criminal tendencies as shown in his handwriting, it doesn't signify that he has already committed a crime, but here we have a crime with peculiarly fiendish aspects—witness that poor yegg's chances of being buried alive—and when I find the one man capable of committing it I've got sense enough to put two and two together."

"I've got more than that!" crowed Phil. "I'm the only one in the bunch who has any real proof!"

They all stared at him and then Lucian exclaimed:

"Proof! Why on earth didn't you speak up before, Phil?"

"I wanted to hear what you guys had to say. You sent me back with my taxi to that studio building on the night before last to find out anything more that I could about that outfit up there and to trail Scaynes if he came out.

"I had a bite to eat first and got there about seven o'clock. The janitor was standing on the sidewalk a few doors away and I halted the taxi to speak to him, forgetting to put my flag down. It was lucky I did, for we hadn't been chinning more than five minutes when a man came out of the building and the janitor touched my hand that was on the wheel.

"'That's him,' he said. I asked which one and he told me 'Scaynes.' The guy stood looking around for a minute and then came straight up to me, for mine by a stroke of luck happened to be the only taxi in sight.

"He asked me if I was free, and I'll tell the world that I jumped down quick and opened the door! It may interest you to know the address he gave me, Luce; it was the Vogue Lunchroom on Thirty-Fourth Street."

"Why, that's where Mickens had his dinner!" Lucian exclaimed once more.

"Exactly. I pulled up in front of it and a man who had been standing on the sidewalk hurried up and jumped in, telling me to drive twice slowly around the block. And then I saw you! You were standing looking in the window of the shop next to the lunchroom.

"I whistled as I started off, trying to attract your attention, but you never even turned. I drove as the man had told me twice around the block and he must have timed things pretty accurately, for as I drew up the second time before the lunchroom, who should come out but Mickens!

"Well, I guess I don't need to tell you what happened for the next few hours; we started off in a procession and I could have laughed if the situation hadn't been so darn serious. Mickens led and then you and then me, following at a snail's pace behind. When we got to the picture house Mickens went in and you followed and my two fares brought up the rear, telling me to wait.

"I thought they were trailing Mickens, of course, and I was more sure than ever that he was in cahoots with them. You see, I had pretty well decided that my second man was the swami, and when I described him to the janitor yesterday I found that I was right.

"Mickens and you and the other two came out after the show was over in the order that you went in and our procession started up Broadway just as before. Mickens was taking in the sights as if he hadn't the slightest notion that he were being trailed, and it came over me then that he had double-crossed the other two and they were after him.

"It was the hour that the theaters let out and Broadway was jammed, but I noticed that another taxi joined our procession at Fortieth Street, and at Forty-Second in the crush there it drew up close beside me for just a minute, but I didn't think of that until afterward.

"At Forty-Seventh, where Mickens turned west to go to his lodgings, we turned, too—I had got my instructions at the picture house to follow him—but at Ninth Avenue the swami stuck out his head and told me to drive down one block, west to Tenth Avenue, and north again to Forty-Seventh, and go like mad.

"I did and he stopped me and got out a few doors below Forty-Seventh on the avenue and around the corner. I didn't like the looks of things but I waited where I was for about five minutes because he had told me to and I didn't like to disobey orders with the other man, Scaynes, still in the taxi.

"I couldn't stand it, though I wanted to see what was going on and get in touch with you if I could. I got down and opened the door, intending to ask Scaynes if I shouldn't drive around the corner—and I found that the taxi was empty. I recalled, then, that other taxi which had stopped beside mine at Forty-Second Street and I realized that

Scaynes must have stepped into it and made his getaway.

"I turned quick, then, and sprinted around the corner and half-way up the block I saw a man lying on the sidewalk and a bull running up to him, while another man was running off away down the street. I took it for granted that the man lying there was Mickens and that the swami had done him in and I didn't want to get mixed up in anything with that bull there.

"The swami was the man who was beating it and I sprinted back to my taxi and started after him. I had a legitimate excuse, for he was doing me out of my fare, but when I turned the corner he was nowhere in sight, and although I cruised around that neighborhood pretty thoroughly looking for him, I didn't find him again.

"You can imagine how I felt when I walked in here yesterday morning and Rex told me what had happened to you! I realized then that it was you the swami had attacked, and you they had been trailing all the time, and the thought that I could have saved you if I hadn't been such a bonehead made me fairly sick!"

"By Jove! that is a queer mix-up, isn't it?" Lucian said musingly. "So it was the swami, after all! But you don't call that proof that Scaynes took the pearls, do you? Actually all the evidence it gives us is that the swami is guilty of assault with intent to kill, and we are not in a position to touch him.

"I'll tell you my own story now. Scaynes wasn't fooled from the moment we entered the Punderford house to start our investigation; he was playing George for a sucker all during that interview, and when Mrs. Punderford—at our suggestion I will admit—sent him on that false errand to Long Island it gave him just the opportunity he wanted to get in touch with the swami and have us shadowed.

"Ethel did not see him at the Punderford house until late the afternoon of the next day, and it was either he or the swami who went to Washington with me on the same sleeper and searched my berth after drugging the porter."

He told them in detail of his experience, and at the conclusion he added:

"You see, it is as I told you this morning. We are all morally certain that Scaynes is the man and yet we have not an iota of real proof against him. If we go to the swami's studio *en masse* and attempt to search it, we wouldn't have a ghost of a chance, for there would be a row and police and everything that we must avoid. Strategy won't do, for you may be sure they are guarding those pearls and the sacred stork with their lives."

"Then what *is* to be done?" demanded Cliff.

"I can see only one way out of it," Lucian replied. "We cannot convict him, so we must make him convict himself."

"But how?" Rex asked curiously.

"By the use of one of your own pet devices: psychology. It's a safe bet that they know all about our organization, if not our past careers, and they probably are trying to shadow us and prevent our interfering with them until Scaynes can make his getaway.

"Now, my idea is to work a constant, subtle third degree on him until his nerve is broken. We'll get at him in a thousand ways, watch him, study his habits and hound him always with the one message: to give up the pearls. George, you're a bit of a ventriloquist, aren't you?"

"I used to be in the old days," George responded cautiously. "I'm afraid I've lost the knack, but a little practise will bring it back."

"You'll do for the phone messages and the still, small voice in public places. Cliff, could you be persuaded to shave off that hirsute ornament of yours?"

"In a good cause," Cliff drawled.

"You played in amateur theatricals once upon a time, didn't you?"

Cliff stiffened slightly.

"As a matter of fact I did, but—"

"No offense, old man. You're going to be a Chinaman for a while. I'll teach you a few phrases and give you a make-up that will stand the sunlight if necessary." Lucian turned to Phil. "You've done more real shadowing in this case than any of us; you stay on the job and trail Scaynes."

Phil's face darkened.

"And suppose he flips some of that

brown powder of his at me and I play dead right in the middle of the street somewhere, what then?"

"I can protect you against that," Henry interposed. "Specially medicated cotton for the nostrils and keep your mouth closed. You've got to breathe it in, you know, and I doubt if it would be effective anyway, except in a confined space."

"I'll arrange a little device for you to put in your taxi, if you can manage to get him inside it again, that will give him a bad quarter of an hour," Lucian remarked. "He hired you at night and he may not know you again, but we won't take any chances; I'll touch you up a bit so that he won't recognize you.

"The first time that Scaynes and the swami go out together, telephone to Ethel here and let her know. Rex, you ride, don't you?"

"Yes."

"I'll telephone Punderford to have his daughter go down in the car and take Scaynes for a drive through the park, keeping near the bridle path, with instructions to bow to any man on horseback who approaches her. We'll fix the details later. As for you, Henry, preserve the rest of that chhota maut that you didn't waste on the cat; it will come in handy."

Henry looked rather alarmed but made no rejoinder, and Lucian arose.

"Phil, got your taxi down-stairs? We'll go and get the properties and start the game going at once. You fellows wait for me."

"I see in a way what you are going to do, Luce, although I don't know all the details," Rex observed. "It's a clever stunt, but do you think it will work? He's a man of extraordinary will power, remember.

"He'll realize the game we are playing and steel himself against it. Good Heavens, he may be making his getaway now!"

"He is too clever for that. He knows of my trip to Washington, remember, but he can have no knowledge of what my visit portended for him. He will make no move until he is sure.

"You may not have faith in my plan now, Rex, but wait a day or two. Scaynes's will power may be tremendous, but no living man could stand up under the strain I mean to put upon him. Before three days have passed, unless I am very much mistaken, he will walk into this office and place upon this table the three Burning Black Pearls."

CHAPTER XLI.

"GIVE UP THE PEARLS!"

AT five o'clock that afternoon the last of the swami's pupils departed and with a sigh of relief he divested himself of his gorgeous robe and turban and stretched out upon the divan with a malodorous pipe between his teeth.

"All over?" Scaynes peered into the studio cautiously, then strode in and seated himself astride a chair. "No sign of any further meddling from those fools? It's too bad you didn't stop to finish that job the other night, Bert."

"With that bull appearing just as I pulled on the knot?" the swami asked feelingly. "Maybe you would like me to have finished the job and got run in for murder; it would have killed two birds with one stone, eh?"

"I don't know what you mean," Scaynes replied coldly. "You are still of use to me, my friend."

"Yes, and I've been the goat for you for a good many years, Ralph." The swami scowled as he pulled on his pipe.

"You've been well paid for it, haven't you?"

"Perhaps, up to now. I don't think you're giving me a square deal in this, though. Ten thousand bucks for that little affair the other night—"

"In which you failed," interrupted Scaynes.

"I get it, though; that was the agreement," the swami retorted. "Then only fifty thousand for seeing you through this game and covering your getaway, when you are making millions! I tell you it's not square!

"You need me now, but how long will it last? This business will put you in Millionaires' Row for life and you'll probably never turn another trick. You won't have any further use for me then and I know a whole lot about you. I'd keep my mouth

shut and let you alone, but would you be likely to take a chance on that? You've always played safe."

"Look here, what are you driving at?" Scaynes rose. "You poor fool! Don't you suppose that if I had wanted you out of the way I would have arranged it long ago?"

"But you needed me; that's the point. I'm giving it to you straight that I wouldn't put it past you now, however. Oh, I don't mean that I'm afraid of you personally; with the money for those pearls and the stork still in prospect you wouldn't take a chance of getting into trouble, but you might try to frame me and save the sixty thou. I know as well as you do what's going on in that sleek head of yours, Ralph."

"You're crazy!" Scaynes retorted in disgust. "I've never gone back on a pal yet. A few more days of this and then I'll be off your hands. Fifty thousand dollars for a few days' hospitality; you're earning it very easily, Bert."

"And in the mean time, suppose Punderford gets wise, or the others—Tuang Lung and his crowd." Bert, the "swami," lowered his voice half-fearfully and glanced uneasily about at the gathering shadows in the corners of the huge studio. "It's bad enough to have that confounded band of amateur dicks at our heels! I tell you I don't feel safe while you and those damnable pearls are under the same roof and twice fifty thousand wouldn't pay me—"

The sudden ringing of the telephone-bell in the hall cut in on his sentence and Ralph Scaynes laughed shortly.

"One of your society proselytes!" he remarked.

Bert rose with an oath and strode to the phone. In another moment his face, suddenly blanched, appeared in the doorway.

"It's a Chinaman," he announced in a queer, strangled tone. "He wants to speak to you."

Ralph tossed away the cigarette he had just lighted and affected a yawn.

"One of my Mott Street friends, I suppose."

He strolled nonchalantly out into the hall and held the receiver to his ear. As he listened to the high-pitched, monkeylike chatter his free hand clenched and beads of perspiration glistened on his face. After it had ceased he stood there for a full minute forcing himself to composure before he reentered the studio.

"I was right," he explained calmly. "I told you I had gone out of my way to do a favor for one of the tongs which Tuangi Lung has antagonized; thought it might come handy if we needed any yellow allies before I've disposed of the pearls, but the thundering little devils always want more. One of them has got into trouble with the police and they want me to advise them."

But he lied. The voice which had come to him over the phone spoke no halting English, but the purest of high-caste Chinese and it warned him, if he valued his life, to take the pearls and the sacred stork to the American association known as the Shadowers.

At six o'clock the pair went out to dinner and Scaynes, his nerves on edge, chose a restaurant of the glittering Broadway type. He wanted to get away for a while from himself and his own thoughts.

A cabaret performance was in full swing and they were half-way through their meal, when in a lull between numbers a voice said very distinctly in Scaynes's ears:

"The pearls. Take them to the Shadowers."

The glass which he was lifting to his lips shook so that the contents spurted out over his hand and, as he set it down, he glanced nervously about and behind him. A very much absorbed couple or two, an army officer alone and three elderly gentlemen were his only near neighbors. He did not observe a tall, cadaverous individual seated with his back to him, just beyond the officer.

"Let's get out of here!" he exclaimed savagely. "That damned cabaret gets on my nerves."

As the erstwhile swami opened the studio door a quarter of an hour later, he paused and sniffed.

"Do you smell that?" he demanded.

"Smell what?"

"Like joss sticks. Some one's been in here, Ralph. Some one whose clothes are impregnated with the damned stuff."

"Nonsense!" For all his long-practised control of himself Scaynes could not make his voice sound quite natural, for he, too, detected that faint, spicy odor. "You've got that Tuang Lung bunch on the brain!"

The other advanced into the studio and switched on the light, and after a minute Scaynes followed. As he crossed the threshold a nasal voice rang through the room.

"Surrender the Burning Black Pearls to the brotherhood of the Shadowers."

"You heard that?" whispered Bert after a moment of tense silence. "I told you some one was here!"

He cowered back against the wall, but Scaynes set his jaw grimly.

"I'm going to search the place," he declared.

He went from room to room of the apartment with which the studio was connected, leaving no possible hiding-place for a human body uninvestigated, but found no one.

"If we didn't both imagine it, it is just some fool trick of that 'Shadowers' bunch," he shrugged. "They must have gained entrance here during our absence and installed some idiotic mechanical device."

"We didn't imagine it." Bert pointed a shaking finger at the opposite wall. "Look at that picture!"

Scaynes's eyes followed the gesture and a smothered exclamation escaped him. Where before had hung a plausible imitation Corot there now appeared in the same frame a soft-toned print of a quaint palace rising behind high walls.

"What is it?" faltered Bert. "It's—it's Chinese, isn't it?"

"It is the imperial palace in the Forbidden City, in Peking," responded Scaynes through set teeth. "Damn those Shadowers!"

He sprang across the room and in an unprecedented outburst of fury he tore the print from the frame. There beneath it was another: a life-sized photograph of the head of Prince Ching.

With a savage mutter he tore that out also, and the blank wall appeared in the empty space. The imitation Corot was gone.

At that instant the telephone rang and he turned sharply to his companion.

"Pull yourself together, man. It is nothing but a cheap trick, I tell you."

But Bert's ears were strained for a sound other than the telephone bell, and with another oath, Scaynes obeyed its summons.

His exasperated words brought Bert quickly from his trance.

"Who? Saunders? No one of that name here. Yes, this is the studio of the Swami Abadenarath—*Bill* Saunders? I'm sure he doesn't—"

"Wait a minute!" Bert brushed him aside and seized the receiver. "Who are you? What do you want? Oh, you do, do you? Well, who are you? What! Who *are* you?"

He hung the receiver up slowly and faced the other man. There was sudden ferocity in his eyes; the naked ferocity of one armed with the first and most savage of nature's laws, self-preservation.

"Some one—must have known me long ago," he said jerkily.

"So! You've another name, then, that I didn't know about!" Scaynes laughed sneeringly. "'Bill Saunders,' eh?"

"Never you mind about that!" the other retorted. "Do you know what that message was? It was a warning to get you and your cursed pearls out of this place if I value my life!"

Scaynes shrugged again.

"More tricks," he said contemptuously. "I don't know what this Bill Saunders phase of your existence was, and you aren't likely to tell me, but don't let them get your nerve. Remember, you're in this with me to stay! Get that? If you try to back out now or double-cross me you know the consequences!"

"Not for a paltry fifty thousand, I'm not!" the other cried with sudden fury. "My life's worth more than that to me! I'll put myself under the protection of the bulls first! They're white men, at least, not yellow; and I'd rather do a stretch or two for past performances in a safe jail than have my throat slit!"

Scaynes scrutinized his partner's desperate face, saw that he meant what he said, and capitulated.

"A hundred thousand, then, and that's final. I tell you, it's nothing but that cheap gang of amateurs, and they probably will keep it up in one form or another until they've finally satisfied themselves that it won't work. A hundred thousand and you stick to the finish!"

How long Scaynes slept that night he did not know. He only realized that he found himself sitting bolt upright in bed in the darkness, and that somewhere a bell was tolling faintly, musically. He had not heard one like it for more than a year. It was a temple bell!

It ceased, and suddenly upon the ensuing silence so close to him that involuntarily he cowered back, a voice breathed:

"Take the pearls to the Shadowers or the vengeance of the East will be upon you!"

He sprang up, switched on the light, and searched every inch of the room, but no trace of any mechanical device rewarded him, and finally he returned to bed to lie wide-eyed until the dawn.

CHAPTER XLII.

"TAKE THE PEARLS TO THE SHADOWERS!"

WITH the morning, Bert's courage seemed to have returned. Scaynes, shaving in the bath-room, could hear him whistling cheerfully as he prepared the coffee in the percolator, and he scowled. His hand wasn't quite steady; twice he had nicked his chin rather badly.

"Take the pearls to the Shadowers before the rise of three more suns."

The solemn voice came from just behind him, just over his shoulder, and the razor slipped once more, cutting a deep gash in his cheek. He dropped it and wheeled about, but no one was there, nor was there a break in the solid tiling of the wall where an instrument could have been concealed. He sat down weakly on the edge of the tub, a towel pressed to his bleeding cheek.

He knew that the Shadowers had established relations with the Chinese embassy in Washington. Was he one man against not six others, but against that sleeping giant of a nation?

"Say, you're all shot to pieces!" Bert remarked consolingly at the breakfast table. "What have you done to your face? I've got all over my funk; if we are just bucking that bunch of would-be dicks let 'em bring on all the tricks they have got in their box! What's your trouble?"

"N-nothing." Scaynes's teeth chattered as he spoke.

"Well, you'll never be able to pull yourself together at this rate. I know you hate it, but you'd better let me give you a shot of dope just this once. You ought to see yourself!"

Scaynes submitted, and Bert had hardly put his hypodermic away when the telephone rang. This time it was Scaynes who slumped and Bert who replied to it.

"Mr. Scaynes?" He used the rolling, unctuous tones he reserved for his clients. "Just a moment, Miss Punderford."

"It's really she?" Scaynes demanded. "You know her voice; it isn't a trick?"

"It's the little lady, all right," Bert responded in a stage whisper.

Reluctantly Scaynes dragged himself to the phone, but returned with a faint trace of a smile.

"She is coming down for me with the car in an hour," he announced. "Worried about her father. Wants me to take a little drive with her and give her some advice."

Several letters lay beside his plate and still smiling he picked up the topmost one. It was addressed in a negligible hand, and he slit the envelope carelessly and pulled out the single sheet of paper it contained. Gradually his smile faded and he sat staring at it with darkening eyes.

It was covered with Chinese characters and its portent was that of the verbal warnings, ending with a threat truly Oriental in its subtly fiendish suggestion. He tore it in small pieces, and sat for a long time gazing down at his untouched plate, careless of his companion's curious scrutiny.

When he joined Mildred Punderford in her car an hour later, however, there was no trace in his stately, calm manner of the emotions which were consuming him. He was again the absent-minded dreamer, the lofty soul apart from material things, yet

condescending to lend his services to one upon a lower plane.

Yet material things forced themselves upon him in a most unexpected manner. They had reached a part of the East Drive where the bridle path ran close beside the road, and a man cantering easily along upon a superb horse bowed impressively to Miss Punderford, who was on the farther side of the car.

Without instructions the chauffeur slowed down, and the man—a distinguished-looking foreigner whom Scaynes had never seen before—rode straight up to the side of the car, and bending from his saddle, said rapidly in a low, meaning tone:

"When are you going to obey the voices? It is your only chance."

Then, without waiting for a reply, he bowed again and galloped away.

"Who was that man?" he asked hoarsely, his pose for once forgotten.

"A friend of father's. He brought him to dinner once, but I have forgotten his name." She added curiously: "What did he say to you, Mr. Scaynes?"

"He evidently took me for some one else," Scaynes responded vaguely, but his mind was busy with a new and startling train of thought. Did Punderford know? Had he in some way gained immunity for his act of long ago, and was he in league with the Shadowers and those they represented to recover the pearls? Had this drive been a plant?

He possessed a key to the studio, and on his return he let himself in, supposing that the swami's morning classes had commenced, but silence reigned throughout the place, and he peered curiously in at the studio door. Bert, clad in his gorgeous robe, and with the turban upon his head, lay upon the divan, stretched out and relaxed as if in sleep; but there seemed something unnatural about his pose, and with fear clutching at his heart, Scaynes crossed and bent over him.

The whites of his eyes showed in a narrow slit, his jaw had fallen, and upon the breast of his vivid robe some grains like powdered rust had settled.

With a strangled gasp Scaynes recoiled. Chhota maut! The little death!

He had thought that no one in America knew of its existence. Surely the supply he had brought from India was all that had ever reached these shores, and he had used the last of it on that intruder in the Punderfords library!

Yet here—here before his eyes was evidence that he was wrong! Dazedly he glanced down at the quiet hands folded upon his partner's breast and saw a wisp of paper protruding from the waxlike fingers.

Shudderingly he drew it forth.

"Chhota maut for the rumal. The sword of the Manchus for him who holds the three Burning Black Pearls."

He stared at the message for a moment with knitted brows. The handwriting was certainly familiar. If he could only identify it he would know who was at the bottom of this persecution. Where had he seen it before? He knew it as well as he knew his own—

A loud cry echoed through the studio, and the paper fluttered through his fingers. *It was his own handwriting!*

Scaynes pressed his clenched hands to his temples and stared down at the paper as though it were some evil thing of living menace. He felt that he must be going mad. Surely his eyes were not deceiving him, his memory was not gone.

He had never written a word of that message, and yet the evidence that he had lay before him. No one could imitate that hand; he had spent years in developing its rounded, impressive flourishes. Yet he must believe it an imitation or else madness indeed would come.

The seeming purposelessness of the forgery recurred again and again to him as he disrobed the inert body of the pseudo swami and put him to bed. There was nothing to be done for him, he knew, save to wait until the coma produced by the drug had worn off, and throughout the long day, as he sat beside the bed, he pondered over the message.

The telephone sounded repeatedly, but he would not reply, and twice the echo of those infernal temple bells rang through the room, but he stopped his ears. In one moment of weakness the idea of submission

flashed across his brain, but he put it determinedly from him.

He would not be thwarted now. With vast riches within his grasp he would not relinquish them because of this ingeniously maddening persecution. His enemies were clever, but they dared not harm him, or they would have made some attempt long ago. They could only reach him in this way, and he had only to fight off the mental pressure of suggestion.

Yet for all his sophistries, when evening came he realized that he was on the verge of hysteria. He had passed a sleepless night, he had eaten nothing since the previous day, and the thought of hours of waiting beside that unconscious form was more than he could endure.

He wanted lights, food, wine, and the comforting presence of careless, pleasure-seeking humanity all about him, close to him, to drive this nightmare away. Swiftly, feverishly he donned dinner-clothes and, rushing from the apartment as though pursued, he hailed the first taxi he saw and told the chauffeur to take him to the Bellemonde Hotel.

He settled back with a sigh of relief and closed his eyes as the cab rolled smoothly off. The motion was soothing, restful, and each turn of the wheels was taking him further from the horror of the studio to where people were normal and carefree.

"Take the pearls to the Shadowers. You cannot escape us."

The words were English, but the high, twanging tones were those of the educated Chinese.

With a hoarse cry Scaynes tore open the door of the taxi.

"Stop!" he roared to the chauffeur, and sprang out even before the wheels grated against the curb. "What's your fare? I'm going to walk."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE MAN WHO CONVICTED HIMSELF.

HE paid and strode off, holding himself tensely to keep from breaking down utterly. He was going mad, of course. It was beyond human ingenuity to create those voices at every turn. And it was a different voice each time; a different voice bearing the same message.

What if he were to obey them? He had accumulated enough money to live in comparative affluence, and he could always procure more while there were gullible people in the world. The Burning Black Pearls of the Manchus had brought disaster to every one who had held them; perhaps if he turned them over to the Shadowers sanity would return to him once more.

In the lobby of the Bellemonde he became conscious of an unwonted stir and noticed that all eyes were turned in one direction. Following their gaze, he beheld an old mandarin clad in the gorgeous native robes of his rank.

"I understand he is here on some secret mission." A woman in evening-dress near him leaned over to confide to her companion. "Something of great diplomatic importance. He's an old royalist, you know; friend of the former dowager empress. He has rather an interesting face, hasn't he?"

Scaynes fled to the restaurant without a glance at the speaker. Had he looked at her it is doubtful whether he would have recognized the erstwhile maid at the Punderfords and her companion as the man he had followed to Washington.

He ate mechanically. The well-dressed crowd about him seemed shut away as by a wall, and he was alone, outside. He was thinking of a cordial after his coffee when a low whisper came to his ear:

"Give up the pearls of the Manchus before three suns."

He rose precipitately and fled, heedless of the curious glances of his neighbors, and was only stopped at the door by the protesting waiter presenting his check.

On the street once more he decided upon a theater. There was nothing to be done for Bert, and if he went back now and sat by the stricken man, listening for those voices all night he would be a raving maniac by morning. He would go to a musical-comedy, something lively, with the orchestra to drown out that hideous whisper in his ears.

By luck he secured a seat in the third

row, but one removed from the center aisle. The curtain rose and the first act was half over and still that seat beside him remained unoccupied. Scaynes determinedly focused his attention on the stage, forced himself to listen, tried to lose himself and his thoughts in the scene before him, but the comedy seemed the dreariest patter imaginable, the songs tuneless and his sense of isolation grew.

The act was over at last, the lights went up, and Scaynes discovered to his surprise that the seat beside him was occupied. His neighbor had slipped in so quietly that he had been unaware of his coming, and involuntarily Scaynes glanced at him. The man was in correct evening-dress, but his cheek-bones were broad, his skin yellow, and he returned Scaynes's horrified stare with a quizzical light in his almond-shaped eyes.

The rest of the evening was sheer torture. Scaynes dared not leave, he dared not pass the Chinaman, who barred his way to the aisle. His very flesh crawled, and once when their elbows touched he cringed as if he had received a blow.

After what seemed like countless ages the curtain fell at last, and he rose. Instead of preceding him the Chinaman stood back to let him pass, and though he spoke no word his eyes as Scaynes met them once again bore a warning and an unmistakable threat beneath their courteous deprecation.

On reaching the studio he found Bert's condition unchanged and dropped wearily into a chair by the bed. Sheer exhaustion brought sleep to his eyes, but twice he was awakened by the tinkling temple bells, and once a warning voice spoke to him in Chinese, but he flung himself on his knees and buried his head in the bedclothes. If Bert would only wake!

It was noon on the following day, however, before the pseudo swami opened his eyes and fastened them in a dazed fashion upon the wreck of a man beside him. As he did so the dazed look faded, and his eyes suddenly flashed fire.

"So you're here still, damn you!" he croaked. "Couldn't make your getaway after all, eh? They were watching for you. If I had the strength I'd kill you, but I'll give you five minutes to get out of here with your damned pearls before I call the police.

"Oh, I'm not afraid you'll kill me; you won't do anything rash while the pearls are in your possession, but you put me under with your cursed chhota maut so that you could beat it without giving me my share."

"Bert," Scaynes gasped as the other fell back in sheer weakness. "You're crazy, man. You're delirious. I came home from the park and found you—"

"Save your lies," Bert interrupted. "You'll need 'em all before you're through. Crazy, am I? I didn't hear your latch-key in the door, I suppose; didn't see you come into the studio; didn't look into your face as you threw that damnable stuff into the air about me!"

"I tell you it's a ghastly mistake. If you're not delirious some one must have been impersonating me. I can prove it."

Scaynes checked himself suddenly. He had meant to produce the message which he had found between Bert's fingers, and now the fiendish cleverness of the forgery became apparent. Bert would recognize his writing, and characterize the message as a clumsy attempt to pull the wool over his eyes.

"Haven't you always told me that no one in America had ever heard of chhota maut? That none had been brought to this country except by you?" Bert's voice was slowly gaining in strength and savage animosity. "Don't you suppose I know your face when I see it? What day is this?"

"Sunday."

"So! You doped me so that you could have a good twenty-four hours' start with the pearls and beat me out of the hundred thousand, didn't you? Then when you found they were watching for you outside there was nothing for you to do but stay here and try to bluff it out.

"Well, you won't; I'm done with you. I don't want any money that comes from those accursed things. I can make enough in my own way, and I wouldn't harbor them or you any longer for all the gold in the world. Take them and get the hell out of here or I will call the bulls and tell them all I know."

In all their years of association Scaynes had been the master, but on certain memorable occasions Bert had asserted himself, and the other knew from experience when it would be useless to attempt to placate or override him.

Without a word he rose, went to the wall-safe, concealed behind a mirror, seemingly built into the wall, and took therefrom a tiny square box, modeled roughly in clay. It had no top, and in the dimness of the room a silvery glow emanated from it.

Scaynes passed into his own bedroom, packed a bag with the box wadded down securely in its center and, returned, paused in the door.

"You'll regret this," he said quietly. "It's all a put-up job of theirs to separate us, but I can't convince you now. I found you insensible when I came in yesterday; some one of our enemies must have gotten hold of some chhota maut, for I had no more. Believe this or not, as you please. Good-by, Bert."

He stalked to the front door, and as he closed it behind him an echo of those temple-bells seemed to ring mockingly in his ears.

He avoided taxicabs and took a car down-town, thinking fast. He would be safest in a large, crowded hotel where he could lie low in his room for a few days, and telephone to Bert when the latter should have had time to think things over. He could neither leave the pearls nor carry them about with him; he was tied hand and foot until his associate should come to his aid.

Entering the newest and most glittering of the city's huge caravansaries he registered under an assumed name, and on reaching the room to which he had been assigned he flung himself across the bed. At least he could sleep here; no devilish mechanical devices could call him from his rest to sound that sinister warning in his ears. He would have a respite, time to plan for his next move.

It was late afternoon when he awakened, normal and refreshed, to look upon the situation from a sane point of view. He ordered dinner and a sheaf of magazines, and spent a tranquil evening.

What a fool he had been to think for a minute of giving up the treasure and all that he could negotiate it for! He hadn't heard those voices in the taxi or the restaurants; that had been simply his overwrought imagination. Somehow those Shadowers had managed to gain entrance to the studio and rigged up some concealed dictaphone arrangements while he and Bert were out to dinner on Friday night, and again on the following morning when they had drugged Bert. That was all there was about it. He was free here, they couldn't reach him.

"One sun has set. Before two more, take the pearls to the Shadowers."

With a groan of utter despair he covered his face with his hands. The voices had followed him even here. He was lost.

At ten the next morning the six Shadowers were gathered in their office waiting in a strained silence for what might eventuate. It was Lucian who spoke at last.

"You're very sure, George, that he'll come through?"

George nodded solemnly.

"I've seen strong men broken in prison, and I know. It was lucky I could get the room next him at the hotel last night, wasn't it? I'll bet that was the first time ventriloquism was ever practised through a key-hole. The third time I talked to him he was gibbering like an idiot, and when I rang the temple-bells in on him he went all to pieces and cried. What's that? Didn't I tell you?"

The door leading from the main hall had opened, and Ethel's voice was raised in query. Lucian listened for a minute and then pressed a button quickly twice. The panel opened and a man appeared upon the threshold.

He was tall and dark, but there his resemblance to the personage whom George had interviewed on the previous Monday had disappeared. His shoulders were bowed, his eyes sunken and the stateliness was gone from his manner as he moved slowly forward and placed upon the table an open jewel-case which contained a quaint stork made of solid pearls with a rosy coral beak.

Then, stooping, he set the bag which he had carried upon the floor and, opening it, brought forth the rude box of clay and placed it beside the brooch. It contained three enormous silvery black pearls, and even Phil caught his breath as he looked at them.

Lucian moved slightly and the room was plunged in pitch darkness, save for the cold, steely effulgence which spread from the box upon the table, in the cavity of which three irregular globules gleamed.

"It's all right. They're the real thing." The lights streamed out once more as Lucian spoke. "We have been expecting you for some days, Mr. Scaynes."

"You have the stork and the pearls." The once beautiful, resonant voice was harsh and cracked. "Do you want anything more from me?"

"No. We do not prosecute. You have made restoration of the jewels."

"Not all." Scaynes reached into his pocket and produced a handful of small black and pink pearls, which he laid upon the table. "I took these for a blind, of course, but Mr. Punderford may value them. I am at liberty to take my departure?"

Lucian inclined his head gravely, and the other returned his bow. Then, with a touch of his old dignity, he turned and walked slowly from the room.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE.

"WHAT do you know about this?" Rex looked up from the check which he had just taken from an opened letter and at which he had been staring with sparkling eyes.

"Did old Punderford come across?" asked Phil eagerly. "I thought you were crazy to ask thirty thousand, but, of course, you could always come down. Did he split it?"

"No," responded Rex quietly. "He doubled it. Sixty thousand added to the reward from the Chinese government—well, did it pay?"

"Pay!" echoed George. "One week's work and we get away with twenty thousand a piece after we have all chipped in for Ethel's share. Luce ought to have more than the rest of us because he ran the whole thing and was nearly murdered by Bill Saunders into the bargain."

"No!" interrupted Lucian firmly. "Share and share alike; that is the only fair way. It will be the turn of one of you other fellows next, and I'll fall in and work for you as cheerfully and unquestioningly as you all did for me.

"The way you changed your voice over the telephone and into those dictaphones was simply splendid, George, to say nothing of your ventriloquism in the restaurants. It did the trick, too."

"It helped," George returned modestly. "You must have had a ticklish time getting into that studio and rigging up the machines before those two devils got back from dinner, didn't you? I think the most artistic touch in the whole affair, though, was that message Cliff wrote in Scaynes's own hand that you and Henry put between the swami's fingers after you soaked him with the chhota maut. I'd like to have seen Scaynes's face when he read it."

"That was the most enjoyable part of the whole case," Henry remarked placidly. "When I stood in the studio door and watched Luce, with that perfect Scaynes make-up on, give the 'little death' to the man who had tried to hand him the real thing not three nights before. Talk about poetic justice!"

"Luce's make-up certainly was startling," Cliff observed. "I would have sworn it was Scaynes himself."

"How about your own?" Lucian returned. "You made quite a sensation when you sailed into the lobby of the Bellemonde that night in all your regalia as a mandarin."

"And I made some quick change, too, when Phil trailed Scaynes from the hotel to the theater and phoned me that he had got the seat next him for me. How did you ever manage to get that ticket, Phil?"

"Rex knows; it's in the expense account," Phil grinned. "It was pure luck, really. When Scaynes went into the theater I bought an admission ticket and watched

to see where he sat. When I saw that there was a single seat vacant beside him I asked the usher the number of it and went back to the box-office and tried to purchase it, but it had been sold.

"It was late then and the curtain had gone up, so I planted myself in the lobby and asked every man who came in alone if he had that seat. Finally I struck the right one; he probably thought I was crazy, but he took the fifty dollars I gave him and let me have the seat.

"I didn't know you myself when you came in, Cliff, until you spoke to me. You were the Americanized Chinaman to the life."

"I had harder work with that Chinese letter we mailed to him than any signature I ever tried to duplicate in all my career," Cliff confided. "That and the changed picture were pretty crude work, I am afraid, but they all helped the suggestion along."

"Are you guys sure it was really Scaynes you saw in the morgue the very day after he came here and gave up the pearls?" Phil's face had sobered as he turned to George and Henry.

The latter nodded solemnly.

"There was no chance of a mistake," George replied for them both. "We'll never know what errand took him to Chinatown, where he was found, nor who cut his throat, but he must have made many an enemy in the Far East in the course of his career there, and there is no more relentless race on earth."

"You friend, Bill Saunders, didn't come forward and claim the body, did he, George?" laughed Rex. "He must have been too busy making his own getaway. He disappeared like a streak of greased lightning as soon as he got on his feet again after that dose of chhota maut."

"Well, it's over." Lucian stretched his arms luxuriously. "Punderford is happy, though the old rascal doesn't deserve to be; we're comparatively rich, and the pearls are on their way back to their rightful owners. When you come right down to it, the whole thing is due to Rex."

"To me?" Rex looked up in surprise. "I did less than any of you."

"You organized the Shadowers. Lord! when I think how reluctant we were to go in for it I could kick myself even now. Just think where we might all be now if we hadn't.

"We all did what we could, I'm sure, to bring the case to a successful conclusion, and we've reaped our reward, but we owe everything to Rex, and that's the last word."

It wasn't, though. The honorary member of the Shadowers, being a woman, supplied that. It was later, when they presented her with her share of the reward and stood about watching her face as she scanned the check.

"Five thousand dollars!" she gasped. "I didn't know there was that much money loose. I'm not on to your game yet, nor how you work it, but I'll tell the world it's a wonder.

"I couldn't save all this in a million years doing honest work. Gee, it pays to be a crook, doesn't it?"

(The end.)

OLD SONGS MODERNIZED

BY CORINNE ROCKWELL SWAIN

TAKE, oh, take those lips away—
Osculation's quite forsworn!
Bacilli, the doctors say,
Make it but a creed outworn.

So thy glance for favor suing, favor suing,
Pleads in vain, there's nothing doing, nothing doing!

One Way Out

by Frank Gillooly

THEIR task was disagreable enough without being dangerous, too. The coolest corner of the room was uncomfortably hot, but where they feverishly worked, between the rows of circuit-breakers over by the wall, it was sweltering.

The storm seemed to have made the night hotter. The lightning left its fire upon the earth and the rain turned it into a heated vapor. At each flash of lightning, each crash of thunder in the heavens, both men glanced apprehensively round, as if to determine that the spitting and screeching arresters were safely diverting to earth the charges accumulated in the miles of cables connecting to the station.

The massive oil-circuit-breaker switch adjacent to the one on which they hurried through temporary repairs carried an overload and fed the meanest section of transmission line on the system. The two eleven-thousand-volt transmission feeders leaving Rocky Hill Substation and traveling thirteen miles over the high, heavily wooded country to feed the city of Paschall, were the oldest and most dangerous in the whole immense network of the United Power Company system.

The intensity of the electrical storms that whipped across this mountainous country was always measured by the damage done to these two lines. To-night one of them had gone down, leaving the entire load of both to be carried on the other alone, and the orders were to maintain service to Paschall!

The thought of their danger did what Elmer Pyle himself could not do—it made him forget his other trouble. It increased his ire against the company and against Andy Grohman, the district superintendent—more vehemently against Grohman. Grohman was the cause of all of his troubles.

It was through Grohman's mismanagement that the company's property had been let deteriorate. There was not an extension cord in the plant to carry light into the dark corners where they were ofttimes forced to work: Grohman would not replace those long worn out. They toiled in semi-darkness now, Elmer Pyle, the operator, and Dick Braun, his helper; having had to remove the protective housing from around the live switch of the working line, so that they might receive some light from the dismal ceiling fixtures. The circuit-breakers of both of these lines wanted overhauling; yet Grohman refused to supply the parts of the mechanism that needed replacing.

Heretofore, when one of the switches had gone bad the other was also taken out of service for safety's sake while repairs were being effected in its neighbor. To-night the Association of Western Engineers was holding its convention in Paschall; and Grohman, anxious to make a showing of good service before his colleagues, had ordered that service be maintained there at any cost. Before the storm had broken, he had called Pyle and emphasized his orders that Paschall should not go dark. When the one

transmission line had failed, its selective relay at Paschall had cut it clear there; but the switch at Rocky Hill had operated sluggishly, allowing the arc to hold until the oil was blown from the switch cylinders and the contacts pitted.

Pyle and Braun worked in a trap. Should the circuit-breaker of the other line fail now, they would be roasted before they could get out of the compartment.

The climax to the mutual hatred existing between Grohman and Pyle was at hand. That afternoon Grohman had sent Pyle to Navarre, the county seat, where the company's district headquarters were located, to collect some money for him, for which he was to call at Rocky Hill late that night.

Pyle had been anxious to make the trip to Navarre. It was to be a test of himself, a test of his resolution. After completing his business, he went several blocks out of his way in a circuitous route back to the train, purposely to avoid a certain house on Parker Avenue. Then when the station was within sight he was dissatisfied with himself for having done so; he had not made the test severe enough; it had not been a test at all. Having more than an hour to squander before train time, he walked the central part of the city, getting nearer and nearer, and finally passing the house he had previously sought to avoid.

No one hailed him. No one sought with honeyed blandishments to entice him into the house. He was entirely unnoticed. That disappointed him. He had visioned a struggle; had anticipated a battle of wills in which he would be called upon to prove his stamina by refusing to enter that house. For some time, as he passed and repassed the house, he speculatively fingered a latch-key on his ring before he ran up the steps, and passing himself into the house with it, went directly to the second floor, where a number of men were gathered around card and dice tables.

A month previous, when the first day of the new year was yet only minutes old, he had sworn to the sister of Dick Braun that he was through with gambling. His wedding-day was but two weeks distant; and to-day, the prospects were that when that time came he would have little more than two weeks' salary with which to finance that affair.

The dealer looked up from the deck of cards he was shuffling and smiled inquiringly at Pyle where he stood behind a vacant chair, in his trouser pocket his fingers playing with five hundred dollars of Andy Grohman's money—money that might otherwise have come to him in increased salary had not Grohman robbed the company of it. On a fourth-card play the man at the right of him "tapped" a player opposite and matched a queen, his best card showing, on the final draw, raking in an even seventy dollars for the play. Again the dealer smiled inquisitively at Pyle. Twenty-five minutes later, when he hurried to the train, Andy Grohman's money remained with the banker of that game.

"The best way out of it now," Dick Braun was saying to him, "is to sit tight and face the music, which Andy Grohman is sure to make interesting. This thing is gong to be hard on poor Edna, and I can't say that I feel a bit sorry for you, Elmer."

Braun talked incessantly as they worked. His sacrilegious disregard of their proximity to the deadly apparatus on all sides of them, his unconcern over the discharges of static electricity which stung them like countless needle-points whenever their moist clothing brushed the metal work of the compartment, appalled Pyle.

"Of course, there's still another way out, the way that fool lineman took who went to work on that line to-night while it was hot and got cooked up on it. That's one way out—the easiest way!"

Braun's laugh set Pyle shuddering. Death from electricity was a thing of which he had lived in mortal dread since the first day that he had entered the substation. Eleven thousand volts to him meant eleven thousand green and blue devils all seeking to sting and burn and kill. The spectacle of an unrecognizable heap of flesh had been in his mind ever since a patrolman had telephoned an hour before that a man had been caught on the lines.

They had the cylinders of the switch back in place and were ready to tighten up the

connections to it. Braun was coming back from a trip to the ice-cooler when Pyle started around toward the rear of the compartment to tighten the lugs on the copper straps connecting to the station bus.

"That fool lineman sure found a way out of his troubles!" Braun was saying, when the heavens seemed suddenly to empty themselves of fire and the thunder rocked the building.

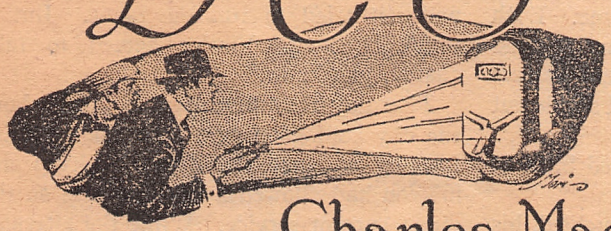
Pyle hesitated, confused, almost blinded by the intensity of the arc spreading over the arrester-horn gaps of the live feeder, his mind obsessed with the fear that the switch from near which he was unable to flee would fail and cremate him where he stood.

With a final screech the arc broke, and he hurried, shivering, into the open compartment—the wrong one, the one from which they had removed the doors to get light where they worked, the compartment of the live Paschall feeder! Braun's yell was drowned in the explosion that came as the wrench melted in Pyle's hands and he tottered face first against the bare copper cylinders, then crumpled, a shriveled, smoking heap.

It was noon of the next day before Braun got away from the substation. On the way home he mused brokenly on the storm's tragedies.

"Pyle found a way out, the easiest way, the poor fool!" he kept mumbling. "He was afraid to face the music, the coward! He was so little man that he gave up just when all his troubles were over. If he had only stuck it out until midnight he would have found out that it was old Grohman himself who was cooked up out on that line!"

D. C. Service



by Charles Magee Adams

HAMILTON flung open the door marked "President," took a step inside the big office, and then halted with a jerk. Burke, the superintendent of operation, had turned in his chair at the opposite side of the room and was eying him with an openly inquiring stare.

"I beg your pardon. I should have knocked," Hamilton apologized, retreating through the door.

The girl at the desk in the center of the room glanced up.

"Come in. You're not intruding, she invited with a quick nod.

Hamilton reentered, closed the door, and advanced to the desk, conscious of Burke's blue eyes following him.

"I just wanted to tell you, Miss Thompson, that the State Utility Commission granted our new D. C. rate," he said quietly. "Here's their letter."

He drew a paper from his pocket.

"They granted it?" she exclaimed with the flash of a quick smile.

Burke flushed.

"Yes, the whole schedule. You surely convinced them," she went on, reading the communication.

"No trouble to persuade 'em to let you lower your rates," Burke put in with a laugh that was not mirthful.

She shot a swift glance at the superintendent and another at the quiet young man beside her. The smile faded and her chin became firm as she straightened in the big office chair, a trim, alert figure despite her charm.

"Men, I want you to forget your difference," she said quietly. "You haven't agreed about this new rate. Mr. Burke, you didn't want it; but Mr. Hamilton presented the figures to show that we could do it and still make money. So it's been done. Now go ahead and work your best for this company and for me. You both know what you have to do.

"Mr. Burke, you have to generate the current; and, Mr. Hamilton, you as business representative, have to see that the current is sold. Do you understand?"

Hamilton nodded.

"I'm ready to do my part," he promised.

"So will I," Burke assented.

"Very well; I'll expect better cooperation from both of you. That's all."

The president turned to the waiting correspondence. The two men rose. Both reached the door at the same time. Each stopped and waited for the other to pass out first. Then with an impatient gesture Burke jerked open the portal and strode out into the corridor.

Inside his office Hamilton tilted back in his chair.

"Oh, but he was mad," he chuckled, his face relaxing into a wide smile. "I'll bet he could have thrashed me."

His face grew serious.

"She knows I'll do my share all right." His eyes grew bright with a sudden warm glow. "He may show some team-work, too."

He had just turned to his work when his buzzer sounded. In response he entered the big office at the end of the corridor a moment later.

But the girl at the big desk in the center of the room was no longer the cool, restrained business woman, erect and alert in the big chair. Now she leaned forward eagerly, her eyes shining.

"Oh, Roy!" she cried. "I'm so glad you did it! I'm so proud of the way you handled the whole thing! Why, it was simply splendid!"

Hamilton advanced smiling.

"It wasn't such a big job, Helen," he replied. "All I had to do was to present the facts. The commission wasn't as hard to convince as Burke, because he's not convinced yet—or says he isn't."

He leaned back easily against the desk. Her brows knit.

"Burke worries me," she said with an annoyed frown. "He's always bringing up something unpleasant; for instance, when you wanted to change this rate. Really, I sometimes think if father hadn't kept him so long I'd want to ask him to resign."

Hamilton shook his head vigorously.

"Don't do that," he said. "He's a good man as superintendent of operation. He's really valuable. Of course, he's not very pleasant, I'll admit. But I wouldn't think of letting him go for that."

Helen sighed.

"I suppose that's right," she admitted. "One has to keep people who aren't pleasant, in business. If it hadn't been for you helping me out I'd have sold out long ago and not tried to run the plant. But it won't be long. You've agreed to take charge, you know."

That day Hamilton spent in going about the city calling on man after man and informing all that the State Utility Commission had allowed a new low rate on the direct current service. While the alternating current is used for lighting and principal power work in most cities, this direct current service is used for limited work, comprising elevators, motors requiring particularly quick starts, and for electrolytic plants.

But Hamilton had decided to make his service popular for other classes of motor work because of the new equipment for generating the current in quantities. So he called on every man who showed any evidence of being a prospective user of power.

So well did he exploit the new talking point of the low rate that by mid-afternoon he had eight contracts in his pocket and four which awaited only the signature of a partner not present, to make them binding.

It was then that he found the next customer on his list to be the Anderson Chemical Company, and headed for its plant at the edge of the manufacturing district.

The building, he noticed as he came suddenly upon it, was small, a plain frame structure, shabby, unpainted, and giving the impression of everything but prosperity. A barely legible sign over one small blackened door announced "Office," and at this door he knocked.

There was no response, so he pushed it open and entered. The tiny room was empty of human occupants, but from beyond a door in an opposite corner he heard voices. So he made his way through the littered room and thrust open the second door to find himself in the main plant.

It was half lighted, but he was able to make out row after row of large wooden vats which occupied most of the floor space, bubbling and gurgling as gases welled up from them.

Hamilton covered his face with a handkerchief as he was seized with a fit of coughing. At the sound a small, wizen old man looked up with sharp, penetrating eyes from a particularly vile-smelling tank over which he bent.

"Mr. Anderson?" Hamilton inquired.

"Yes," the old man admitted grudgingly.

Hamilton handed him one of his business cards, which the old man scrutinized suspiciously.

"Well?" he demanded.

"I want to sell you our direct current service," Hamilton announced, squirming between two tanks which seemed about to bubble over.

"Use it now," Anderson snapped.

"I know that. You're a good customer of ours. But we want you to use more of it."

Anderson shook his head.

"Use yours and the Central's, too," he grunted. "Both so I can be sure I've got current."

"Ours never fails," Hamilton smiled.

Anderson sniffed skeptically.

"We've just been granted a new low rate by the State Utility Commission," Hamilton went on. "We can undersell the Central people by forty per cent. That ought to be worth considering, Mr. Anderson. You see, we've installed new equipment and—"

"No," Anderson cut in. "I told you I've got to have both. Got to be sure I've got current all the time. Good day!"

"Whee!" Hamilton whistled a moment later as he turned and looked back at the unprepossessing building. "Mighty crusty to be so far from prosperity's blessings. Wouldn't be surprised that you'd make more money if you weren't so grumpy, Mr. Anderson!"

He was about to turn away when, through his habit of inspecting the service lines, he glanced up and noticed the leads entering the chemical plant. The Federal's wires, two strands of copper, were not large, and neither were those of the Central Electric, which entered the opposite side of the building.

"Anyhow, he don't use any more from them than he does from us," Hamilton said as he noted the wire sizes. "But all the same, I'd like to sell him his whole service."

Three more days he worked, calling on the city's present and prospective consumers of direct current and skilfully using the new lever of the low rate to pry business from the Central Company. On the morning of the fourth day he entered the president's office bearing a sheaf of contracts.

"Well, Mr. Hamilton, that looks like you've been really working," Helen remarked with mock tartness as she scanned the papers he spread before her.

"Yes," Hamilton sighed wearily. "The boss told me if I didn't make good she'd discharge me. She's an awful slave-driver."

"She ought to discharge you at once for insubordination," she retorted.

The outer door opened and closed.

Hamilton turned and saw Burke advancing toward the desk.

"Good morning, Mr. Burke," the girl greeted him.

"Good morning, Miss Thompson," the superintendent replied, with a curt nod to

Hamilton. "I don't want to be exceeding my authority." He shot a swift glance at the business representative. "But I happen to know a man who uses current, and I managed to get him to sign a contract for this D. C. service."

He drew a form from his pocket and laid it on the desk.

She scanned it swiftly.

"The Anderson Chemical Company?" she remarked; and then, in surprise: "Seven hundred and fifty kilowatts!"

Hamilton looked from the president to the now triumphant superintendent.

"He wouldn't take a bit more than he's using now," he said in astonishment.

"He's a friend of mine," Burke retorted.

"But, men," the girl put in, "seven hundred and fifty kilowatts!"

Hamilton stared.

"We can't handle that," he said.

"Why not?" Burke demanded.

"I just brought in contracts enough to fill the service," Hamilton replied.

Burke leaned over and examined the contracts.

"They're not signed," he countered. "I think Miss Thompson has business sense enough to take this one big contract instead of all these little ones."

The girl was regarding both men quietly.

"You say this man Anderson is a friend of yours?" she questioned Burke.

"Yes, I've known him for years. That's how I came to make the contract."

"How much capacity have we left on this service?" the girl pursued.

"We can connect about eight hundred kilowatts," Burke replied.

"And how much do your contracts call for?" she asked Hamilton.

"About that," he answered.

The girl eyed the two for a long moment.

"What do you advise, Mr. Hamilton?" she asked.

"Why, I suppose the best thing to do is to take this one big contract. It will mean just one service and less copper. Of course, it puts me in a bad way with my customers. They may insist on getting the service, and if they do we'll have to install another unit. But I think I can handle them."

The girl nodded. "You're right," she said.

Hamilton watched her affix her signature to the contractt.

"Good work, Mr. Burke," she remarked. "It seems to pay to have friends."

"Yes," Burke conceded with a final glance of triumph at Hamilton as he pocketed the contract and left the room.

"How in blazes did he land that?" Hamilton demanded the instant the door closed. "How'd he do it?"

"Don't be peevish because he beat you," she teased.

"No, I'm serious," he replied. "I can't see how anybody could get a contract out of that man Anderson. Why, Helen, he's a bear! I went down there and he wouldn't even talk to me. Said he didn't want any more of our service, and told me to go on about my business. I can't see how Burke ever landed him!" He shook his head hopelessly.

"All I know is that he made the contract," Helen said. "It's all right, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, the contract's good," Hamilton replied. "But I can't see how he landed that old sinner."

"This business life is surely strenuous," the girl sighed. "I'll be glad when you're manager."

Hamilton smiled a new, brighter smile.

"So will I," he replied. "Not because I'll be in charge of the plant, but because I'll be in charge of the present president."

She frowned in mock severity and beckoned imperiously for him to leave, which he did after an elaborate bow.

But out in the corridor he once more frowned.

"Well, Mr. Business Representative!"

He looked about suddenly to find Burke standing in the doorway of his office, confronting him belligerently.

"I guess you're not the only one around here that can make big contracts!"

Hamilton halted, flushing hotly. But when he answered his voice was low and steady.

"That's all right. Go ahead," he soothed.

"You bet it's all right," Burke laughed

harshly. "I'm just beginning. I'll show you if you can go over my head and get by with it."

He thrust a flushed, exultant face close to the other's.

"Look here, Burke, what's your game?" Hamilton demanded.

"What's *your* game?" Burke flung back. "You've come in as business representative to sell current and buy supplies and such nonsense and keep me from getting a good fat job as general manager after I've been with them for years. What's *your* game? What's *your* game?"

Hamilton stared.

"Burke," he began quietly, "I didn't keep you out of a job. I came here because Mr. Thompson wanted me. He organized the company. Miss Thompson is running the business just as her father wanted her to. I don't see why you blame me for keeping you out of a job."

Burke grinned ironically. "Don't you suppose I can see what you're doing? Don't you suppose I know you want to marry her and then throw me out of my job and run the whole business? Oh, I'm not as big a bonehead as you think!"

Hamilton's jaw clicked shut and his eyes blazed.

"Look here, Burke," he snapped, "you will please not mention Miss Thompson. My relations with her are not a topic for your conversation. I'm the business representative of this firm and she is the president. Anything else is strictly none of your business."

Burke's grin widened.

"I'm just starting in to show her you're not indispensable. When I get through I'll get your salary too and hold both jobs."

He turned and slammed the door.

Back in his office, Hamilton came to grasp the full meaning of Burke's threat.

"The fool! I didn't take his job!" he exclaimed. "I didn't take it, and if he tries anything I—"

He strode up and down, trying to give vent to his rage. After a few moments he became calmer, seated at his desk, and was able to look at the situation which confronted the superintendent.

"I guess I wouldn't feel much different myself if I was in his shoes," he said at length. "Must be hard for the old man to see the chance for both salaries get away from him.

With this thought he quieted his agitation and set to work on the task of tactfully declining the contracts that he had just secured, now superseded by Burke's single large contract.

But all that day a question recurred to him again and again. "How had Burke managed to persuade Anderson to take the large amount of current?" He recalled vividly the decidedness with which the wizen little man had bruskly repulsed his advances a few days before, and the possibility of a man of Burke's unattractive personality securing such a large contract with such apparent ease appalled him.

"He must be a pretty good friend of his," he thought. "He's welcome to his acquaintance; I'm sure I don't care for it!"

He did not see Burke for several weeks. This was due partially because Burke did not seek his company and partially because he did not seek that of the superintendent.

As usual Hamilton saw the girl frequently, both in her office and in her home. But he did not mention Burke or the threat he had made during that stormy interview.

On the first of the following month he received the report of the corps of meter readers, and as usual verified their figures before submitting the statements to customers.

Heading the alphabetical list of the direct current customers he found the Anderson Chemical Company. Opposite it in the consumption column was a total which made him gasp.

"The ham!" he muttered. "Some more of Collins's carelessness. I'd better go right down there and straighten that out before that crab gets a chance to kick."

Twenty minutes later a workman guided him through the maze of electrolytic tanks to a dim corner of the fume-filled chemical establishment. By the light of his pocket lamp he found the recording wattmeter and as he caught sight of the numbers his eyes opened wide in astonishment. The next moment he was leaning close in an intent scrutiny.

"He was right. By Jove, he was!" he ejaculated. "He's using all he's supposed to and then some," he muttered as he straightened. "Let's see."

He made a mental calculation. "About eight hundred kilowatts normal load!" He turned to find Anderson regarding him with his sharp, questioning eyes.

"Just came down to read your meter," Hamilton explained. "Your month's bill was so big I was afraid Collins, the regular reader, had made a mistake. You've been using quite a bit of current, Mr. Anderson. I'm glad you've come over to us now and cut out that Central service."

Anderson shook his head violently.

"Still have Central service. Got it in case you fail," he snapped, turning away to sniff critically at the fumes from a tank.

Hamilton smiled at the perverse old man and then headed hastily for the nearest door which offered an escape from the choking interior atmosphere. By so doing he found himself on the side of the building opposite that on which he had entered.

"He don't seem to mind the big bill," he said; and then: "Well! No wonder!"

He had stopped and was gazing upward at two big stranded wires which entered the building.

"Whee! That must be close to a million and a half mills!" he ejaculated. And then as his eyes followed the new wires to the pole: "Why, it's the Central's line!" He stared at the name stenciled on the spruce in open-eyed astonishment.

"When did they put in new leads here? That's bigger than they use for their main feed lines! They used to be just about seven hundred and fifty thousand mills! Are they crazy?"

He eyed the massive wires incredulously, reading the name-plate again and again as he shook his head frowningly.

"I can't understand their system," he muttered. "Why, that's as big as we're using for the full load."

He strode rapidly around the building and assured himself that the service leads of his own company were also of the million and a half circular mill size.

He stood and contemplated the building, his brows knit in a thoughtful frown.

"Same old building," he muttered, eying the unpainted shabbiness of the small structure. "No addition to it, and not a new tank on the inside."

He pondered this.

"Same building, same equipment. Used to use two hundred and fifty and now they use eight hundred from us and Lord knows how much from the Central. What do they do with it? They—"

His eyes narrowed as he looked up at the two pairs of big wires with sudden keenness.

"I'll just see about this line of the Central's, anyhow."

His long, swift strides had left two blocks behind him when the muddle of his conjecturing was penetrated by the clear tones of a bell. Halting, he saw a trim electric roadster coming to a stop in the street beside him.

"Are you walking in your sleep?" a girl's voice called.

It was Helen Thompson.

"I was just thinking," Hamilton replied, crossing to the car.

"Ride and think at the same time," she replied.

"What brought you out here?" he asked as the car got under way. "I thought you went home after your arduous business day."

"I did," the girl answered. "But I decided to go out for a drive and stopped at the office to see if you were through. They told me you had gone to that Anderson place. So I came."

Hamilton was steering the little car deftly through the thickening traffic.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "That reminds me." He swung the car to the left.

"Where are you going now?" she demanded as he sent it down an unfamiliar street.

"Just stay here a few minutes," he directed. "I'll be right back."

He had stopped the machine near the mouth of an alley, alighted, and disappeared in the gathering gloom. Mystified, she waited and in a few minutes he reappeared, replacing a pocket lamp inside his coat as he came.

"It's five hundred thousand mills or I don't know what wire sizes are!" he exclaimed as he reentered the car.

"What are you talking about?" she demanded.

"The D. C. feed lines of the Central electric where they come out of their substation. I just made sure."

"Well?" she asked.

"They've got a million and a half stuff at the end of their line," he replied.

"Well?" she pursued.

"Don't you see?" he demanded.

"No, I don't."

"You ought to know that," he retorted, turning the car toward her home. "The million and a half mill size will carry more current than the five hundred thousand. Why should they have it at the end of the line when they have the five hundred thousand near the substation? A fellow wouldn't put an inch pipe next to a pump and a six-inch pipe at the end next the faucet, would he?"

She was silent for a moment.

"I see," she said. "Why do they do it?"

"That's what I don't know," he replied. "I have an idea, but I'm not certain."

The next morning he did not come directly to his office. Instead, he called on the men to whom he had sold the direct current service and whose business he had been forced to decline because of the single big contract with Anderson.

At every office he asked the same question: "Where do you get your D. C. service now?" Except in the few cases where his own alternating current service had been used, he received the same reply: "From the Central people."

Back at his desk, he plied pencil and pad in a series of calculations. His results appeared the same, check and recount as he would. "Eight hundred kilowatts additional load."

Five minutes later he was down-stairs in the substation room where the big motor-generator purred smoothly, transforming alternating current from the distant power plant to the direct current for the 550-volt service.

"Oh, Courtney!" he called.

The engineer in charge turned from the meter he was reading.

"When did the Central install their new D. C. equipment?" Hamilton asked.

Courtney's eyebrows raised.

"Why, I didn't know they had any," he replied.

"Neither did I," Hamilton countered. "They're putting in new services all over town and I wondered where they got their additional capacity."

Courtney frowned. "I haven't heard a thing," he said.

"So they haven't anything new that you know of?" Hamilton pursued.

"No," Courtney declared. "And if they did I'd know, because that fool Kemp would be crowing about it."

Hamilton smiled at Courtney's opinion of his competing engineer, but when he burst into his office a minute later his smile had faded and his eyes were glowing.

"This you, Bedford?" he was saying into his telephone transmitter. "This is Hamilton. Do you know whether the Anderson Chemical Company ships any outbound freight over your line or not? All of it? Can you tell me how much during the past month and during the preceding month?"

He waited.

"Ten thousand pounds last month and twelve thousand the month before? Thanks, old man."

For many minutes he sat studying the figures which he had assembled on a pad.

"Less stuff than the month before. About three times as much current. No new equipment to handle a new load."

Then meditatively: "And he made the contract."

He sprang up and leafed swiftly through a file from a case on the opposite wall.

"For two hundred and fifty kilowatts. Yes, the old contract, and made by Thompson himself."

He read the former agreement, under which the Anderson Chemical Company had secured current from the Federal Electric.

"And he said they'd been friends for years."

He laughed quietly.

That evening just as Billy Harlow, the night attendant, was preparing to give the big motor-generator its hourly once-over for the third time, Hamilton entered the substation room.

"Got a portable D. C. voltmeter handy?" he inquired, after he had passed Billy the cigarettes.

"Yes, I guess there's one over in the supply-room. Why?" Harlow replied.

"Some of the consumers are kicking about the voltage, and I'm afraid the switchboard meter's out of adjustment," Hamilton replied. "I'll test it."

Harlow disappeared behind the purring unit and ministered to a bearing. When he reappeared Hamilton was replacing the meter in the supply-room.

"It's all right," he said, as he passed the cigarettes again.

Burke was just handing Miss Thompson his report the next morning as the door of the president's office opened and Hamilton entered.

"Good morning, Mr. Hamilton," she greeted him.

"Can you and Mr. Burke come down in the substation room for a few minutes?" he asked. "There's something I want to show you."

He met the stare of inquiry Burke turned on him at the question.

"Certainly, if it's important," the girl acquiesced, and arose, followed by Burke.

Hamilton halted them before the direct current panel of the motor-generator switchboard.

"As you can see," he said, "I have connected this portable voltmeter across the D. C. bus bars above the main switch."

He indicated the apparatus with a wave of his hand.

On a small wooden stand beside the slate panel was a portable voltmeter, its two long connecting cords leading to the big copper bars on the switchboard and secured there by spring clips.

Burke shot him a swift glance.

The girl surveyed the instruments and connections and then turned with a smile.

"I suppose you have," she laughed. "You know I don't know much about this, even if I do own the plant."

Hamilton nodded gravely.

"The reason I've done this," he said, "is to show you a rather peculiar thing."

He pointed to the portable and then to the stationary indicator mounted on the panel.

"As you can see," he went on, "the portable and the one on the switchboard are both showing about the same voltage—a little above five hundred and fifty."

She glanced at the two dials.

"Yes, I can see that," she smiled.

Burke was eying the business representative narrowly.

"Now, if I open the main switch," Hamilton went on, "the switchboard meter should keep on as it is, and the portable should show zero."

He reached up and jerked open the big switch.

After the flash and snap the girl leaned forward and read the two dials.

"But it doesn't!" she exclaimed. "It's a little above four hundred, and the one on the switchboard is just like it was!"

She straightened, her eyes wide with curiosity.

"What causes it?" she demanded.

Hamilton met her eyes.

"Our direct current system is a part of a multiple connection," he said quietly.

She frowned.

"I don't know what that means," she replied.

"Mr. Burke and any other electrical man does," Hamilton replied.

He faced the superintendent.

Burke's face was blanched, his eyes were bright, but with a shifting light, and his fingers twitched uneasily.

The girl, too, faced him. "What is it?" she asked.

His lips parted. He moistened them with the tip of his tongue. His eyes turned from the needles of the meters to Hamilton and then back again.

"It's—it's—" he whispered huskily, and then stopped.

Hamilton faced the girl.

"I can tell you," he said quietly. He pointed to the portable meter.

" This is a repetition of a test I made last night," he said. " It proves something I've suspected for some time. Our transmission lines are connected to those of the Central Company in the plant of the Anderson Chemical Company.

" We sell current to Anderson at our new low rate. He sells it to the Central people at a little higher rate, and they sell it to their customers a little higher. Anderson is just a go-between for the Central people. They can get cheap current from us and sell it to the customers we ought to have.

" If you want to know how the connection came to be made, you might ask Mr. Burke."

But the superintendent of operation had gone.

Very Clever, But—

by Jim Egan

STEVE CONNERS, reformed convict and unreformed chauffeur, cursed as he pulled a massive tire from a limousine equally massive.

" Of all the poor fish whoever swallered a hook!" he growled, after dedicating some choicer phrases to the giant cord. " Why did I ever turn honest, anyhow? A good yegg like me working for a hundred blooms a month. Some day I'll give this place the razz, and when I do the furniture will come with me."

Steve dragged out an inner tube which had been neatly perforated by a small spike, and began to rub the area around the puncture with sandpaper, muttering the meanwhile.

Life was a constant struggle to Conners. Months before, a hard-boiled offender, he had been taken in hand by the " Rescue Our Brother Society," an organization to uplift lawbreakers, and given a job at the home of T. D. Munyan, a millionaire. Though several times tempted by the lure of easy money, Steve had never succumbed, and was considered a trustworthy member of the household. But he could not keep his fingers from itching, ever and anon.

A slender figure in black dress and tiny white apron flitted into the garage.

" M'sieu Connairs!" she thrilled.

Steve dropped a couple of patches, and turned to look. A sort of a smile struggled into being on his ugly face.

" Hello, Madeleine!" he greeted. " How's the kid? You look like a million bucks this morning!"

" *Merci,* M'sieu Steve!" The girl curtseyed, smiling coquettishly at the chauffeur.

Madeleine was an alluring creature. Her snapping black eyes and pink cheeks had caused Steve almost to forget Adele Munyan, the millionaire's kind-hearted daughter, whom he had so admired at first. Madeleine was a new maid who had come to the place two weeks before, and Steve was not the only one who worshiped at her tiny feet.

" Nice of you to visit me, kid," Conners went on. " Make yourself right at home while I finish that da— I mean, this blame tire."

"*Ma foi!*" Madeleine feigned indignation. "Do you theenk, M'sieu Connairs, I come out to veesit just you? No, no. Mees Munyan, she want to see you right away, on beesness. She is *très jolie. Oui?*"

"How do I know?" Steve parried. "Tell her I'll be right in, and don't stand bothering me, you little French kidder."

Brushing off his uniform and shoes, the chauffeur set off for the house, and was soon in Adele Munyan's study.

The millionaire's charming daughter was not alone. Seated in two comfortable chairs were a benevolent-looking man with long white whiskers, and a tall, thin lady with a perpetual smile. Steve recognized the Rev. Penstroke Moody and Jerusha Maddox, leading lights of the Rescue Our Brother Society. He stifled a groan. In their presence he was always uneasy.

"How well you are looking, Mr. Conners!" gushed Miss Maddox, in her customary fashion.

"Huh!" vouchsafed Steve, who realized Nature had fixed things for him so that he would never look well.

"The straight and narrow way has proved the right road," observed the Rev. Penstroke, gently fingering his straggling foliage. "Oh, if other erring ones could only be made see! If they would follow the example of this dear brother!"

"Well, what's coming off?" asked Steve, getting uneasier every minute.

"We have decided to bring another soul out of prison darkness," stated the lovely Adele, "and we want you to give him all the help you can, so he will feel at home the first few days."

"A guy out of stir?" Steve opened his eyes. "How did it happen?"

"Our butler is leaving us," Miss Munyan explained. "Keating owns a flourishing real estate business, and must give up his duties here as butler to attend to it. Good butlers are hard to find, and we've been quite worried. Last week, however, your old friend, Warden Hooker, recommended a man about to be paroled. He was formerly a butler, he said."

"A very intellectual gentleman," gushed Miss Maddox. "So polished and urbane!"

"A dignified, educated man who fell foul of ill fortune," chimed in the Rev. Moody. "A worthy soul, I feel, who deserves a chance."

"Papa objected at first, but mother and I won him over," Adele continued. "I'm sure you'll like him and help him, Steve."

"What's the name of this bird?" the chauffeur queried, a scowl on his battered visage.

"Mr. Oliver—Luke Oliver," Miss Munyan smiled.

"Huh!" exploded Steve. "That guy? Say, I wouldn't trust that egg with the hole from a doughnut. I know him!"

Luke Oliver! "Oily" Oliver, the smooth-tongued hypocrite with the sanctimonious face! If there was any crook in the wide world Steve Conners disliked, Oliver was the man. He was one of the thieves among whom there is no honor. Some years ago he had double-crossed Steve to save his own hide, and Conners wasn't forgetting.

"Help that bird!" he growled. "Yeh, I'll help him—back to jail! Of all the—"

"Now, now, brother, be not unjust!" exhorted the whiskered Penstroke. "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

"I am sure you have made a mistake," declared the gushing Jerusha. "Mr. Oliver is a noble, if temporarily misguided, man."

"Give him his chance to atone, Steve," added Miss Munyan. "He seems to repent sincerely. You must be kind to him, Steve—for my sake. Won't you?"

The chauffeur mumbled and muttered under his breath, and finally promised to "do the best he could." Back to the garage he went, with his rough-hewn features looking much rougher than usual.

"Oily Oliver buttling around here!" he snapped at the partly repaired tire. "That miserable snitcher and sneak. If I don't put the carbolic on his bacon my name ain't Conners! Help that stiff! Oh, my, yes! I'll help him get hung!"

The next day the new butler arrived. Oliver was a tall, rather thin man with a pale, pious cast of countenance. He accepted an introduction to Steve with an air of dignity that made the chauffeur grind his teeth.

"We have met before, Mr. Conners," he uttered.

"Yeh, we have," was Steve's response. "You remember it, too?"

"Indeed I do." Oliver smiled faintly. "I have a remarkable memory. I never forget a face."

"I never want you to forget mine," the chauffeur stated.

"I never could." Oliver said it gravely.

"Well, I hope you get along here," said Steve, in a tone which failed to back up the sentiment expressed. "I wouldn't like to have you go wrong again."

"*Ad tristem partem strenua suspicio!*" quoted the new butler, and although Steve failed to understand the insult conveyed, he itched to hit the oily one on the point of the chin.

Oliver seemed to slip into his new duties without a hitch. Adele and her strong-minded mother were delighted with him. Millionaire Munyan wisely kept his thoughts to himself, but as far as Steve could perceive, he was not greatly dissatisfied.

The chauffeur was determined to get even with Oliver, however.

"I'll fix that bird!" he told himself many times. "He's foxy and all that, but he'll slip some day."

Madeleine seemed to have made a decided hit with the new butler, and this was far from pleasing to Steve. He undertook to reprimand the maid.

"Falling pretty heavy for this long-faced butler, ain't you?" he accused one day. "Fine old bird, he is!"

"*Ma foi!* You're jealous! *Très bien!* I like men to be jealous," Madeleine laughed. "M'sieu Oliver—he ees a very smart man, with much education. No?"

"Oh, he's pretty smooth, all right; but you can trust him like a snake," Steve growled.

"You deeslike heem, M'sieu Steve! You can't see hees good points. I like heem very much, but sometime I theenk—maybe I see heem before. He worry me then."

"Why?"

"Oh, I cannot tell. Maybe he look like one of my old lovairs!" With a roguish laugh, the maid danced away.

Both the Rev. Penstroke Moody and Miss Maddox were in the daily habit of dropping around to note the progress of the rescued brother, and each day saw the chauffeur's dislike grow more violent.

Late one afternoon Munyan telephoned Steve to bring the car down to the office. From here the millionaire was driven to an obscure jewelry shop in the tenement part of town. After keeping Conners waiting nearly half an hour, he emerged with a well-wrapped package which might have contained a jewel case.

"I've got a wonderful bargain, Steve," he remarked to his chauffeur. He long since had outgrown his distrust of the ex-convict, owing to exceptional circumstances which seemed to prove Conners strictly on the square.

"Yes, sir?" responded Steve.

"Ever hear of the Borghesi pearls—the wonderful Italian necklace?" the millionaire asked. "Well, they are worth a king's ransom, even if kings are a little below par these days. And I have been lucky enough to get them for a song. The necklace is a beauty! The pearls are of that faintly pink shade which is so hard to find. Won't they look stunning on Adele?"

So enthused was the millionaire over his purchase that he rambled on to the chauffeur for a couple of minutes.

"I'm going to stow them in my safe at home for awhile," he said, "and surprise Adele some day, soon. I think they'll be secure in that old box. Nobody around who could open it but you, and you are not working at the trade now—eh, Steve?"

"No, boss." Steve's reply was properly meek. Munyan's manner told him that the millionaire had been quaffing liquids supposed to be unobtainable, yet always to be had by the wise ones. Adele's father wasn't often this talkative in the presence of his chauffeur.

As he drove the car home, an idea began fermenting in Steve's brain. He saw a possible chance to lay a trap for "Oily" Oliver. The more he thought it over, the better the scheme looked.

"If things don't go haywire, I'll sure put a pin in your chair, Mr. Butler," he muttered.

Later in the evening, while he was enjoying a cigarette, he observed Madeleine and Oliver conversing just outside the servant's hall. Their speech was perfectly audible to him.

"Ah, my little lady," the butler was saying," you are at the glad season of life. Youth at the prow, and pleasure at the helm. Ah, me!"

"*M'sieu* is so very wise." The maid looked shyly up at the solemn-visaged Oliver.

"Wisdom counts for little in a world of beauty." Steve scowled. The hypocrite was always oily.

"*M'sieu* does not theenk I am beautiful?" Madeleine hinted.

Oliver allowed a smile to disturb his grave countenance.

"*Vous etes très jolie, mon petit,*" he expressed.

"Blah!" uttered Steve, tossing away his cigarette. "Voo set tray zholee moan petee! Oh, I'll have you squawking in another language before long, Mr. Oily Oliver! Just wait!"

Opportunity knocked the next day. The chauffeur was washing one of the cars when Madeleine stole out for a little visit.

"Such a scowl, M'sieu Connairs!" she twitted him. "Is eet that you are angry at Madeleine?"

"I hate to see you hanging around that old scoundrel of a butler," Steve growled. "That guy is no good."

"You are jealous! *Oui?*"

"Listen to me, kid!" Conners decided to spring his trap, if he could. "Do you know our new butler is a crook? He came here out of stir—I mean the pen. Get me? He is just looking for a chance to rob the place and make his getaway."

"Oh, *m'sieu!*" Madeleine's eyes widened.

"Years ago that bird did me a terrible injury," Steve went on, "and I want to get back at him. Will you help me?"

He spun the girl a highly-colored tale which made Oliver's real past, shady though it was, look snow white by comparison. Madeleine shuddered with horror through the recital.

"Oh, the beast!" she gurgled, at last. "I will help, *m'sieu.* What shall I do?"

"Well," said Steve, "I happen to know that old Munyan has just bought a famous pearl necklace. It's worth an awful wad of jack, and he keeps it locked up in his library safe. Any good yegg could open that box. Oliver can do it, I'm pretty sure.

"You put him wise to the necklace being there, and that it is apt to be removed in a day or two. You—

"*Voilà!* I have an idea, *m'sieu!* I will tell heem I love heem. If he get the necklace I will flee with heem. When he is to rob the safe I will tell you so you can catch heem. *Oui?*"

"Fine stuff! You're all there, kid, believe me!"

When the maid had gone back to the house, Steve's ugly face wore something approximating a beam. The hardest part of the job had been done. The black-eyed little witch evidently didn't care as much for the butler as she pretended in public.

"That old fox is going to get hooked this time!" Steve gloated. "He'll never be able to keep his hands off those sparks, and when he gloms 'em I'll nail him and come in for a little of the hero stuff as well as send him back where he belongs."

It was twenty-four hours before Madeleine and Steve talked again.

"Everyteeng is ready, *m'sieu!*" she told the chauffeur. "I have promised to fly wid heem after midnight. He will get the necklace, and then I am supposed to join heem."

"But you won't!" Steve promised. "I'll nab him, and it'll be curtains for the butler. Guess that gabby old maid and the long-haired preacher will have something to think about, too."

"Have I done well, *m'sieu?*" asked Madeleine. "I hope eet all ends well."

"You're a bear, kid," assured Steve. "I'll kiss you for this some day."

"*Merci, m'sieu!* But do not wait too long." And the maid fled.

Shortly before midnight the house lights were turned off that evening, and a few seconds later found Steve Conners, armed with a heavy automatic and a flashlight, crawling into the library.

"I'll hide somewhere," he decided.

"That bird won't crack the box for a while yet. I just got to wait. Maybe I ought to take a peep at it myself."

He turned the eye of his flashlight upon the safe, and as the latter loomed out of the darkness, his jaw dropped. The door of the safe swung open! Oliver must have worked fast!

"What the—" began the disgruntled chauffeur, when his quick ears caught the sound of footsteps in the hall without. Steve flicked off his light and dashed behind the curtains concealing a bay window.

He was none too soon, for the library was entered, and the lights turned on. Daring to peep through the curtains, Steve saw to his astonishment that Oliver had come in with Munyan himself, the latter in pajamas!

What could it mean? He heard Oliver speak.

"You have been robbed, Mr. Munyan," the butler declared. "Your pearl necklace has been stolen!"

"My pearl necklace—how did you know?" Munyan darted to the open safe, and pulled a case from an inner compartment. He snapped it open. A glistening rope of pearls reposed within.

"No, the necklace is still here, Oliver!" The millionaire sighed in relief. "Evidently the thief failed."

"Pardon me, sir, but will you examine the necklace closely?"

"Why—" Munyan scanned the pearls. He suddenly swore.

"Rank imitations! Where is the real necklace? What's this confounded business mean, Oliver?"

"The real pearls and the thief are in the house. We can lay hands on them both in a minute.

Steve suddenly shivered. Could he be suspected? But he had no pearls.

"There's some mystery here, Oliver." Munyan's tone was ominous. "I want it cleared up—quick."

"Very good, sir." Oliver's voice was calm. "I have a story to tell you, sir, and I want you to be patient with me."

"Hop to it, then!" the millionaire commanded.

"In the first place, sir," began the butler, "I came here from prison, with the stigma of a long sentence upon me. I realized I would be mistrusted, even though I was determined to pursue a right course of living at any cost."

"The oily, lying hypocrite!" thought Steve.

"Things went serenely, sir, until yesterday," Oliver continued. "Then the maid, Madeleine, who claims to be French—which she is not—came to me with a startling proposal. She told me of the Borghesi pearls, and offered to fly with me if I would get them. And I'll confess, sir, that for the moment I was tempted. I was, sir."

"Um!" contributed Munyan.

"But I successfully resisted my preying inclinations, sir. I began to think about this girl's odd proposal, and about her. Somehow, there's always been something familiar about her. I have a remarkable memory, sir, and I never forget a face. I cudgeled my brain for hours—then, abruptly, it came to me. I knew Madeleine. Eight years ago, a mere slip of a girl, she was known as Dolly, the Chick. A wonderfully keen little crook, sir. She could open any safe you ever saw with her slender fingers. The years have changed her some—but she is still Dolly, the Chick!"

"And she stole my pearls?" Munyan demanded.

Behind his curtains Steve was groggy and reeling. Madeleine the celebrated Dolly the Chick? And he had never guessed!

"Oh, you bonehead!" he groaned, softly. Oliver was talking again.

Having identified Madeleine, sir, I resolved to watch her. I know what a tricky devil she is. Today she went to town, and I managed to get excused so I could follow her. She went to a disreputable place known only to the underworld, and I learned she bought an imitation pearl necklace."

"This one, eh?" asked Munyan. "But why?"

"That puzzled me, sir. I racked my brain, and finally the solution came. You see, I apparently had agreed to rob the safe late to-night. But she was to rob it before me!"

"But—"

"Can't you see, sir? She was to get the real pearls and leave the false. When I came I would open the safe and get the imitations, and also all the blame. She would not really flee with me. I think—well, perhaps I don't understand all of her plan yet."

Steve Conners could have told him that he didn't. He was beginning to see where he had been a pawn himself.

"You see, the beauty of her plan, sir. Even if I failed to rob the safe, the false pearls would be there and she would have the real to dispose of at her leisure."

"Still, why did she leave the safe door open?" Munyan queried.

"That wasn't in the plan, sir, I guess. She was scared away too soon. I nearly caught her in the act, and I hurried to notify you."

"Certainly a dangerous young woman," said Munyan. "Smart, too."

"Yes, sir. A nice little scheme, sir. Very clever, but—I never forget a face. And if you'll pardon me, sir—I wanted to stay honest."

"You've done nobly, Oliver. I'll see that you are properly rewarded for to-night's work. And now let's nab Miss Madeleine before she gets away with the real necklace. It would never do to lose it now after finding her out!"

A few minutes later Steve Conners was in the garage, still dazed.

"That smooth old fox!" he groaned. "He's a hero and I'll never have a chance to hook him again. To think of me picking out Dolly the Chick to help me. Of all the haywire luck!"

The arrest and exposure of Madeleine created a sensation around the Munyan household the next day. The new butler was the lion of the hour, and he went about with a sanctimonious smile upon his long face. He was wearing it when he encountered the chauffeur.

"Well, Conners," he said, "to think of our charming Madeleine turning out thus. You were quite fond of her, too, were you not? But the way of the transgressor is hard. Poor girl! *Mala mens, malus animus. Nemo repente—*"

"Aw, the hell you say!" Steve uttered bitterly, and, turning on his heel, walked grouchily away.

YOUR MOTHER'S GIFT TO YOU

BY OLIN LYMAN

ARE ye brave in a thund'rous crisis
That buffets the battered soul;
Have ye power to banish vices
Which clog the path to the goal;
Can ye captain your bark, and steer it
Through surges of storm and din,
Nor cower to doubt, nor fear it,
In the battles that ye win?

Then yours is the torch of ages
Ashine in a deathless glow,
While the wind blows soft, or rages
O'er the waters of weal and woe;
And yours is a star at midnight,
The blend of the joy and rue,
Given by her in life and light
Who gave her faith to you.

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

JANIE FRETE—how many thousands of ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers regard this clever, pretty, efficient and altogether lovable young woman as a personal and highly valued friend? Enough, we'll venture, to make up the population of a good-sized city. To every one of these admirers a new story about her is like a letter from an old pal. That's why we are especially glad to announce a new six-part serial beginning in next week's issue:

JANIE AND THE WANING GLORIES

BY RAYMOND S. SPEARS

Author of "Janie Pays a Debt of Honor," "A Shortage in Perfumes," "Janie Frete, Intruder," etc.

Since Janie first made her bow to ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers in "Trail of the Otter Pelts" (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, January 29 to February 19, 1916) they have followed her through many adventures. From her home on Two Canoe Island, in the St. Lawrence, she has set forth on quests of high emprise. Whether floating down the broad Mississippi in a shanty-boat or speeding through the waters of Florida in a high-speed cruiser she has held the reader's interest and affection. So we feel safe in predicting that in her latest enterprise—which concerns a cattle ranch in Nevada—she will give her friends many thrilling moments, and add to the already high regard in which they hold her.

EVERY reader of this magazine knows who put Tickfall on the map and who keeps it there. Vinegar Atts, Figger Bush, Little Bit and their equally famous townsmen have made friends in every corner of this country where clean, wholesome humor and sympathetic delineation of negro character are appreciated. We are glad to be able to satisfy the demands of so many readers who write clamoring for more E. K. Means. Next week there is a characteristic tale of his—in fact a novelette:

KEEPER OF THE GRAVE CLOTHES

BY E. K. MEANS

Author of "The Left Hind Foot," "The Consolation Prize," "A Chariot of Fire," etc.

We were so hard pressed trying to provide life clothes we had quite forgotten there were such things as grave clothes. But then the conventions of Tickfall—well, they are the conventions of Tickfall as you will discover when you read this bully yarn.

"OFF STAGE," by Raymond Lester in next week's magazine is an excellent example of a trite platitude, "truth is stranger than fiction." A good many people are apt to think all the tragedy and comedy of an actor's life takes place up-stage. They forget about the "real stuff" which happens in the wings or off-stage. Read this crisp little story and we think you will agree with us the biggest things never come off before the audience.

PROVIDE two normal American boys with long and useful tails—and what will happen? W. A. Curtis will tell you—with side-splitting details—in a corking short-story in next week's issue, "THE MAHOOSALEM BOYS." It's a sure-fire laugh producer.

VARIETY, ALL-STORY'S CHIEF CHARM

TO THE EDITOR:

I am getting so thoroughly frightened for the safety of ALL-STORY WEEKLY that I simply must write. Keep it just as it is, don't listen to any of these knockers and don't change a single thing.

The varied field covered by the stories in each single magazine is the greatest charm of all. There are of course some we do not like as well as others, but the poorer ones only make us appreciate the better. Those who want only one type of reading can get a magazine at any news stand that has all one kind of stories in it, but those who like a variety would have hard work to find one equal to ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

Now for some of our favorites. I think "The Left Hind Foot" was sure E. K. Means's masterpiece of all the stories by him printed in ALL-STORY WEEKLY during the last two years. And I also liked "Th' Texan," and I, too, want to see him fall in love with the right girl, so hurry up the sequel, and also bring back *Whistling Dan*. I would love to know how *Lakla* likes Ireland, and by the way, "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" is one of my husband's favorites, as is also "The Girl of the Golden Atom." We are reading the sequel now, and have just finished "The Gold Girl," which was fine. Isn't it about time "Semi-Dual" was called upon to solve another mystery, and also, where has *Valentine West* gone? I liked him very much; and I wish we might have more about "The People of the Glacier" and more just like them all. They were all fine, finer or finest, so keep them coming. With all the good luck possible and good wishes from a satisfied reader.

Oneida, New York. MRS. GERTRUDE MOOT.

ALL-STORY PSYCHOLOGY

TO THE EDITOR:

I can't think of any word that describes the state of my mind when I am reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I am oblivious to everything else when I am interested in one of those wonderful stories.

I do not remember the date of the first one I read, but it was while the ALL-STORY WEEKLY was the *All-Story Cavalier*. The first story I remember reading in the magazine was, I believe, "Sweethearts Primeval," by Edgar Rice Burroughs (January 23 to February 13, 1915) or some such name, and from that time I was a firm admirer of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. The next one was "The Huntress," by E. H. Footner.

Since then there have been so many that I cannot remember all of them, but some of them were the "Tarzan" stories, and, in fact, all of Edgar Rice Burroughs's works, the "Polaris" stories, by Chas. B. Stilson, "Broadway Bab" and "The Valley of Bleeding Hearts," "The Iron Rider"; also the works of Achmed Abdullah, "The Ten-Foot Chain" in a recent issue, "Children of Night," "A Man Named Jones," "The Gold Girl" and any number of the short stories, a great many of which I remember but have forgotten the names. I liked the stories of the rookie aboard the U. S. S. Springfield.

Some few of your writers I do not like, but since it is impossible to please every one, and since some other reader may have taken a liking to the one I dislike, I will not name them. I do not care particularly for murder or mystery stories. Adventure, Western, or sea stories for me every time.

Your magazine is the only thing I know of that can be bought for a dime and still give the utmost satisfaction. Yours for success and lots more good stories. Very truly yours,

Wichita, Kansas. CATHERINE YOGGERST.

SERIALS THAT DON'T "PETER OUT"

TO THE EDITOR:

This is my first attempt at rushing into print this way. I write stories, but for some mysterious reason they don't sell. *Pourquoi? Quien sabe?* I just want to start the New Year right, by declaring that I, a reader of ALL-STORY WEEKLY, a steady-by-jerks reader of it, do hereby declare and solemnly state, so help me mischief, that it is the best ever!

The serial stories do not "peter out" miserably toward their ends, as do those of so many magazines I've read. I just simply detest the nasty, sloppy sort of story that strings out its dialogue for seventeen issues, doing absolutely nothing to your poor abused imagination but let you understand that "they" are always just about to do something, and fail to pluck up nerve enough. What restaurant-fed imaginations these popular-in-name-only authors do have! I'm getting a typewriter soon, and will write a couple of stories just to show some of these authors what I think a story should be. The only reason my display of literary activity may fail to impress them properly is that my efforts will probably never even get their eyes open, let alone see the light of day.

I am starting "A Buccaneer in Spats" and waiting impatiently for the second half of Julian Hawthorne's "Goth from Boston."

Cleveland, Ohio. MRS. ADAH B. MANNINA.

"A BUCCANEER IN SPATS" FINE

TO THE EDITOR:

Just a few words of praise and appreciation to your glorious magazine. It is fine! Though not a subscriber I am a constant reader and would not miss one number. I like the short stories almost as well as the serials. They are so witty. Some stories worth mentioning are: "Ashes to Ashes," "The Flying Legion," "The Ivory Pipe," "Eastward Ho!" "Comrades of Peril," "On Swan River," and many others I can't begin to mention in this short letter.

"A Buccaneer in Spats" is fine. I wonder what *Waly Al-Din* will do to lose *Lady Violet*. In "Ashes to Ashes" it was a pity for sweet *Leila* to be killed. *Norman Storm* got just what he deserved. Some of my favorite writers are: Achmed Abdullah, Julian Hawthorne, Dean L. Heffernan, H. A. Lamb and Clyde B. Hough. I enjoy the Heart to Heart Talks very much. It is nice to read those letters and see just what every one likes in the way of stories. You must be very

glad to receive such words of praise and congratulations from readers all over the United States. I hope to see this letter among the nice ones in the Heart to Heart Talks I like to read so well.

Micanogy, Florida. MAUDE CHAPPELL.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Since buying an ALL-STORY WEEKLY one day to read in a few spare moments, I have come to realize the worth of your esteemed (in my mind) magazine in the average American home.

Among the stories I think most worthy of commendation are:

"The Left Hind Foot," "Th' Ramblin' Kid," "The Girl in the Golden Atom," "The People of the Golden Atom," "Under the Sign of Scorpio," "The Flying Legion," "Tarzan," and others too numerous to mention.

As aforesaid, I wish to join in the praises of "The Left Hind Foot," and request a sequel by Mr. Means, portraying the further adventures of *Little Bit* and *Org*.

If the author of "The Flying Legion" would write a sequel, showing what became of the various members of the expedition, I am sure it would be very much appreciated by the readers of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

Taken all in all, your magazine is the best for the literary value and the price on the market.

Very sincerely yours,

Baltimore, Maryland. JOHN E. GROSCUPS.

Being that I do not know Mr. Earl Wayland Bowman, and have no way of learning his address, I make my desires known to you. The story, "Th' Ramblin' Kid," by Earl Wayland Bowman is, I am sorry to say, incomplete, and so I take this opportunity to request a sequel. A few words in regard to the magazine before I close will not come amiss. You have an exceptionally good staff of writers. But as regards some of the stories, there are a few in my opinion that are no good. But what is one person's food is another's poison, so please do not consider the above as a kick.

The only kick I have is that the magazine does not get here soon enough. Did not kick about that right after the strike was settled, but—now that you are caught up to date I cannot see why the magazine should be late. Of course I realize that the delay may be in the postal service. (I worked sixteen months in the post office in this city.) Allow me to wish you a successful year and to hope that you will be able to furnish us some more of the Bowman type of story.

Your friend and well-wisher.

Great Falls, Montana. A. L. TAYLOR.

I have been reading the unsurpassable ALL-STORY WEEKLY for close to four months, a length of time in which I formed an opinion of the publication—a leader of magazines.

I ardently "drink" such stories as "Tarzan," and at the present time I am reading "Tarzan and the Valley of Luna," which is a creditable story of the ape-man. In imagination as well as character drawing, Edgar Rice Burroughs is gifted. Although I have seen little comment on "The Eye of Balamok," the story just suits me, and I hope Victor Rousseau issues another as good. Other excellent stories I have read are, "The Girl with the Jazz Heart," "The Master of Black," novelettes; "Little Crooked Master," "Elope If You Must," "The People of the Golden Atom," serials. "Wild Wully the Waster," by Tod Robbins is in a class by itself.

Wishing the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and also all other Munsey publications the best of success.

Yours, OLIVER ST. PIERRE.

North Westport, Massachusetts.

Enclosed herewith is the sum of ten cents, for which send me copy of ALL-STORY WEEKLY of September 28, 1918. I have been a reader of your magazine for a number of years and you sure have some fine stories. It is a hard thing to pick the best ones, as they are all good. But of course, every one of your readers, like myself, has some favorite authors. Mine are Max Brand and Johnston McCulley. So rush some more by these two. My father has been a reader of your ALL-STORY WEEKLY for a long time, and he often tells me of the way the magazine has improved. I wish you continued success with your magazines and hope to be able to read many more of them. Give us some more stories like "The Untamed," "His Word of Honor," "The Owl Taxi," "The Curse of Capistrano," "Broadway Bab," "The Clean Up," "The People of the Golden Atom," and "With a Crew of Skeletons."

JOSEPH HARRIS, JR.

1007 East Beach, Biloxi, Mississippi.

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for about three years. I have read every story. I do not find any dry. My favorite authors are: E. R. Burroughs, Max Brand, Ben Ames Williams, and lots of others. If I would try to name them all I would use up the whole magazine. I like the story "After His Own Heart." "The Untamed" was great. I want a sequel to it.

Boston, Massachusetts. WILLIAM MEYERS.

Enclosed you will find one dollar to extend my subscription to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months. I think this magazine is one of the best that money can buy. I always read Little Heart Beats and see that quite a few of your readers dislike "different" stories. I think they are fine, especially "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" and "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," and also "The Master of Black." Why doesn't Achmed Abdullah write another like the "Master of the Hour"? That was splendid. He has never written any to equal it since. Tell him to write some more like it. Wishing you all success in the coming year.

St. Louis, Missouri. MRS. K. SANDAGE.

Enclosed find ten cents in stamps for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for March 6, 1920. I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for over a year. It is the best magazine published in the United States that I have read. As to my favorite authors they are J. U. Giesy, first; Max Brand, second; Homer Eon Flint, third; G. A. England, fourth; E. K. Means, fifth, and Ray Cummings, sixth. I would like to see sequels to "The Flying Legion" and "Trailin'." But say, what has become of H. E. Flint? Would like to see a story by him soon. Tell him to get busy.

Smithville, Texas. WILSON M. FLINT.

This is what you get for just printing one issue a week. Here it is only Sunday and I have to wait until Thursday before I will get another book. Well, I just want to say that I enjoy everything in your magazine and it would be impossible to mention all of the good ones. Well, here's hoping for a long life for the best magazine on the market. Thanking you.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. R. BENNETT.

I don't think you receive many letters from this part of the world, so here goeth mine. Please, please have James B. Hendryx give us a sequel to "The Gold Girl," as it is too good to cut it off in such a way, at the ending. All your writers in your splendid magazine is simply wonderful. I have only good words for each and every one; begging them to come back very often,

Matanzas, Cuba. MRS. J. N. CRABB.

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for the past four or five years. It is fine; but in all that time there were only two stories that I thought were the best I ever read in anything. The first was "The Good Indian," by E. J. Rath; that was a dandy, and the one last month, "The Gold Girl," by James B. Hendryx. Why can't we have a few more like them? I am sure there are many other readers like me. There are many fine stories, but in those two you just seem to see the people in the stories. I am sure my letter is a long way from a masterpiece, but I will watch to see if it is printed, anyway. A friend and booster for ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

Seattle, Washington. M. LASHLEY.

If this should miss the scrap basket, I just want to say, you sure have got some story-book. It is the best I have ever read for a long time. I get it every week and it don't come often enough. Now you tell James B. Hendryx he can't stop "The Gold Girl" where he did. He can't get away with that end. What became of *Vil?* Did he get *Microby Dandelion* back? Here is luck to you. As ever, a faithful reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

Springfield, Ohio. GEORGE MORROW.

I am a steady reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and would like to say that I think all the stories are splendid. I liked "Th' Ramblin' Kid" the best of all. Now, for goodness' sake please try to get us a sequel for that. We'd like to hear how he, the *Kid,* fared in the "world of men," and of his return to the ranch. If I had the author's address I'd besiege him "day and night" until he'd promise a sequel. Hoping you all success.

Floodwood, Minn. S. M. STORKY.

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY magazine for more than two years, although not a regular subscriber. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate your magazine. "The Gold Girl" and "Trailin'" were great; in fact, I like them all, especially the Western stories, as I am now making my home in the Golden West. I am now reading "Th' Ramblin' Kid" and think it just fine. I would like to see this in Heart to Heart Talks. Wishing you and ALL-STORY WEEKLY continued success.

Vallejo, California.

MRS. ANNIE R. SANDFORD.

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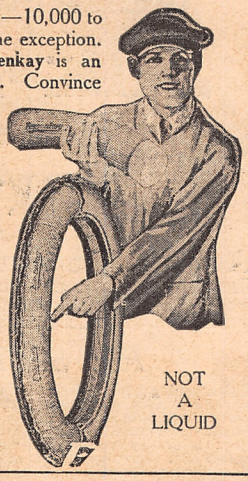

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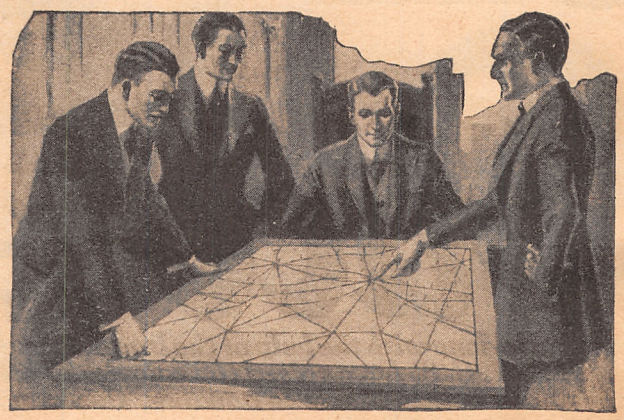

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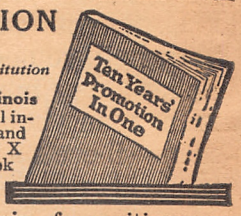

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