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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

The Frigate Bird

by Lee Bolt

Foreclosure on a Mortgaged Soul

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CX — NUMBER

CONTENTS FOR MAY 29, 1920

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

SIX SHORT STORIES

VERSE

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

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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

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VOL. CX NUMBER 4

SATURDAY, MAY 29, 1920

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by Lee Bolt

CHAPTER I.

THE FACE OF EGYPT.

IT was a real tribute to the ordinary peacefulness of the modern age that such a man should be found in a laboratory; in an earlier time he would have held aloft battle-ax or sword even as he now raised the test-tube to the light.

He stood well over six feet in height, though at once so massively built and so well proportioned that the eye did not admit his superior size. The very breadth of his shoulders made him appear less lofty, and it was only when one stood face to face with him or saw a man of average size beside him that his true proportions became obvious.

But the moment the eye seized on the truth, then the imagination of the spectator went galloping. Here was such a fellow as might have stooped like lofty Ajax and wrenched from the soil a stone such as "three men of these degenerate days could not budge."

Now he replaced the test-tube in the clamp above the gas-flame and crossed the laboratory hastily. The instant he moved one forgot the ponderous bulk of the body in the light spring of the step, a gait like that of Diomedes, aspiring and eager. One noted it with a touch of awe, for here was a man with the speed to overtake and the power to destroy. Yes, a man for an earlier age! Armor on his limbs had been hardly more hampering than linen clothes on the limbs of others, and in his hand the ax of the Lion-hearted with its twenty pounds of English steel would have been a toy!

With what pity, then, the eye rose from the details of that peerless body and rested on the face—what pity and awe commingled! A sculptor could have wrought that face with ease, for it was blocked out roughly in broad planes and sharply defined angles; it was like the sketch of a head rather than a completed thing. And like many swift and unfinished sketches, done in bold lines, the ugliness, the appalling grimness, of that face came more sharply home because of the very roughness of the execution; like the head of a Pharaoh hacked from the granite of Syene, the hardness of the stone defying the edge of the chisel. Considered feature by feature, the countenance was not so unseemly; it was the whole impression which made the blood run cold.

Beginning from night-black hair, curling short and stiff, the forehead, very high and

broad, ran down at a pronounced angle, and just above the eyes lifted into two bony protuberances, between which the brows puckered into a continual frown, not so much of discontent or of anger as of cold and penetrating criticism. A highly defined ridge ran around the eye, giving it a sunken appearance, and merged with a prominent and square-cut cheek-bone below which the cheek itself fell away in a lean, straight line broken only by the bulge of the jaw muscles. This jaw, massively built, thrust forward to an angular chin and pushed the lower lip a trifle beyond the upper.

The mouth itself was wide, but thin from habitual compression, and tilted up slightly at the sides and was lost in the ridge of muscle which framed the cheek. This same ridge made a deeply defined line, which cut down from the edge of the nostril and ran past the mouth; and this line and the tilt at the corners of the lips gave the mouth a mocking and cynical expression.

The nose was aquiline and large, continuing the forehead in a straight line depressed cruelly at the tip—what is known as a hawk-nose. The eyes, again, made one think back to the mysterious faces which the sculptors of Egypt produced in eternal diorite; for they often made an enameled pupil and placed behind the enamel a silver nail which caught the light and added life. Likewise behind the black eyes of John Axson there was a point of light which persisted, and it was from this point of light, threatening always to burst into a raging flame, that even those who knew him best were apt to shrink.

It was a face of infinite and cruel power. One could not imagine this man in defeat; one suspected reserves of strength, reserves of experience and cunning mixed with courage. The Egyptian sculptor cast over his most imposing colossus an air of repose, of waiting which defies the flight of ages. That repose strikes awe through the heart of the archeologist to this day, and the same awe fled like a shadow over the mind of every man who faced John Axson.

Returning once more across the laboratory with a small glass flask, he waited until the furiously boiling liquid in the test-tube had varied from a dull red-brown to a sharp crimson, and then dropped a slight portion of the fluid from the bottle in his hand into the tube. At once the substance changed to clouded white, and this in turn varied swiftly to the crystal clarity of water. At this point Axson removed the test-tube, turned down the flame to a thin point of fire, cooled the liquid in running water, transferred it to a small bottle, and passed it to his visitor.

The latter received it with trembling hands. He was a very old man, with pale, wrinkled hands, and dressed as dapperly as any young dandy who lives in the full light of fashion. His ordinary pallor was accentuated now by a point of bright color in either cheek.

"Is it," he asked anxiously, "absolutely tasteless?"

"It is."

"And its effect certain."

The big man smiled, and before him his guest shrank.

"Then, my friend, my very good friend," he said, "tell me what recompense you will receive?"

"Nothing."

The old fellow started.

"Nothing?" he echoed, and the color in either cheek went out like a lamp before a puff of wind. "But, my dear Mr. Axson!"

"You brought me," said Axson, and it was pleasant to hear the deep bass of his voice, for it had that quality which singers prize so highly, of seeming to come from a great distance—"you brought me the note of James Gordon Windsor, requesting that I do whatever I could for you in this matter. His request, I assure you, is sufficient."

"Of course," nodded the other, manifestly ill at ease, "and yet—"

"Money," said Axson coldly, "could not buy my silence more completely. Sir, I do not chatter."

"I am sure of that," said the old man anxiously, and he raised himself a little on his toes as if to peer more effectually into those shaded eyes. "Nevertheless, I wish that there might be something I could do. Your workroom here, for instance, is

cramped. Now, Mr. Axson, if you were to extend that eastern wing—"

"Sir," boomed the voice of Axson, "I am forbidden to accept any rewards. That is final."

The old man drew a whole pace away. Obviously he was anxious to leave the place at once. He lingered still, however. He said:

"But one thing more, my dear Mr. Axson. If this should be ineffectual, could I return to—"

The giant frowned, and the act gave life and meaning to the cynical intolerance of his face.

"Mr. Andrews," he said, "I am about to engage in a long experiment, so arduous that I must give it my entire attention for three days and nights. I beg that you will not come to me during that time. But if you have a second note from Mr. Windsor, I will of course be at your disposal. Nevertheless, I hope that you will not find it necessary."

"My dear Mr. Axson," said the old man —"my *dear* Mr. Axson, I assure you that I had rather enter—ah—Hades unannounced than come to you when you are unwilling to receive me!"

"Good day," said Axson.

"And a thousand thanks," nodded the aged dandy, and he disappeared hastily through the door.

It had hardly closed before Axson was back at his work.

CHAPTER II.

A MESSAGE TO THE SPHINX.

HE was hard at it in an inferno of confusion of his own making, when some two hours later the door opened and a red-faced man of middle-age entered. He entered with a smile and the heavy step of the self-assured; but his smile diminished and his step grew automatically lighter as he approached John Axson, until at length, pausing a few paces away, he called: "Ah, there, Mr. Axson!"

He had to repeat the call twice before Axson answered without raising his head: "Well?"

"A message for you, Axson."

"Damn messages. Be off. I'm busy."

The other, as one accustomed to this abruptness, persisted in the same tone: "But this is from your friend Windsor."

The effect was magical. Axson straightened and whirled toward the interrupter: "And why the devil didn't you tell me that in the first place?"

"Because with your usual amiability you gave me no chance. Your disposition, Axson, would adorn the seventh circle down below."

But Axson, scowling, snatched from his hand the envelope, opened it, and ran his eye over the contents. He remained in the position of one who read for several moments, though there were only a few words on the paper. Then he turned slowly to one of his gas-jets, ignited the paper, and allowed it to burn to a fluttering white cinder.

Then he said to the other: "Harden, I'm to close my laboratory, end my affairs with you to-night, and be off."

"What!" cried Harden. "But our experiment, Axson. Good God, man, our experiment!"

"*My* experiment," answered the giant with a corrective emphasis, "is already outlined, and you have my plan in full with all the estimates of quantities and a complete time-table."

"I have the outline," replied Harden, "but for the execution—"

"Do you need me?"

"Don't sneer, confound you. Well, I suppose I'll have to get along without you. But what right under heaven has this James Gordon Windsor to command your movements?"

To this Axson answered with his usual cold, non-committal smile.

"I will meet you in the library below within the space of an hour," he said, "and we can arrange our business."

"You aren't leaving to-night!" protested the other with real concern. "Why, man, you can't possibly get your things together before morning!"

"On the contrary, I am always ready to leave within a half-hour notice. I will meet you below, sir."

Accordingly, before the hour had elapsed an expressman had called for the trunk of Axson, and then, punctual to the second, he appeared at the library door of Harden, laden with two big suit-cases. He deposited his burden and took a chair facing his host. He produced a check.

"I have here the check of Mr. Windsor," he said, "left blank except for his signature. I will fill in whatever amount you name."

The red face of Harden grew positively purple with self-satisfaction.

"The amount I name is nothing," he said. "No, sir, not a cent will I take!"

"Do you imagine I am a subject of charity?" said Axson, and his big voice rose and rang. "Sir, I have been with you six months. You have furnished me with both lodging and my food. You have granted me an entire wing of your laboratory. You have kept me supplied with chemicals and laboratory properties often at a great expense. You have given me hours upon hours of your own time in instruction. For this there is something owing—a great deal! And I assure you that I—that Mr. Windsor will be most happy to pay it!"

"If you are not an object of charity," answered Harden with the heat of one who is conscious that he is about to perform a good action, "neither am I a hired teacher—nor do I keep a boarding school."

"Six months ago you did not have these scruples. The arrangements were made on a business basis. Come, sir! What are your terms? I have no time to trifle."

There was something about his change of tone which banished all the blustering good-nature from the voice of Harden.

"Six months ago," he said, "it's true that I was hard pressed. Nothing was turning out well, and I took you as a—well, as a paying pupil—a special student of chemistry in my laboratory—at a named price. I did not foresee the result. To be frank with you, Axson, I would be an ingrate if I charged you. The experiments you have successfully conducted at my suggestion, to say nothing of your own discoveries, have netted me thousands—and by the Lord, they will net me other thousands hereafter! Yes, Axson, so far from wishing to charge you, I would be willing to pay you—er—well, say five hundred a month, if you will continue with me on the same basis. I supply all materials as well as whatever incidentals you may need for your personal comfort."

"You are very generous," said Axson, and his glance went through and through Harden, reading him.

"I am not in the least generous," said the chemist. "As a matter of fact, Axson, two more pupils like you would make me a rich man. In short, sir, you have the gift of the natural investigator; I would prophesy a great future for you if you will follow this line of work."

"And this," said Axson, "is all you will propose?"

"It is. But if you will really consider coming back to me I could make you better terms."

"That is impossible. I will never follow chemistry."

"Then what will you follow? In Heaven's name, my dear fellow, are you going to throw away the talents the Lord gives you? Don't you like chemistry?"

"I do, but I like other things more."

"What?"

"I don't know," frowned the giant; and it was strange to see him apparently puzzled. "So far I seem to have spent my life working toward some end, but just what end may be I cannot tell."

"Perhaps," suggested Harden dryly, "you are going in for pugilism. Lord knows you spend enough time in your infernal gymnasium lifting sand-bags and boxing with your shadow and doing I don't know what else. If you were to put some of that wasted time into your chemistry—"

"If this is all you have to say to me," said Axson, "I will wish you good night and good-by. I must start for the station."

He suited his action to the word by rising from his chair. Henry Harden stood up and hurried anxiously to block the way to the door. It was like a child stepping out to challenge the progress of a steam-roller. Harden himself, after a glance up to the colossus, made a little gesture of resignation.

"If you intend to go, I suppose I can't

stop you even for a minute. Axson, have you ever in the world met a force which could change your mind?"

"James Gordon Windsor," replied Axson instantly.

"I should like to meet him," said the chemist curiously. "What sort of a chap is he?"

"I have never met him," answered Axson.

"What! Well, the devil take it! I've never made head nor tails of you. But come, you can't leave me like this! Sit down and have a glass of port with me. Vintage of 1885, I swear! Fine flavor and smooth as oil!"

"I don't drink," said Axson patiently.

"To be sure. I forgot. Liquor would make you almost human. Well, Axson, it's been a rare pleasure to work with you. After you've seen your dictator Windsor, let me know whether or not you won't consider coming back to me."

"That is probably impossible."

"Never say impossible."

"Observe, I qualified the term."

"Damn your mathematical exactness! Well, Axson, at least let me know how you are coming along. Keep me in touch with you wherever you go. The news will always be welcome."

"You are very kind," replied the giant, "but I never write letters."

"Ha! How's that? No letters! Upon my word, impossible! How do you keep your friends if you never write?"

"Has any letter come for me since I've been with you—except those from Mr. Windsor?"

"Not one."

"The deduction is clear, is it not? I have no friends."

"Dear God!" murmured the chemist. "No friends—no wine—no kindliness—no life, by Heaven! Axson, are you simply a machine?"

"I am whatever you choose to term me."

"Even to yourself? Have you no regrets? Are you satisfied? Will you live under orders all your life—blindly—like a soldier?"

"You must agree with me," said Axson, "that a conversation which is made up from a mere aggregate of exclamations leads to no definite result. Good-by, Mr. Harden."

And since Harden, agape, made no answer, the colossus brushed past him and strode out of the house with his two suitcases. Half an hour later he was on the train for New York.

CHAPTER III.

THE ROOM AND THE MAN.

IT was late in the evening before he rang the door-bell of the apartment of James Gordon Windsor 3d in New York City; the door was opened for him after a moment by a servant as old and as withered as the Mr. Andrews who had been with Axson earlier that same day. And like Andrews himself, the dress of the servant was exact to foppishness. His very age had some part in it, but there was about him an air of superrefinement that seemed to disdain the very boards upon which John Axson stood.

The latter presented a card from which the servant looked up with a touch of wonder which even his perfect training could not altogether suppress. That glance embraced in a second every detail of the careless dress of Axson and lingered for the fraction of a second upon the hard-knotted string of his necktie.

"Mr. Windsor," he said at length, "expected you. Will you step in?"

He showed Axson into a living-room, informed him that the master was expected back at any moment, inquired after his wants, and then slipped out of the apartment. For a time after he was left alone he continued sitting bolt upright in his chair, as if on his guard against the return of the servant or the entrance of Windsor himself. He kept his head canted a little to one side in the attitude of one who listened intently. For there are noises of peculiar character in every place—even in the wilderness of the western sands. To the sounds which filled the apartment Axson now attuned his ear, held back from his senses the pounding and humming of the night traffic in the street far below, and caught now the far-off bursts of music from

a neighboring apartment, and now the ticking of a clock, and now a step in the next room, which paused at the door and then retreated.

At this Axson relaxed, and starting half erect again in surprise, examined his chair. It was softly upholstered, deep of seat, and low of rolling back, and Axson lowered his bulk against the cushions like one who has never before been fitted by a seat. After this experience his keen eyes went from object to object in the place.

It was a high-ceiling, oblong room, spacious, and lighted by two great windows at one end. Between these windows a solid sheet of mirror went from the floor to the ceiling. No sooner had he noted this mirror than Axson rose and stood before it. He examined one by one, with painful care, the objects upon which the eyes of the servant had rested during that brief moment at the door.

First of all he considered his necktie from both sides and from in front, and even drew it from beneath his vest for further study. Shrugging his shoulders, at length, he restored the necktie and went on with his critical analysis. It embraced the knees of his trousers, battered and bulging out of shape; it considered the elbows of his coat-sleeves—thrusting out in rude pockets, his shoes long innocent of polish, and even his hands with the tracery of prominent veins along their backs. After this, apparently, he dismissed himself from mind—not that he removed the subject entirely, but rather he suspended it for future attention.

He transferred his glances to the details of the furnishings. But apparently nothing that he saw was of importance. The long velvet curtains of an exquisite old gold; the Persian rug, with its charming harmony of dull blues and golds, enlivened with red; the massive Italian table; the ivory woodwork paneling of the walls; the big blue jars on either side of a wide and rather low fireplace, and the branches of yellow broom which filled the jars; the Italian chest; the oval mirror above the fireplace and the tall Italian andirons beside it; the beautiful wrought-iron candlesticks at the farther end of the room—all these details his rapid eye surveyed minutely and passed up as if they held no interest for him.

To the lengthy shelves of books between the candle-sticks, however, he paid more attention, and crossing the length of the room with a singularly swift and noiseless stride, he ran his eyes over the titles.

It was a queer jumble of prose and verse in German, English, French, Greek, and Latin. He saw volumes of Heine, Keats, Molière, Aristophanes, Horace, Epicurus, Voltaire, Shelley, Schopenhauer, and Poe. On the lowest shelf were a few scientific works on biology, chemistry, and psychology. These Axson drew from the shelves and glanced at the contents, but he restored them with the haste of manifest contempt; they were all popular surveys of the work of real investigators. Dismissing these, he examined the rest of the books on the shelves, looking not so much at the contents as at the amount of handling, which was indicated to a certain extent in each by the ease with which the pages turned, and here and here he lingered for an instant over a marked passage.

This done, he returned to his chair and became at once oblivious of all that was in the room. If it had been merely a picture of an apartment rather than a concrete fact which contained himself, he could not have been less interested in it. He remained alone with the perpetual cynicism which was printed on his forehead and in his eyes and in the very curve of his lips.

Presently catching the click of the opening front door, he rose from his chair and stood with his hands clasped behind him, waiting. One would have thought his attitude the height of indifference had it not been for the terrific power with which those broad fingers were interlaced. A slender man somewhat past middle-age entered the room and stood drawing off his gloves and surveying his visitor. He did not speak till this process was complete, and until he had tossed his overcoat over the back of a chair; but all the while his eyes held steadily upon Axson. Now he advanced and stood in a position somewhat like the latter's, save that his own was infinitely more graceful.

"Well, well," he nodded. "So you are Axson. But I expected a man, not a mountain! Sit down and talk to me."

Axson slipped into his chair and remained impassive while his host stared down upon him until at length a shudder ran through him. He shrugged his shoulders and purposely selected a chair upon which the light struck only dimly. As it were, he looked forth upon Axson through a screen of darkness.

"After all these years—" he murmured. "And this is the man! Well, sir, are you glad to see me?"

"No," said Axson.

It was characteristic of James Gordon Windsor 3d that he did not start at this bluntness. He seemed rather pleased than otherwise, and sat nodding his head slightly and surveying his guest with the faint smile which might be mere politeness, or it might be criticism. It was impossible to distinguish.

"That is interesting, but hardly pleasant," he said. "Yet hear me contradict myself! How can anything be interesting and not pleasant? To return to the point, you are not glad to see me?"

Axson remained silent.

"You never answer the same question twice?" interpreted Windsor. "A habit which will save you much time. Not glad to see me, and I take it not grateful either?"

The giant neither moved nor spoke.

"I can assume that your silence speaks in itself. But I'd like to argue that point. At least, you should be logical, Axson, and logic demands that a man should be grateful to the fellow who takes care of him for twenty years."

"You are wrong," answered Axson. "I admit a debt of fact, but not of gratitude. What you have done can be repaid with money."

"Good, good!" chuckled Windsor. "Axson, you are rare indeed. You'd be a sensation in certain places I could name offhand. Well, well, neither glad to see me nor grateful. This is less than I expected. Explain a bit more."

"You lay me under a debt which you expect to exact," said Axson, "and you will exact it with interest. There is no cause for gratitude; there is only a call for repayment, and that you shall have."

"And suppose I refused to ask for any repayment?"

"I will not waste time considering the impossible."

"My dear boy, you are very harsh; and yet you do not know me. I hope you haven't formed the habit of jumping to conclusions. That would be very bad indeed. Oh, very, very bad!"

"I never jump to conclusions," said the colossus.

"No?"

The silence of Axson once more refused to repeat.

"Very well. Then who have you been catechizing about me? And who has dared to estimate my purpose?"

"The room you live in."

"So? Well, what has it told you, Axson?"

"Is that a command?"

"Ah, you admit my right to command you?"

"Until I have paid my debt I am in your command."

Exultation set the face of Windsor on fire, but he controlled himself.

"Very well, then, you have my order to tell me about myself."

CHAPTER IV.

AN EDUCATION IN HATE.

THE face of Axson as he talked showed neither malice nor pride in the cunning of his analysis, but as unmoved as one of those ominous, granite gods of Egypt pronouncing judgment. He spoke slowly, as always, not like one who hunts for words, but rather as if he doubted the practical value of continuing his speech; for he gave the impression continually of a man who had as soon keep a thought to himself as frame it in utterance for the ear of another.

"You will demand some sort of repayment," announced the giant, "because you are essentially a selfish man. Your life is a perpetual seeking after comfort and amusement. Yet this is not a positive energy.

It might be said that your chief pursuit is the avoidance of ennui. On the whole, you are a negative nature; you refuse to react. This is partly because of your nature, partly from choice. You avoid emotional outbursts because you dislike to burn up your energies. You are kept from action by a dread of inaction."

"Ah," murmured James Gordon Windsor, who listened with slowly nodding head and an expression of quiet enjoyment, like a connoisseur who hears the music of a great master. "Too indifferent to be either good or bad."

"You flatter yourself," answered the colossus. "Your greatest virtue is good-nature; your greatest vice is inertia. But the good-nature lacks point because it is by nature outgoing—it involves the interests of others. Your inertia, on the other hand, has to do with yourself. By the incessant avoidance of all that will injure you, you practically choose to injure others. The qualities of the heart are, then, totally lacking in you; or at least they never spur you to action. The qualities of the mind are present, however. But they are sharply modified.

"You are shrewd, patient, clear-minded, able to see through multiplicity of details to the necessary end. You possess excellent standards. You are conscious of beauty, evil, and good and truth. These standards, however, remain largely subconscious attributes. You refuse to investigate them independently. You prefer to base them, rather, by reading the discoveries of other men; even in this you will not go to the profound authorities, for they demand energy of attention. Rather you choose popular renderings of the great minds.

"For instance, you know the history of philosophy, but you are little acquainted with philosophy itself. At the same time the acuteness of your mind enables you to appreciate the fact that the very books you read are shallow. Accordingly, you despise them just as you despise the people who admire your conversation and accept your opinions. You know that there is a higher truth concealed even if you have not the will power to examine into it. This gives an edge of cynicism to all your conversation. Not only do you despise other men but you despise yourself—that is to say, the self which other men know. You comfort yourself with the feeling that there is in you an inner, higher self which you sense vaguely. This is what gives you the sense of superiority. You feel that you wear a mask which no one in the world can penetrate.

"On the other hand, you yourself have so long seen only that mask that the existence of that higher self in you is become almost a non-existent fable. You are, in fact, very nearly like your mask; twenty years ago there was the possibility that you might awaken and achieve some of the possibilities of that higher self. To-day that chance is gone, and you are damned forever with the doom of insignificance."

Before the speech ended, the smile was gone from the face of Windsor, and he listened with head erect.

"You make me a monster, abhorred of men?" he asked, sneering openly.

"Not at all," replied Axson. "The very certainty which others feel that they can never approach your true self is a continual stimulant which makes them attempt over and over again to break down the bars. You yourself feel that your inner nature is a treasure; you have cast such a glamour over it that others cannot help but feel that there is real gold within you. You have successfully kept up the bars. No one has taken away any of the gold, partly because of the bars and partly because the Fool's Gold turns to sand at the touch."

The calm of Windsor had now completely returned to him.

He said: "You defeat your intention. Your talk is logically planned. But if I have baffled the world all my life, as you admit, how is it possible that you should penetrate the secret by merely looking at the furnishings of a single room?"

"You cannot escape by that quibble," answered Axson. "I see the truth that others overlook, partially because I have been trained from infancy to see things clearly and without prejudice, partially because in this case my eyes are sharpened."

"By what?"

"Hate," said Axson in the same slow,

deep voice. But though his expression did not change, yet such meaning came into his eyes that Windsor set his teeth like a man about to face the charge of a wild beast.

Yet he was by nature a brave man and he never proved it more certainly than now, for though his color changed and his forehead grew wet, he did not wince in a single muscle. He repeated at length: "Hate?"

"Hate," said the giant, "unqualified until this moment."

"And what has qualified it, my handsome boy?"

"You are the first man," said Axson with a sudden and musical softening of his voice which made it almost tender, "you are the first man who has ever looked into my eyes as long as this without showing fear." And he added harshly: "Or horror!"

A litttle exclamation of sympathy fell from the lips of Windsor and he started from his chair and toward Axson. He was stopped by the giant saying: "Don't touch me. As long as you stay at a distance you are safe."

It brought up Windsor sharply as a blow, but he said as he resumed his chair: "Whatever you may feel toward me, Axson, I assure you that I have nothing but good will for you!"

"For that matter," answered the other, "does the man who is about to offer up a sacrifice ever hate the animal which is under the knife?"

"You are keen," nodded Windsor, "and a little vindictive, and I shall not dispute you because, as you yourself have discovered, I am averse from effort. But I should like to know the grounds of your hate. I have kept you fed and clothed; I have seen that you studied under the finest masters; I have made certain that that great body of yours should be trained in every way, so that you can to-day run, box, wrestle, swim, ride, and shoot." He laid a slight emphasis on the last word. "Do you value none of these?"

"Does a slave," answered Axson instantly, "value his possessions as long as they are used in the service of another man?"

"A slave? My dear lad!"

"A slave," insisted Axson, "for I know that whatever I possess is yours first, and mine only in reversion."

"I could tell you a story," said Windsor, "that might take some of the edge from your feeling—and yet it would give some body to your reasons also, I fear. Hate? That's a very violent term, my boy."

"I use it advisedly," said the giant.

"Come! Tell me more of your grounds."

"I hate you," said Axson, "because you created the environment which makes me what I am."

A flicker of cold malice came into the eyes of Windsor.

"At least," he murmured, "you will not blame me if your face—"

And he ended with a graceful gesture.

"I blame nothing for that," answered Axson. "It is not the ugliness of my face alone that makes men shrink from me. It's the thing inside me. I was raised without love; I have no love to give the world; and men feel it. Yes, I hardly know the meaning of the term I use, it is so far removed from me!"

He continued after a pause in which he seemed to weigh the necessity of saying anything further: "From the first day I can remember, your authority has been a rod over me. From the first day every hour of my life has been planned and there have been tasks to accomplish. All those tasks lay along certain carefully mapped out directions. I have studied physics and chemistry deeply, history, and above all criminology; but I have never been allowed a book of verse, a novel, or even pleasant essays.

"Everything I have read has been intellectual. Nothing has touched the emotions. And my body has been educated like my mind. I have been taught to box, to wrestle, to shoot, and even to throw a knife. But I have never associated with other youngsters. They took joy in using their strength, but I have never played a game, I have never danced, I have never sung, I have never talked with men of my age or with a girl. It is true that even when I was a child other children fled from me and cried out at the ugliness of my face, just as

men give me elbow room and fall silent when I come near them.

"You have made my body strong, but it is only strong to destroy. You have made my mind vigorous, but it is only trained to analyze, dissect both the mental and the physical. Like my body, it is strong only to destroy and not to make.

"I am equipped to take but never to give. By my whole education, I am fitted to be a plague to men. They feel it instinctively. They shrink from me. And because of their weakness in shrinking I despise them.

"You have given me every gift, but you have kept from me a gift that is worth a million times more than all the rest. You have kept back the gift of liberty. All men are created to pursue one end—their own happiness. I have been trained so that it is impossible for me to give happiness to myself or to others. There is only one thing for which I yearn, and that is destruction.

"I want to break, crush. I want to tread underfoot. And the temptation to do it tortures me every day of my life. Do you begin to understand, Mr. Windsor, why I hate you? It is because every moment I am here I have a longing to take you in my hands—so! And it is because that very desire is checked and held back by the knowledge that I owe you my life. Yes, you have given me my life, and it is hateful to myself and hideous to others. Is it clear to you?"

CHAPTER V.

INSPIRATION.

THERE might have been eloquence in this outburst if the voice of Axson had given it emphasis, if the great volume of his tones had swelled here and sunk there; but instead he spoke in a deadly monotone and the only variation was in the point of light which flared once to a fire in his eyes and then burned away to a dull cinder again.

As for Windsor, instead of showing either sympathy or horror as the narrative proceeded, he grew more and more excited, more and more exultant, until at the end he cried out: "Yes, it is perfectly clear! It is done; it is complete. And now, Axson, I am going to tell you why I have made you what you are, and you shall judge if I am in all cases the ineffectual ass you have pictured me in the first place. It is not a pretty story, but then you are used to ugly things."

And he paused to give sting to the thrust, and to collect his thoughts. Axson, as though wearied by the long continuance in one position, rose and crossed to the hearth. To give employment to his large hands he picked up the wrought-iron poker and held it carelessly before him. It was well over three feet in length and massive enough to pry the most ponderous log into position. Windsor now sat quite close to Axson, and leaned at ease in his chair, a comparatively frail figure, staring up at the grim face of the colossus.

"We must go back to the time when the Lord created the race of the Windsors," he said. "They were once a rude and broad-boned lot and their hands were as familiar with the sword-hilt as mine is with a cane. They might, under ordinary circumstances, have remained a vigorous and fighting lot, but men answer to their environments, as you have just so conclusively proved to me. And the first services of the Windsors to the Norman kings of England were so great that they received fiefs rich enough to remove from them all necessity of ever troubling about money.

"At first there was an occasional call to arms and the Windsors, I assure you, always rode in the first rank of the onset. But as times grew a bit more civilized and men used more gentle and cruel weapons to defend their rights, it no longer was necessary for the Windsors to wield arms. In short, they became by degrees mere gentlemen of leisure, and by the time the family had removed to this side of the water there was a tradition of idleness behind us, at least a couple of centuries old. It had become, in fact, impossible for a Windsor to work.

"Their bodies changed with their minds. In place of the sturdy old warrior type they became smaller boned, slenderer, less fitted to bear burdens. Occasionally there was a

reversion to the burlier type of our ancestors, such as you will find my son.

"I have had to inflict this long prelude upon you in order that you might understand my state of mind when I found, at the age of thirty, that my finances were in a state of collapse. It was because of a failure in stocks which no one could have foreseen. I was suddenly confronted with the necessity to labor; and yet I was perfectly certain that I could never work. However, I found one solution.

"By investing all my capital in a twenty-year annuity it was possible for me to draw enough money to support me and my five-year-old son not in luxury but in modest comfort. You observe."

And he waved his hand about the room.

"At the end of the twenty years the payments ceased and the capital itself reverted to the company in which I had invested it. You note, however, that this provision sufficed only for twenty years. At the end of that time it left my son practically penniless, aside from whatever personal effects I might leave behind me.

"After your description of me you will feel that the fate of my son must have meant nothing to me. In that you are very wrong. I was determined that I should find some means of providing a gentleman's income for him.

"During the time I was in this quandary, wondering how I could make something out of nothing for my boy, I was walking down the street one day toward evening and was held up by a bold footpad. He was so bold, in fact, that he overstepped the mark, came within reach, and I promptly knocked him down with my cane. By the time his senses returned I had his gun and was dragging him toward the street corner. The poor devil began pleading pitifully for mercy. According to his story he was an honest working man, a plumber, and had been forced to this course by the deadly illness of his wife, and by a starving boy at his home.

"Of course I saw at once that the tale was nonsense, and before he had repeated his yarn twice he was a carpenter instead of a plumber. Nevertheless I was out for diversion, and I promised to let him go free if he would bring me to his home and show me the truth about his family. He agreed with an eagerness that staggered me.

"His home was on the East Side in the dirtiest, noisiest section. Hordes of dirty brats played across the pavements. Moreover, it was a sweltering hot summer night and there was a veritable blanket of heat over the city. It seemed to shut out the stars.

"We climbed the stairs to the fifth floor and there we entered one room which served as kitchen, dining-room, living-room, and bedroom. Faugh! I can catch the scent of it to this moment! I remember the flypaper on the oilcloth that covered the table—I can even see the coffee stain on the side of it!

"The bed filled at least half the room, and on it lay a skeleton of what had once been a woman. And gad but she was ugly! By nature she must have been as homely as a witch and disease had made a veritable caricature of her face. She had a hard, sharp cough that jerked the color into her face now and again, and then it went out slowly and her skin was the same greasy white.

"Her son squatted cross-legged on the floor beside the bed, a somber-eyed youngster of five or six—her true son, for he was uglier than his mother even at that age. It wasn't so much the misshapen features as it was the sinister expression behind them. Gave me the shivers, my lad, as nothing has done until I looked on you again this evening. For of course you were the boy.

"In fact, you were so damnably ugly, my dear lad, that you inspired me. The great thought came with my second glance at you.

"The upshot of it was that I got my man the thief out of his room and into the back part of a nearby saloon. There he poured down a couple of raw whiskeys, and when I promised him some money and gave him a ten-spot as a retainer, he unlocked his tongue and simply poured out the information. He admitted that he had been a thief from his childhood and that he would be a thief until he died—it was in his blood. And he also admitted that his son would be

trained to the same work as soon as he was old enough; in fact, he was already clever enough to do a bit of work in thick crowds. Finally, I offered to take the boy and give him an education and a chance to live, which he would never have in the tenements. The only price that your father asked, Axson, was the expense of the burial of your mother.

"There you have the background of your life. Now you will admit that from such a start, you could have gone on to nothing, except the life of a pickpocket and graduating from that class to the footpad, and finally at last, to the division of the yegg. A noble future! It was this that came to me when I first looked at you. The second thing that came to me was the size of your forehead and the bigness of your bones. It was plain that there was the raw material of a strong man in you.

"Observe that in the crisis, my mind worked fast—hardly like the poor ennui-driven fugitive you have described me. I leaped at once from the paltry beginning to a distant conclusion.

"It was plain that since I could leave my son no capital, there were only two possible sources of an income for him. One was money he might make for himself by creative work. This had to be dismissed at once. It was impossible that a Windsor should ever work. The second possibility was that my son should take from other men what they had made. This also was impossible, because although he might have become a successful spoiler, the act of degradation would have stained his character in his own eyes, and above all else it was necessary that he should be not only a Windsor, but a gentleman. It was at this point that the inspiration came to me, and I thought of substituting for my son a professional thief, who would place some percentage of his spoils in the hands of my son.

"I think I got the great idea from the frigate-bird, which I have seen in my travels. It is a bird of tremendous power of flight and great fighting capacity. It lives on the fish which it forces other birds to surrender as soon as they have captured them.

"I knew that thieves of intelligence often make large and consistent incomes. It occurred to me that this income might be preserved from danger and much increased if a man were specially and scientifically trained as a destroyer of property!"

Here Windsor broke off short, for his ear caught a light creaking sound, and staring at Axson he saw the thick bar of the iron poker bend slowly between the hands of the giant.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GENDER OF THE SPHINX.

OTHERWISE he gave no sign of emotion in the compression of his mouth or the keenness of his eye.

Windsor went on: "The average thief is not a clever man. He has a certain low cunning, but his work is not based on careful learning. I decided that a man who knew thoroughly all that could be learned of the methods of acquiring the property of others could not only take freely, but he could take safely. I determined to make you such a man. I was doing no wrong, because I was simply enabling you to do with impunity what you would be course of nature have attempted and eventually come to grief over, in the hands of the law.

"So I secured you and began the course of your education. From the first it was necessary to impress upon your childish mind the fact that you would have perished miserably before the dawning of intelligence if you had not been rescued by me. For in truth, Axson, there was no chance that you could escape the tuberculosis germ if you were left in contact with you mother, and in your weakened and half-starved condition the disease would have carried you off within a month. Your very existence, then, you owe to me."

"I admit it," said Axson in the usual calm voice.

"Starting from this point, I had your mind carefully trained by various masters. Yes, your education has cost me a pretty penny. It was possible that your future profession would frequently place you in danger. Accordingly I had your body trained thoroughly. Naturally large of

bone and muscle, you were schooled in every exercise which could benefit a fighting man. You were taught to wrestle and to box, and I have it on good authority that a single blow of your fist will accomplish what a club effects in the hands of an ordinary man. You were also necessarily taught to use weapons and have acquired, as I understand, a truly extraordinary proficiency with firearms. But that had to follow when your hand and eye were trained almost from infancy.

"The mind, however, was infinitely more important than the body. I kept that firmly before me from the first in planning your education. Moreover, I was determined that since the mind has only a limited capacity, yours should be concentrated only upon those branches which would be of possible benefit in your work. You were taught, therefore, little else than the sciences and mathematics. Some philosophy was necessary, though I understand that you have plunged into the subject somewhat further than I intended.

"The entire history of criminology is at your finger tips, and all the methods of the great figures in the world of crime are yours to use when you will. Moreover, you have been schooled as a detective, for knowing how to find a clue it necessarily follows that you also know how to work without leaving traces.

"Meanwhile it was necessary that your mind should not be softened by the so-called humanizing influences of association with other children. You were consistently debarred from all society. Neither were you allowed to fribble away your time on the arts. A hard, compact, practical, working mind was what I wanted, and by the eternal heavens, that is what I have produced! You ask me in what my life has been creative? Sir, I point to you! You are my lifework, and you are a masterpiece! What! I had only to let you see my room, and from it you read my character with unflinching truth! But whatever you may be, I have made you. Now the time has come for me ask not gratitude, but answering services. Are you ready?"

The poker dropped from the hands of Axson and clanged upon the hearth.

"I am ready," he said simply.

"Very good," nodded Windsor, "very good indeed. The work is completed, and it is only necessary that I should communicate some of the details.

"My annuity ceases to-day. At midnight I shall terminate my life. Pay careful attention, therefore, to the details of my instructions.

"First of all, my stock of money is short. And my son, James Gordon Windsor, 4th, has little of his own, and a considerable stock of debts. You must be prepared to begin your activities at once.

"It shall be borne in mind from the start that my son shall never suspect from what source the money you give him comes. You shall have it delivered to him in such a manner that he shall never dream that he lies under any obligation to you. I shall tell him simply that he is to expect a supply of money in an amount which I cannot determine and which may cease at any time. I shall therefore urge him to save himself by a rich marriage alliance at the earliest possible moment.

"One thing I have omitted from your education. I have not taught you to dress as will be necessary when you enter the society of my son. He himself shall give you the necessary lessons. To this end, I shall leave him parting instructions to the effect that you are the son of an old friend of mine who had placed me under heavy obligations to him. I shall say that your father, dying, sent you to me with a request that I introduce you to the ways of the world. And I shall pass you on as a bequest to Jimmy. The Lord knows what he'll do with you!"

Here Windsor chuckled, and he resumed after a moment: "But it will be necessary that you share the same lodgings; the contact would be mutually beneficial." He laughed again. "Above all, it will enable you to come at all the vital needs of my boy and estimate exactly how much money you will have to make. Now, sir, we are about to part, and such a gulf will be placed between us within the hour that you will never be able to meet me again. Is everything clear between us?"

"Everything."

"It is of course apparent to you that I have placed you under no bond. I have no means of compelling you to serve my son, and that servitude ends as soon as my son is in possession of a sufficient permanent income. Will the compact hold?"

"It will hold while I live," anwered Axson. "I have already admitted the debt."

"By the Lord, you seem happy to accept it; your eye's on fire!"

"Because I'm free," answered Axson. "I have a debt to pay, but the means of paying it is open to me. Thereafter there is no program which I must follow. My will is my only master. This is liberty!"

"And no scruples about the course you will have to pursue?"

"There are open to me honorable means of making money."

"My son needs thirty thousand a year. He must have at least that much to live like a Windsor in these days of high prices and expensive fancies. Axson, can you make thirty thousand a year by honest means?"

The giant was silent.

"No, my friend, it is impossible. Resign yourself to the inevitable."

"And why not?" said Axson. "I am merely accepting what would have come in the course of nature if I had not been taken away from my home by you. I will follow that natural course—and will follow it without scruple."

He laughed suddenly and without mirth, and ceased so abruptly that the heavy echo went booming through the room.

"There is only one thing that could upset my plans," said Windsor thoughtfully.

"And that?"

"When you know the gender of the Sphinx you will understand what I mean. And now, sir, I must say farewell for eternity. My time is drawing to an end and I have still much to do. Take this card. You will find on it the address of my son. Take this wallet. You will find in it the means of providing yourself with a suitable outfit of clothes before you go to call upon him."

These things Axson accepted without a word, and still without speaking he turned on his heel and strode from the room with that characteristic step, so light and swift in spite of his bulk.

CHAPTER VII.

A BUSINESS PROPOSITION.

IT was three days later and Axson stood at the door of James Gordon Windsor 4th, while a servant said: "I don't think that Mr. Windsor can possibly receive you now, sir."

"It's nine o'clock," said Axson. "How soon *will* he be able to receive me? By ten?"

"Could you possibly come back this afternoon?" inquired the servant anxiously.

"Not possibly," returned the giant. "I will see Mr. Windsor now."

His big body started a forward movement before which the other automatically shrank, and as a corollary of this he said: "I will see what can be done, Mr. Axson." So Axson found himself in the big, square hall of the apartment. He followed the retreating form of the servant to the farther door of the hall. On this the servant knocked, and then listened. As if in reply, a jangle of excited voices rolled faintly out to them. He looked up with an anxious smile to Axson.

"You see," he said, "they won't hear me. I've tried before."

"Let me knock," said Axson, and accordingly he stepped forward and smote with a heavy hand upon the door. It shuddered under the impact, but a rush of clamoring voices within must have drowned the sound of the summons. He raised his ponderous fist a second time, when the servant pushed in between him and the door. "One minute, sir," he cried, as if he feared that a second stroke might beat down the stout wood, and so saying he laid his hand on the knob. So, by accident, as the knob turned with the shrinking weight of the servant against the panel of the door, it swung suddenly open and the servant stumbled with a gasp, headlong into the inner apartment.

Looking over him John Axson saw a table surrounded by five men. He saw them through a haze of tobacco-smoke; he saw

chips littered across the top of the table; he saw bottles and glasses strewn across smaller tables which were placed beside every player. And he saw one man rising to his feet. Only his profile was toward the door, and he paid no attention to its opening. Neither did the rest, for their eyes were fixed upon him who stood erect. He was a large man—as tall and nearly as massive as John Axson himself. He had that peculiarly erect, proud carriage of the head which so often goes with the fine athlete. A glance at him in street clothes suggested that muscular body racing around the oval of a cinder-path or plunging through the thick of a football mêlée.

A handsome man—in fact, his features were almost too regularly cut to promise strength of mind; they suggested rather amiable than aggressive qualities. Like the rest, he was in evening dress; it accentuated the swell of shoulders and chest and the lean hips of the active man.

"Gentlemen!" he said, and raised his hand.

The murmur of voices around the table died out and full attention of four pairs of eyes fixed upon the speaker.

"I regret to announce," he said, "that the bank is broken. Mr. Leffingwell, you will take my note?"

A little chorus of exclamations came from the circle.

"What the devil!" said a plump fellow, much older than any of the rest. "You don't mean you're seriously embarrassed by this evening's play?"

"I am, Jack," said the speaker. "I'm most damnably embarrassed. In fact, I'm what I've just told you—broke. Sorry, Leffingwell."

"Look here," cried the middle-aged man who had spoken before, "I'd no idea we were cutting so close to the nerve. For my part I'll have none of this. Windsor, you'll be good enough to take back what's come my way? It was purely a matter of—"

"My dear fellow," said Windsor coldly, "I know you've the best heart in the world, but I couldn't consider accepting a cent."

There was a marked look of relief on the face of every man at the table.

"My note for how long, Leffingwell?" asked Windsor, and he turned to a little pale-faced man with light-blue eyes and very black hair.

"Awfully sorry," said Leffingwell, "but you know I'm starting across the pond the day after to-morrow."

"Just let me have your overseas address, then," said Windsor. "Will that do?"

There was a moment of pause which brought astonished eyes toward Leffingwell.

He said at last: "Yes, I suppose that will have to do."

Some one murmured: "By Jove!" half audibly. It was a palpable cut. The blood rushed to the face of Windsor and sank from it as quickly, leaving him white. The elder man, very grave, and almost as pale as Windsor, fixed angry eyes upon Leffingwell.

"It will be a privilege to arrange this," he said, and nodded with an appeal to the host.

"Come, come, Jack," said Windsor with some heat. "You'll do nothing of the kind. Mr. Leffingwell, you shall have your money before you sail. I have your address."

The servant, in the mean time, had picked himself up, and now, shrinking back to the door, as if to block the way of John Axson, he cried in a shrill voice: "I beg your pardon, sir."

Young Windsor turned and saw the hulking form of a stranger in the door; he started and cursed softly.

"What the devil is the meaning of this, Smithson?" he called sharply.

"I beg your pardon, sir," repeated the miserable Smithson, "but Mr. Axson came —insisted—the door flew open before I—"

"Never mind," cut in Windsor. "That will do."

He came toward Axson and shook hands.

"I'm glad to see you," he said, forcing a smile, "even though you see me in rather a tangle."

John Axson said nothing at all. The others had risen from their places, and one of them raised a window-shade.

"Gad!" he cried, "it's broad daylight. What's the time?"

"Nine ten," answered John Axson.

"My word!" said little Leffingwell. "Where did the night go?"

The middle-aged man said coldly: "Out of Windsor's pocket and into yours, apparently."

Leffingwell started to reply, but in turning he encountered more than one pair of oblivious eyes and seemed to suddenly realize that he was no longer a desirable part of the company.

"Well," he said, "I'm off. Sorry you're hard hit, Windsor. Morning, boys."

And he was gone hastily. The others followed his example, the elder man lingering behind to murmur to Windsor: "Of course I'll see you soon. And if there's any tangle, Jimmy, it will be a privilege—"

"Not a bit," answered Windsor emphatically. "Not the least bit in the world. Good-by, Jack, and thank you a thousand times."

He followed his guests into the hall, calling cheerfully after them until the last was gone, then he returned to Axson, and led the way into a small library. There were a number of magazines on the table; the shelves were lined chiefly with uniformly bound sets, suspiciously fresh and unbattered.

"So," sighed Windsor, as he sank into a chair, "there's the end of one chapter. What the devil will be in the next?" He continued: "But the interesting thing to you is not my affairs but your own. Unfortunately the two go together to a certain extent. What has just happened takes it out of my power to be of any use to you. Sorry is no name for it. I'm covered with mortification. You see, my father's last request was that I should do what I could for you and start you along in this little world of ours. But my father didn't leave me the wherewithal. Last night I plunged to put myself on the right side. Result: All on the minus of the important decimal point. Sorry, Axson, but my hands are tied. Tied behind me, in fact. Can't even ask you to stop over here with me. To-day I have to auction off my things—or get rid of 'em some way. At least, I can fill Leffingwell's pocket that way."

"And when your things are sold, what will you do?" asked Axson.

"Eh? I haven't thought that far ahead. Damned if I know. Business, I suppose."

"Then begin business now," said Axson. "You have something I want to buy. Sell it to me."

"Anything you want," smiled Windsor. "Look about you. Name the article you desire and it's yours at your own price."

"Not furniture," said Axson. "It's become necessary that I learn something about manners—learn how to dress and walk and talk. If you think we could strike a bargain, say so and I'll pay your own price."

Windsor merely stared.

"If you can make me presentable," said Axson, "it is worth money to me."

The gaze of Windsor remained fixed upon the face of his guest.

"I read your mind," said Axson. "I would start under a handicap. I know that. I merely wish to be able to ameliorate that handicap as far as is possible. Will you help me?"

A suggestion of a smile touched the lips of Windsor. Evidently he was thinking of the sensation of that grotesque face and mighty figure introduced to polite society. The smile went out at once, however, and was replaced by an exceeding gentleness.

He said: "I'd be very happy to do anything in my power, but this is one of the few things I'd be unable to do for a money price. You understand me, of course."

"This is final?" said Axson.

"Absolutely. I'm sorry."

"Then I'll say good-by, Mr. Windsor."

"Not yet. I can't let you go as easily as this. By no means. Why not run down to the gymnasium of my club with me and after I get freshened up with a bit of exercise I can talk more to the point. There may be certain little things such as letters of introduction which would be of some service to you. We can talk it over, at least. Will you?"

"Gladly," nodded Axson.

CHAPTER VIII.

TIME!

IT was not easy to talk to Axson, however, as Windsor discovered on the way to the club. He met every remark with the same blank face and answered nine ques-

tions out of ten with a curt no or yes. At the entrance to the club they met a man coming out, almost as tall as themselves, though hardly as stalwart of shoulders. Windsor hailed him, and they stood together for a moment, a titanic trio; club members in passing stopped an instant and stared.

"Jackson," said Windsor, "you're the very man I'm looking for. I want some exercise. Will you go up and put on the gloves with me?"

But Jackson regarded him with a partly mocking and partly rueful smile.

"Not again for me," he said. "I was in bed for two days after our last bout."

"Impossible!" cried Windsor. "We were only sparring."

"Sparring with you," said Jackson, "is like boxing with a bear. Never again! Sorry!"

And he hurried out, leaving Windsor to stare gloomily after him.

"Jackson is getting a little fat and slow," he confided to Axson. "He used to be great sport with the gloves. Well, I'll have to pull the weights or toss the medicine-ball about, I suppose."

"I'd be glad to accommodate you with the gloves," suggested Axson.

"You?" cried Windsor eagerly, and then the light died from his eyes. "You have the bulk," he went on, "but boxing needs something more than size. Mighty kind of you, but boxing has been a sort of hobby with me, and I don't care to put on the gloves with a man who isn't fairly expert. You see, it's hard for me to pull a punch, and if I don't do that I'm liable to hurt the other chap pretty seriously. Thanks just the same."

"I think," said Axson gravely, "that I would take a chance—for a short bout—just to loosen you up."

For a moment Windsor considered him judiciously.

"Well," he decided at length, "it's up to you. If you'll put 'em on I'll go as easily as I can."

The thought of the contest fired him. He began to hum as they went up in the elevator, and when they reached the gymnasium he led Axson directly to his locker.

"What shall it be?" he asked, as they began to undress. "I have anything from five to eight-ounce gloves in my locker."

"There's more padding in an eight-ounce glove," remarked Axson non-committally.

"Right you are," grinned Windsor, "and the eight-ounce it shall be. You've done some boxing?"

"Off and on—a little bit," agreed Axson.

"It may be a bout after all," said Windsor, and then, as he watched the last clothes swept from the body of Axson he uttered a little cry of astonishment. "It *will* be a bout. By the Lord, Axson, I've never seen a better body than yours. Well, shall we have Duffy—that's our boxing-master—referee the match?"

"If you wish," said Axson, slipping into his trunks.

"Good! Old man, I wouldn't have missed this for much money. And what shall be the prize? A supper to-night?"

"If you beat me," said Axson, "I'll buy you a supper. If I beat you, we'll take up that bargain I mentioned before. I pay your debt to Leffingwell, and you teach me what you can."

"That," frowned Windsor. "It's almost the first bet I've ever refused. But I can't do it."

The temptation made his eyes bright.

"I can't be rotter enough to do that."

"Suppose I make it more definite," said Axson. "If I knock you out we call it a bargain."

"Come, come!" smiled Windsor. "I don't want to boast, and you may be a very good man with the gloves, but I've never been dropped or even staggered in my life, and I've mixed with some clever fellows. You certainly never could do it with eight-ounce gloves. No, I could make that bet."

They stood in trunks and in gymnasium shoes, now, pulling on their gloves. Axson measured Windsor deliberately from head to heel.

"I'll offer you any odds you want," he said.

Windsor flushed deeply.

He said in a controlled voice: "It's hard for me to be polite when it comes to a matter of the gloves. Please don't insist on challenging me in this way, Mr. Axson.

It's not a gentleman's bargain, Mr. Axson, if you will force me to be frank."

"However," said the other imperturbably, "it is the sort of a bargain that suits me. If you beat me, it's only a supper, which I will buy. If I knock you out, it's the other bargain."

Windsor ground his teeth.

"I have to keep hold on myself," he argued fiercely.

"Say, in four rounds," continued Axson calmly. Four rounds with eight-ounce gloves. Don't you think you could defend yourself for that length of time, Mr. Windsor?"

It was not so much what he said that infuriated Windsor as it was the undisturbed manner in which he made his astonishing proposal. Moreover, they stood with the gloves laced upon their wrists, stripped to the waist, ready for action. The blood of Norman ancestors was boiling through the veins of Windsor and the Berserker light looked red from his eyes.

"I shouldn't do it," he muttered, "but it's more than a human temptation. Besides, there isn't a possibility that you can lay me flat, Mr. Axson. If there was the ghost of a chance that you might do what you promise I couldn't make this bargain, but as it is—"

"As it is," cut in Axson precisely, "if I knock you out without question inside of four rounds you allow me to pay the debt to Leffingwell, retain your apartment intact, and accept me as a guest."

Windsor swallowed hard. His lips were beginning to draw back hard over his teeth.

At last he said: "Are you mad, Axson? Well, we'll put it that way, then. I've warned you enough."

He led the way from the locker-room into a roomy place in the center of which stood a roped ring with the padded mat inside. In it, a bald-headed man was putting a sweating youth through his paces. As they approached, the pupil held up his gloved right hand.

"'Nuff, Duffy," he gasped. "Besides, here comes Windsor with another of his victims. No, gad, it looks more like a professional!"

"How are you, Duffy," nodded Windsor. "May we have the ring for a little while, and you to referee?"

"Sounds to me like serious business, Mr. Windsor," said the instructor. "What's the game?"

"I want you to hold time on us and referee. The point is this: my friend here—Mr. Axson, this is Mr. Duffy—promises to knock me out within four rounds. You're to see that it's done legitimately, and tell me about it when I wake up."

The panting youth paused as he climbed through the ropes to stare in astonishment at Axson, and Duffy regarded the big man with a rather grimly prophetic smile. Then he turned rather sharply on Windsor.

"Is this a joke?" he asked. "No more manslaughter, Mr. Windsor. Can't have it here."

"I've tried to explain everything to my friend," said Windsor coldly. "But he insists."

"Well," said Duffy, grinning openly now, "he looks like he could stand a good deal of wear. Maybe he'll get it. Climb in, lads!"

The two big men obeyed.

"Now," went on Duffy, in a businesslike tone, "you two are going at it hard and heavy, eh? But what's this? Eight-ounce gloves?"

"I suggested that he take lighter gloves," said Windsor dryly. "But he'd rather save his hands."

"And you're going to knock out Mr. Windsor with eight-ounce gloves?" said Duffy to Axson.

"Exactly," nodded Axson, "and within four rounds. We're perfectly clear on that, Mr. Windsor?"

"Perfectly," said Windsor. "Are you ready?"

"I am."

"Wait one minute. Mr. Axson, I don't know you, and I don't know how good you are. But I do know that a professional himself couldn't put Windsor away in four rounds—not with eight-ounce gloves."

In reply Axson said: "If you'll call time, we'll start."

"All right," said Duffy savagely, "maybe you need Windsor's fists to teach you

your lesson. No hitting in the clinches or the breakaway. That's all. Time!"

CHAPTER IX.

NEMESIS.

HE slipped back two rapid, gliding paces, and then crouched with his hands slapped on his knees ready to watch every move of the two boxers. They came together, shook hands, and then stepped back, ready for work.

They were exactly of a height and within a few pounds of each other in weight; that much was obvious to the most unpractised eye. Also, their general outlines were the same—broad shoulders, thick chests, and comparatively thin hips and waists. In these main details the resemblance ceased. The skin of Windsor shone with a dazzling whiteness and here and there it was drawn out to an almost transparent fineness by the swelling of the muscles and the pink shone through. Everywhere those muscles played in and out in formidable knots and bunches. Up from a small wrist the muscles of the forearm swelled suddenly, and the upper arm was a congested mass—the arm of a gymnast.

The arched chest was padded mightily, but nowhere was the development of the young athelete more remarkable than across the shoulders. Here there was a continual flash and play of light. At every movement of the arms the muscles across the shoulders leaped in and out, bulged and disappeared, and down the center of the back, on either side of the spinal column, was a great ridge —like two cables. At first glance Windsor seemed overmuscled, but now as he began to try out his footwork, dancing lightly yet in perfect balance in and out, one lost all sense of bulk. He seemed merely a swift and eminently capable engine of destruction.

In all this Axson stood the exact opposite of his opponent. His wrists were broad and bony, and when he crooked his fists in a bit, the cords leaped out like bow-strings. The forearm swelled up to a perfectly rounded mass, but it was not indented—there was no knotting and play of muscle. The upper arm also was comparatively lean. It tapered up from the elbow almost like a woman's, absolutely smooth. One would have expected to feel it yield under the touch; in fact, it was hard as tempered steel. Neither were there the jutting points which caught the light over the chest and shoulders. All was sheathed in a thick layer of what might well have been fat, except that the gaunt ribs of the man showed that he was in perfect condition.

No matter what he did with his arms, not a muscle rippled along his back. Neither were his legs as trim as those of Windsor. The knees were not half concealed by overhanging muscles as were Windsor's—they thrust out—big, bony, and the feet below were two or three sizes larger than those of his dancing opponent's.

Their expressions were also in vital contrast, for while the face of Windsor flamed with the eagerness of battle, his cheeks flushed, his eyes afire, his nostrils dilated, the face of Axson was buried in the same unshaken repose. That half-mocking smile tilted up the corners of his mouth, the eyes were continually probing the infinite distance. He stood with his guard low, his left hand down almost to his waist, his body not at an angle but squaring around toward Windsor, his feet planted solidly, clumsily, as if they were taking root.

These details Windsor took in with lightning glances. He danced in swiftly, feinted, and danced out and around. The guard of Axson had not stirred. He wheeled himself awkwardly to face the new attack. Duffy was chuckling. A dozen men, gathered around the ringside, glanced to each other and smiled. More men were coming.

Half the battle-eagerness vanished from the face of Windsor. He began to smile, and waved his gloved right hand to some of the spectators. Then he darted in again upon his victim. His movements were exactly like his first feint; but this time the darting arm did not feint. It shot with terrific impetus straight for the chin of Axson; the swarthy head rolled almost lazily to one side and the arm of Windsor shot to the elbow over the shoulder of his opponent. He grunted, partly at the jar of the waste punch, partly in surprise; but his

perfect balance had not been disturbed by the miss. In an instant he had rocked back on his heels, and then swaying forward, he stooped with his inward lunge and smashed his right arm toward Axson's body. At that close range no earthly speed of movement could have dodged the blow. The only chance for Axson was to block it, yet his guard remained as low as his waist; the driving right fist darted home just above the belt line, a deadly spot which the great Fitzsimmons had made a famous target for his knockout punches.

The blow landed fair and square, and with every ounce of Windsor's power behind it. The spat of the glove against the flesh was like the clapping of two open hands. At the sound the spectators involuntarily hunched their shoulders and grunted in sympathy. Yet there was no doubling up of Axson's body; there was no gasp for breath; there was no contorted face of agony. Windsor's tremendous blow rebounded as if he had smashed with all his power against thick sheets of pneumatic rubber.

He sprang back with an astonished oath, his right hand drooping very low, for it had been hurt in that smashing impact. His eyes, agape, were fixed upon the rocklike form of Axson, who had not moved any more than a granite statue. His ugly face showed neither mockery nor jubilation, but merely a faintly studious contempt. A shout came from the spectators. Duffy, wild with enthusiasm, was dancing in a most unprofessional delight.

"By the sivin saints!" he shouted, lapsing into his native dialect, "an indja rubber man. An' Windsor has his match!"

Even this applause could not disturb Axson, but it sent Windsor in like a thoroughbred under the spur. He leaped and lashed out with both hands for the head. The swinging left hurtled over the ducked head of Axson. Its companion right thudded against that hard surface. The metacarpal bones would have buckled under that impact if Windsor had not held his fist perfectly in line with his forearm. As it was, the blow paralyzed every nerve in his right arm. He danced back again, his forehead puckered in studious thought, and Axson raised his head to wait. He had hitherto moved nothing but that same head. His hands and his feet had not stirred, nor did they stir now in a forward movement as Windsor danced about him watching for an opening. To this maneuver Axson responded with a solemn and slow change of front, his movements of oxlike regularity.

Once more Windsor sprang in. He came with a double feint which ended in a left shift; but once more that elusive, bronzed head slipped to the side and the arm of Windsor shot past it almost to the shoulder. He fell into a clinch.

Here a strange thing happened. His left arm was clasped tightly about the shoulders of Axson. His right glove clasped the upper left arm of Axson. But the swarthy man disentangled those mighty arms with the ease of a mother avoiding the caress of a child. He did not stir his feet but simply picked off the arms of Windsor and then pushed the blond youth away to arm's length. This done, calmly, deliberately, he slapped Windsor across the face with his open glove.

After that, no ducking of the head could have avoided the rain of Windsor's punches. He came behind a literal mist of flying gloves—every blow enough to have knocked an ordinary man through the ropes. But not a blow landed; for Axson, in turn, had commenced to move.

He did not dance about like Windsor. Watched by himself without relation to Windsor he seemed to be lifting his feet methodically, slowly, trailing them across the floor, side-stepping or going in and out, gliding around reluctantly as if he wished to expend no unnecessary effort. It was a clumsy process, indeed, and a slow one, until one watched him in comparison with Windsor. Then it became apparent that those gliding steps were taken with lightning speed. He outdistanced Windsor and the swift movements of the blond boxer seemed like a futile, meaningless dance. If such a thing is conceivable, it might be said that Windsor was running at full speed, but Axson, merely walking, was always out of his way. Never a yard or even a foot out of the way. It was always a matter of an inch or a fraction of an inch.

He was always within range, and yet he was never hit. He glided back and the gloves of Windsor brushed across his face. He slipped to one side and the smashing fist of Windsor glanced along his ribs.

"Time!" called Duffy suddenly.

Windsor stopped, panting, in the middle of a rush, and stared about him in bewilderment. Spectators stood three deep on all sides of the ring, and they welcomed the dazed face of Windsor with a shout of delighted derision. For he was dripping with sweat, and at the opposite side of the ring Axson stood with his hands on his hips, unmarked by the furious onslaught, his bronze chest lifting in regular and unhurried breaths. Duffy was shaking the hand of Axson frantically.

"Lad, lad, lad!" he cried, with tears of delight in his eyes. "This is like the old days!"

"Mr. Windsor," said Axson, "I don't wish to hurt you. Will you call the game off?"

"I?" gasped Windsor, breathless with panting and rage. "Call it off? Confound you, Axson, you're clever on the defense, but you couldn't hurt me if you were swinging a sledge-hammer;"

"Very well," said Axson. "In the next round I will knock you down."

"Sit down, then," urged Duffy. "You've done a pretty bit of work, lad, but you'll need your strength if you're after Windsor in earnest."

But Axson brushed him away and continued to stand, his hands on his hips, considering Windsor thoughtfully.

However confident he might have been, Windsor would have been more than human if he had not winced under that considering stare which dwelt on him, point by point, like the eye of the butcher choosing the spot where he will strike.

And when Duffy called time for the second round, Windsor danced cautiously to the center of the ring, and waited. He had not long to wait, for Axson came at once with his stealthy step, not quite so erect, but with his shoulders swaying forward, his right and left gloves at an equal distance before him. It was a clumsy approach—to watch.

But when Windsor lashed out in a volley to keep that smoothly approaching form at a safe distance, his punches were picked off at a distance or else they were allowed to bounce harmlessly off the blocking forearms; and still more frequently it was the glove of Axson which tapped that of Windsor just as it darted within range and caused the blow to glance harmlessly away from its original aim.

And through this shower of punches the Nemesis continued a slow, almost strolling progress. Windsor had to give ground. He executed his retreat in the most approved form, yet for all his speed he was almost hemmed against the ropes by the gliding address of the swarthy giant. Yet he managed to leap to one side and regain the center of the arena. He was panting swift and hard, now, and there was something almost like terror in his eyes.

Indeed, there was a touch of the unearthly in the approach of that stealthy Titan, with never a blow struck, with the studious eyes fixed apparently on the vague distance beyond Windsor. For all that, his second attack was delivered with a speed of movement before which Windsor seemed to be standing still.

Back danced Windsor. He leaped to one side; the gliding Nemesis was before him. He sprang to the opposite side; the relentless stalker was again confronting him. He sprang in with a furious shower of punches; they bounced harmlessly away as rain drops off an iron-clad figure. He staggered back. The ropes touched his back. There was no room now to leap to either side. The onslaught was upon him and the punch was coming. He knew it.

A little grim silence had fallen over the onlookers. Half a minute before they had been shouting themselves hoarse at the sight of their champion in full retreat before an unknown warrior with a reputation still to make. But by degrees, as they watched that ominous attack, their shouting fell away; and now in the crisis, each man seemed to be holding his breath.

There was no thought of surrender in the brave heart of Windsor, however. So far he had not received a single blow. His strength was somewhat spent by the furious

pace at which he had fought, but it was as yet unsapped by punishment. The touch of the ropes against his sweating back gave him a desperate courage and strength. Right in the face of the oncoming colossus he leaped, aiming a terrific right hook at the head.

It was not a full arm punch that met him. It was merely a straight, stabbing, left jab such as pugilists use to measure an opponent. It was used by Axson, very evidently, merely to stop the onslaught of Windsor. His real attack was delayed in his right hand, which drew back to his hip for the vital effort at the same time that his left leaped out. But there was no need for a second blow. That darting left hand shot inside the curve of Windsor's hooking right, at the same time blocking the blow. The fist of Axson landed on the point of the chin with that peculiar thudding sound which is heard when an ax sinks home in the soft top of a chopping-block, and the head of Windsor jerked violently back. That terrible right hand of Axson was already started on its errand, but he stopped the blow in mid air with a wrench that jarred even his great body. For the arms of Windsor were dangling helplessly at his side. His head hung back, the mouth wagging open, the eyes staring and dazed. Then his whole body began to sag. The knees buckled first and swayed out. He sagged forward at the waist, and then toppled forward, limp as water. Axson received the shining body in his swarth arms.

He laid the body carefully, almost reverently, on the floor. Then he stood up.

"It is only a daze," said Axson calmly, "and he will be all right in a few seconds. Fortunately, I did not strike him hard."

"Hard!" squeaked Duffy, already kneeling beside the prostrate form. "Lad, it's lucky for you that you stopped that right hand or you'd sleep in a cell to-night. Hey, there, Conklin, throw me that wet towel! He's breathing, thank God!"

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 SUN OF A DAY

BY DIXIE WILLSON

LOVE is the sun of a day.

In the morning,
Rosy and warm, on the crest of a hill
Like a jewel in the distance—
I watch it—and wonder
How one splash of gold all the wide world can fill!
And then—with the day—as I thrill to the sunshine—
As closer and closer it comes to my heart,
I know that its light is the glory of Eden—
The soul of a world—yet a whole world apart.
But—oh, while my eyes are still full of its fire—
I see, in the trail of its roseate beams,
Shadows—beginning to lengthen and linger!
Shadows—like mist over vanishing dreams!
Breathless I watch while the sun begins sinking—
Folding the glow in a whispering gray—
Folding it into the shroud of a memory—

Love is the sun of a beautiful day.

Teach: Pirate De Luxe

by C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne

THIS is the second of the splendid series of sea tales dealing with the amazing modern pirate, Teach, which began last week. While each of these stories is complete in itself, it will add greatly to your enjoyment if you read them all consecutively. One will be published each week, and we feel certain that having made the acquaintance of this fascinating rascal, it will not be your fault if you miss a single one of his adventures.

II—THE COCHINEAL GROWER

"MY week's parole," wrote Miss Mary Arncliffe in the letter the cochineal-grower found in the floating champagne bottle, "my week's parole ended yesterday, and Captain Teach has not even asked me to renew it. So I am quite free to tell all I know.

"There was some carbon paper downstairs in the saloon, and by using a very hard pencil I am able to make eight copies, so that I am hoping one will be picked up somewhere and sent on to Mr. James Buckden, or my father, at Arncliffe's Bentwood Works, Skipton. I am weighting the bottom of the bottles with sand so that they will float upright, and sticking a little flag on a wire in the cork. A red flag on a blue sea should catch some decent eye, surely.

"The man Teach is now blatantly and openly a pirate, and flies the skull and crossbones through sheer vanity, and also, of course, to keep his crew together. We have sunk one big steamer, which I fancy was German, though she flew the red ensign, burned an Italian bark—the one which carried King Ernestino's treasure—and captured two Canary fishing-schooners.

"The crews of the last-named are made to work on the Littondale's repairs. Our pirates sit round, and if the Spaniards do not work hard enough, beat them with wire rope-ends. The Littondale, though Teach lied to me and said she hadn't been touched, was evidently a good deal hit about in the action with the big Hun steamer. And somewhere aboard of her is stowed (I suppose) the three hundred thousand pounds of Ernestino's which they looted. At any rate, I haven't seen any attempt to hide it or get rid of it, and it's bulky stuff, in heavy iron-bound boxes.

"Me they've put ashore on this island which makes the outside of the harbor. I do not know its name or whereabouts. But I suppose it is off Africa, as there are canals on the main land behind the ship. Possibly

they expected me to go back to the Littondale to sleep, but they didn't fetch me, so I didn't go. It was Pickles, the gunner, who put me ashore in the quarter-boat—a detestable fat man who is married eight deep, so the steward told me, and joined Teach to escape a prosecution for octrigamy, or whatever it is.

"Pickles has oily ways with him that make me shudder, but the steward says I need not be frightened. 'Pickles always boasts he does it by kindness, miss, never vi'lence. If you'll excuse me, miss, it's Captain Teach you've got to keep your eye on. He's not a lady's man, they say, but, then, miss, you've got your looks, which you can't help, and that hogged hair of yours, with the twiddle at ends is very camilfo, if you'll excuse me mentioning it.'

"I may remark that I have washed the offending hair in sea-water most thoroughly since I got this tip, and it is as decorative as a bunch of tallow candles at this moment of writing. I've slackened my —well, I've so arranged that my stockings sag about my ankles, and if that doesn't put Teach off, nothing will. One has to do desperate things. That black-eyed pirate is awful, and his men are beginning to leer, too, the brutes—all, that is, except the steward.

"The steward is in this business because he can't help it. He 'signed on'—whatever that may mean—in the ordinary way, and found himself pirating before he knew what was happening. He stands to be hanged with the rest, if caught; but in the meanwhile, if dividends are going, he intends to pocket them. In reply to a broad hint, I gave him a pound-note as a tip in advance.

"He says: 'You never know what might 'appen, miss. Thank you, miss. You'll find you have nothing to complain of, miss, from my department, till I've worked this off.'

"His name is Llewelyn Jones, which he can't help, and he's got a strong outward squint, which I suppose he didn't arrange for, either. You can imagine what I've come to when a man like this is the only soul I've got to trust.

"The Littondale's two life-boats, fastened together into a sort of raft with balks of timber, are hovering over the sunken steamer, whose topmasts and a bit of funnel show above the sea. They are salving guns and ammunition. So, with the six 6-inch guns she has already, the Littondale will be a very formidable ship, and, as her people will fight with halters round their necks, she will be a terror to every merchant-ship she can come across. I gather that her main handicap is her speed—which is slow.

"There is no slackening of discipline since they all turned pirates. Captain Teach shot one man on Saturday for being drunk, and another on Sunday for not saying 'Sir' when he spoke to an officer. Decks were cleaned and brasses polished far above the merchant service-standard, and the afterguard dresses for dinner. Did any former pirate put on evening clothes? I am not up in piratical history, and do not know. But I doubt it.

"But I am the only woman amongst them, and in spite of all this iron discipline I know that my danger is horrible. From Teach especially. In spite of his reputation of being a man's man only, a look from Captain Teach turns me cold all over. I don't show it. With him I always keep a stiff upper lip, and put him in his place with all the resources of an impudent tongue. But oh, my dear, I am so frightened. Jimmy! Get me out of it.

"Your scared

"MARY ARNCLIFFE."

Eight copies of this letter were—according to Miss Arncliffe—entrusted to ballasted glass and the waves of the Atlantic, and seven of these have left no trace. The eighth rolled ashore on Grand Canary, near Punta Gando, and was retrieved by Señor Don Carlos Bustamente, who had descended from his ancestral farm near the Caldera de los Marteles for his yearly bath.

Now Don Carlos was an ill-used man. When he was born, in the eighteen sixties, his father was a cochineal king. He was son to the original Bustamente who, at the risk of his skin, had stolen the original cochineal insects from Ejutla, in the Oaxaca valley of Mexico, and brought them to Grand Canary. (The penalty of discovery

was having the said skin stripped off, and a plaster of sand and Chile pepper applied in its place.)

The price of cochineal in London in those days was some twenty-five shillings per pound, although it dropped to ten shillings sixpence in the thirties, the profits were still delirious. The Bustamente estate of bare lava and pumice, was terraced and tanked and irrigated with every penny that could be raised from banker or money-lender, and the golden returns romped in.

Some time in the seventies young Carlos was sent to Stoneyhurst in England to pick up more knowledge than the local Canary priests could teach him, and about the same time aniline edged its way on to the dye-ware market.

When Don Carlos passed out of the sixth at Stoneyhurst into the great world beyond, cochineal was listed at tenpence per pound (London) in place of the ten shillings on which his scheme of education had been founded.

Another man would have cut cochineal and gone into, say, tobacco, or wine. Don Carlos did not. He lived on among the ruins of his ancestral splendors, and made a meager pocket-money by renting out water from his collecting tanks to tomato and banana farmers lower down the barranca. He just lived. But all the while at the back of his mind he felt that the world owed him something big, and if that something came in his way, he did not propose to be too nice-minded about grasping it.

As an Englishman or an American, one would have looked upon Carlos Bustamente merely as an unsuccessful business man anxious to retrieve his position. As a Canario with an English education he was an active danger.

Here, then, was the man who received Mary Arncliffe's letter, and the first person outside the Littondale's crew—excepting those who could tell no tales—to learn that Teach had turned pirate. Don Carlos read the letter through, time after time. He barely gave a thought to the lady or to the James Buckden she addressed so affectionately. His mind went out fully and entirely to that hoard of ex-King Ernestino's, which seemed to be valued at the neat, round sum of three hundred thousand pounds, and he sat there in the cool of the trade, dabbling his toes in the scum of the surf, puzzling for some plan by which he could pry it loose from Captain Edward Teach.

I do not think Carlos Bustamente was a man of much imagination. If he had been, his elaborate farm would not have been still planted with prickly pear for the edification of the unwanted cochineal insect. (One supposes that even the British War Office, which stuck to cochineal in the teeth of all the anilines has discovered that khaki is now the fashionable military wear, and not the old stout-hearted red.) But at last he got an idea, and, with un-Canarylike promptness, climbed into his clothes, and set about putting it in action.

A white-painted motor-launch, which was missing with one cylinder, splashed out from behind the western headland and steered wetly towards the harbor. Under the hot blue of the southern sky she looked very spic and smart in the distance, but when she drew up against the Littondale's accommodation ladder, one saw that she carried the Spanish markings of rust-streak and neglect. At the head of the ladder was a member of the British mercantile marine who wore a bandage round his head and a rifle under his arm. This person, when Don Carlos Bustamente proposed to step from launch to ladder, inquired pointedly where the hell he thought he was coming to.

"I want to see Captain Teach."

"That's likely," admittedly the mariner. "A many does. Whether he wants to see you is a different cup of tea. I'll ask. Stay you where you are, or you'll get a pill in the onion box. Quartermaster!"

With newly-learnt ceremony, announcement was made to the pirate chief, and that potentate was gracious enough to give an audience. "And keep the launch alongside. Shoot any of her people if they try to get away. Now send this dago up."

Teach was a good deal surprised with Don Carlos, who exchanged with him English as perfect as his own. (They do a line in eradicating Spanish accent at Stoney-

hurst.) Also when offered a drink, he plumped for that un-Spanish luxury, a whisky and soda.

"If you insist," said Don Carlos, "I will present my formal credentials, but for the preliminaries it will be more profitable for both of us if we remain a little vague. His excellency, the governor of the Canary Islands, need not be dragged into the matter at all unless we fail to agree on a *modus vivendi*."

"How did you hear of me?" Teach asked.

Don Carlos shrugged, and—I always remember it, to his credit, unscrupulous blackguard though he was—did not give away a lady.

"We are pretty up-to-date people here in the Canary archipelago, though you English always forget it. Government house had news of you by cable about five minutes after your—er—little entertainment had taken place."

"Did it?" said Teach. "Smart of government house. And what does it propose to do next?"

"That," said Don Carlos, opening a cigarette and rerolling it, "is what I am here to chat over."

He had talked vaguely of the "little entertainment," because of the very sound reason that he lacked details. He hoped Captain Teach would supply them. But Teach, on his part, said as little as might be. He might accept doubts as to the honesty of the King of Spain's regent in the Canary Islands, but he had had so far no reason whatever to believe in the good faith of Don Carlos Bustamente. "Of course," the latter continued, "with the force we have at our disposal we could obliterate you in five minutes. Or we could call up the British navy by our wireless, and I am sure they would carry out the job efficiently. But both these methods seem wasteful from the point of view of—er—er—"

"Well, whose?"

"Is it advisable to name names just now, captain?"

"If you don't," said Teach pointedly, "I shall send you out of here and have you shot, one-time. Get that?"

Don Carlos waved tobacco-stained fingers. "Captain, you are a man of business. I can see we shall soon come to terms. His excellency is a poor man, and the increased cost of everything, due to your war—it is not our war, I am sure you will remember—has made it very hard for him to keep up the state that is expected of his position. He invites you—through me—to contribute to his needs."

"Thoughtful of him."

"And also he offers his services as banker. You have Don Ernestino's three hundred thousand pounds—"

"It didn't tot up to that, anywhere near. But I bagged a fat Cape boat yesterday with some fine pickings. She was five times our size, but I fought her to a surrender inside five minutes. And your blessed governor would be glad to take the loot off my hands, would he? Now, that's kind."

"As I said, on terms, he would—through me—become your banker. A banker, as you will remember, captain, charges commission for work done, sometimes heavy commission, but of course he gives a receipt for all moneys received."

"The British navy," said Teach dryly, "would, I daresay, give me a receipt for the boodle if they could lay fingers on it. But I expect I'd find a difficulty in cashing my check on them afterward."

Don Carlos laughed pleasantly. "I was going to suggest we should invest the money by cable on your behalf in British war stock. Those five per cent bearer-bonds, for instance, would be much handier to carry about with you, captain, than crude, heavy bullion. Our charges for negotiating the business would be twenty-five per cent. That's high, of course, but then the affair has its difficulties."

Captain Teach drummed thoughtfully at the chart-table with well-tended nails. "Twenty-five per cent is robbery, of course, but in my line of business one expects to be robbed. I badly want a good round sum in war stock as an endowment for a sailors' mothers' guild I am interested in. I'd swallow twenty-five per cent to graft if I'd proper assurance you would deliver the goods."

The Spaniard showed beneath the English voice. "*Señor*, you would have my per-

sonal word. Permit me to refer you back to my card. I am Don Carlos Bustamente y Tirajana. My guarantee is as good as that of your Bank of England."

"I am sure I hear you say so. The only trouble is that commercial circles don't recognize it. But I'll make you a sporting offer. Buy the war loan bonds on your own, bring them to a spot I'll appoint, and I'll give you in hard cash double their face value. Now, Carlos, my lad, there's the best get-rich-quick scheme you ever had dangled before your nose."

"And yet I regret, Señor Captain, it is beyond my reach. A large landowner I am, to be sure, but a poor man in ready cash all the same. It is entirely beyond me to finance such a deal."

"Precisely. And what about that excellency the governor—or is it viceroy?—who is standing in with you?"

"*Señor,*" said Don Carlos, with stiff dignity, "if such a name has indeed been mentioned by accident, it must not be dragged in here. The person you speak about could not be implicated with the matter in any degree whatever at these stages. Any countenance he gave it must be quite unobserved. He would merely take his dues at the finish."

"It looks to me," said Teach grimly, "as if your little afternoon treat will be a chair in front of a firing party. Your idea of humor and mine don't seem to coincide. Quartermaster!"

An armed man appeared in the doorway as though he had been jerked there by a conjuring trick. At least this modern pirate kept discipline, and taught his crew to be smart in their movements.

"Quartermaster, clap this man in irons and put him in the paint-locker. Get his crew on deck, iron them, too, and put them on top of the coal down No. 2 hatch. If any of them are in the least awkward, shoot them. Stream their launch astern, for the present. That's all. Carry on!"

"Aye, aye, sir," said the quartermaster. "Come along, Alfonso." And out walked Don Carlos Bustamente with his left ear gripped between a very horny thumb and fore-knuckle.

"And I wonder," said Captain Teach to himself, "what use I can put that joker to. He's on the make, of course, and he's probably about as straight as a corkscrew. But I've got to bank that money somehow, and it's on the cards he might help. Yes, banked, or invested, it's got to be; I'm not Great-Grandpapa Blackbeard. Burying one's cash in a sand dune with four nice, white skulls for leading marks is all my eye these days."

Now handcuffs and the expectation of imminent death sharpen imagination, even if they do not improve the temper, and when, after dinner, Captain Teach, in the fullest of sea-evening kit, had the prisoner once more brought before him and his elegant cigar, Don Carlos was ready with a whole fresh set of arguments and assurances. I do not exactly know what these were, but have my ideas, and from the cold outside view-point should still class them under the heading of "fishy."

But Teach was mellowed by prosperity and a little unexpected civility from Miss Arncliffe—who was, as a rule, bitterly rude to him—and perhaps he was even a trifle expanded by champagne. Anyway, he appeared to be impressed. Perhaps also he was ready for a gamble. It had been brought home to him already that the ordinary methods of investment are closed to pirates practising on the high seas.

So, under the southern moonlight, Don Carlos Bustamente's launch was freighted to the value of eighty thousand pounds in cash, and plate, and American bearer-bonds, and with three of the Littondale's people as crew, started up her erratic engines, and coughed off into the night. Don Carlos was plainly informed that his command was only nominal. His own Canary crew still remained in irons on the coal under No. 2 hatch, and would answer most strictly as hostages for Don Carlos's behavior. To which one may add at this after date, "And a lot Don Carlos cared."

However, that is neither here nor there, and, frankly, I never heard that Teach hanged the men as he threatened he would if Carlos Bustamente let him down, and for anything I know they may be wrestling with the drifting sand on Lanzerote to-day,

or back at their own place in that big southeastern barranca on Grand Canary. I am only sorry our pirate did not execute the fellow who looked after the launch's engines. I have seen that one cruel to mules.

The Littondale pulled out from the back of Graciosa bright and early the next morning, as Captain Teach was taking no more chances on Mr. Bustamente's honesty. He picked out Miss Arncliffe from her hiding-place among the old baccalhao fishers' huts —which his faithful steward, Jones, had reported on—before he sailed, and gave that infuriated lady the full run of the ship. She volunteered to go into the dark cabin again if he wished it, so as to get away from his sight. But he blandly replied that her looks did not annoy him particularly, borrowed matches from her to light his pipe, and left her with a nod to return to his sand-bagged upper bridge.

The Littondale steamed off then on a four-weeks' cruise, and made three captures of disappointing value. One fought and was sunk. The other two surrendered and were handled in a manner which will be described later. At the end of that four weeks, the Littondale turned Canarywards again and was brought-to one midnight off the Bahia de Gando. Teach and an armed boat's crew went ashore.

They stumbled first of all upon five men strung hand in hand across the sands, and called upon them to surrender. This the men did readily enough, but on inspection proved to be incomplete men. Some lacked fingers, some arms. One poor wretch had no face. In plain truth they were lepers, taking the evening air. The pirates shuddered and tramped on. The lepers followed after them, making obscene noises, but were lured off by a handful of money thrown broadcast. The invaders still felt their skins tickling with apprehension as they got away. Moreover, *more piratico*, they felt the omen to be an unfavorable one.

Dawn was threatening with its chill when they reached the cochineal grower's place. Their road lay between gray-green walls of prickly pear growing on terraces laboriously cut into the naked lava, and at intervals they blundered into channels which carried the precious water. The house, when they came to it, was a pretentious mansion of white and pink adobe, colonnaded profusely, and hung with unkempt purple bourgainvillea. A clump of bananas, with their broad leaves torn to ribbons by the trade, sprawled over the central patio.

These things did not interest Captain Teach. What caught his eye was the first streak of dawn glittering on the bayonet of a drowsy sentinel.

He waved his men together and gave curt, whispered orders, and in ten minutes' time a captain and subaltern of the Spanish army, together with some fifty non-commissioned officers and men, had surrendered to a mere coat's crew of pirates. It was, as Captain Teach felt, quite like his Great-grandfather Blackbeard's days on the Spanish main, what time he and friends stormed Carthagena, and harried log-towns in the Carolinas.

A dozen of the Spaniards were dirked or shot before they would listen to sweet reason, and Don Carlos Bustamente y Tirajana sprawled on the ground with a shot-smashed knee.

As a first effort, Captain Teach went through the house on an ordinary search, and found nothing. He went through it again, with assistants and axes, smashing bureaus of old Spanish walnut, and eviscerating cupboards of Honduras mahogany, and still drew blank. He went through it a third time with a pressed force of Canary peones, practically ripping it, adobe brick from adobe brick, and behind a tarnished Venetian mirror let into a wall, came across Don Carlo's safe-deposit and letter-book.

There were no British war-loan bonds, or trace of any attempt to buy any. But there were receipts for moneys deposited under the name of Don Carlos Bustamente in a dozen banks. And also sixty thousand pounds out of the eighty thousand pounds originally advanced were still in the strong-room. Don Carlos, with the habits of a lifetime behind him, was slow in realizing. Captain Teach packed the available salvage and held a bed of justice.

Don Carlos was dragged roughly into a ruined drawing-room, and dumped into the

wreck of a chair. His knee dribbled. His sallow face was livid.

"Well," said Teach truculently, "thought you would get to windward of me, did you, you blasted dago?"

"I had hoped, *señor,* you would have been caught and hanged long before this. A pirate in these modern days should have short shift. You can picture my disappointment."

"You are a cool customer. But I do not know that makes you any the more appetizing. Look here now, I give you one chance, just one, to save your neck. There is a leak in my organization somewhere. That yarn you pitched about the news of my engagement with the big Hun boat and the Genovese getting to you by cable from Lanzerote is all a lie. I've found that out. Mind, I do not blame you for pitching the yarn you did. That's all in the game. But if you give away your true source of information, I'll let you stay here and go to the devil your own way. I reckon you've got enough local pull to explain away why you got soldiers up here, and how you let me ambush them. But if you don't make me wise to where my leakage is, you swing within three minutes."

"I admit that what I told you about my source of news was a tarradiddle. But, *señor,* I pray you do not press me more. My honor as a Spaniard and a gentleman is involved. I cannot tell you the true tale."

"P-ff! Your honor! You own yourself to be a swindler, and yet you talk to me about your honor."

"Oh, I admit I attempted to swindle—a pirate. But that does not trouble my honor. Telling you what you ask would smirch it."

"I have no time to chatter with you," said Teach in his deadly quiet voice. "Tell, or swing."

"*Señor el capitan,*" said the Spaniard with a suave bow, "I'll see you in hell first."

"Right," said Teach. "Here, you, take him out and string him up to that walnut-tree at the far side of the patio."

The life of Carlos Bustamente was full of errors, and had little of the admirable, but I have always had a kindness for the man when I remember his method of leaving it. If he had given up Mary Arncliffe's name, I firmly believe Teach would have let him go. But he was a Spaniard and a gentleman, and he went to his death for the sake of an Englishwoman he did not know, and had never even put eyes upon.

I cannot see myself doing as much. Could you, who read this have managed it?

Anyway, will you join with me in taking off your hat to Stoneyhurst and Spain?

Captain Edward Teach strode back between the prickly pear hedges toward his boat, puzzling how to get those moneys to the sailors' mothers' guild before anything unpleasant happened to himself.

"AND HOPE, WHICH IS ETERNAL"

BY MAUD HOWARD PETERSON

A WOMAN robed in black in a darkened chamber lay.
"My heart is crushed," she wildly cried. "There is no light."
'Twas then, like angels' touch, a golden ray of might
Shot through the room, fell on her somber dress of night,
And turned the black to glorious shades seen only in the day.

Such, then, is man. With petty human strength he strives
To fight 'gainst Fate and wrest bliss from her hold.
Poor children all! Then heed thou, life's deep'st secret told:
Look up to Hope's glad sun, though other joys lie cold.
Thus light shall come from out the darkness of our lives.

House of the Hundred Lights

by J. U. Giesy and Junius B. Smith

Authors of "The Ivory Pipe," "Stars of Evil," "The Black Butterfly," etc.

(A SEMI DUAL STORY)

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

ANDREW CAHILL, district attorney, gave a supper-party on the eve of his fifty-ninth birthday at the Kenton Grill. Besides his daughter, Ruth, and his ward, Billy Byrne, the party included Mr. and Mrs. Van Besant, Vivian Martin, and her fiancé, Courtney Lang. The evening passed off pleasantly enough, except for the judge's criticism of his ward's acquaintance with a Miss Millicent Mann, one of the Kenton dancers.

The next morning his valet found the judge dead in his bed. A post-mortem disclosed that Andrew Cahill died from the effects of phosgene gas. Then Ruth, with the concurrence of Inspector Johnson, called in Glace and Bryce, the well-known detectives.

Ruth insisted Miss Mann was a party to the crime and that the gas had been concealed in a toy balloon, which exploded in his hand.

Johnson and the two detectives, on their way to interview the dancer, stopped to question Miss Martin. From her they learned that Billy, whose considerable fortune was held in trust for him until his thirtieth year, by the judge, had been in the gas and flame service during the war. Previous to his enlistment he had been unofficially engaged to Ruth, but since his return the judge had disallowed his suit, and in particular resented his acquaintance with Miss Mann.

Miss Mann, on her part, insisted she had given the judge a green balloon, not a red one, and that the balloon had been given to her for the purpose by one of the substitute waiters at the Kenton. In spite of her insistence that she was under treatment for a nervous condition, Johnson had her arrested for detention.

George, the judge's secretary, admitted his master had quarreled with his ward after their return from the supper-party. Johnson and the detectives then confronted Billy and Ruth. The inspector decided on his arrest, and Billy gave himself up, while Ruth failed to commit herself.

George, on going to Billy's room to pack a bag for him in his emergency, returned with a gas-mask. Ruth's attitude then convinced the detectives she was firm in her faith in Billy's innocence.

Then Glace and Bryce decided to consult their great friend, Semi Dual, the astrologer, who gleaned from the stars certain things unknown to common men. He heard all the data in the case, and was of the opinion that some drugs produced optical illusions. He wanted to be informed of the nature of the treatments the dancer had taken, and asked for her age. The detectives then knew Semi Dual *was on* the case.

CHAPTER IX.

OVER ON GRANT STREET.

"YOU think that there may be some connection between her condition and the treatment for it, and her misquoting color?" I said, noting her face.

"It is a point to be determined," he returned.

"And I reckon that's our lay for tomorrow mornin'," Jim added. "I don't know much about these jaw-breakin' words, but I reckon psycho-neurasthenia has somethin' to do with th' nerves an' brain."

"Exactly," said Semi Dual.

Bryce chuckled. "Whisky will do it to some folks. I knew of a fellow once bet he could tell whether it was a Manhattan or a Martini he was drinking by th' color of th' cherry an' olive, after twenty cocktails—an' he lost th' bet. Along about th' sixteenth he got twisted an' blamed near

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for May 22.

broke a tooth, tryin' to bite an olive. I don't say this Mann skirt had been drinkin' but—it shows it can be done."

Dual inclined his head. "The visual influence of drugs is an established fact. Hashish for instance causes an apparent increase in distance, making an interminable space out of the narrow confines of a room. The dipsomaniac sees double, also non-existent things. Peyote, used by the Western Indians, causes optical distortion. But"—he drew other sheets of paper toward him—"the nature of the treatment in this case is for you, my friends, to learn."

His words and act were tantamount to a dismissal. It was as though he said for us to be about our business while he began investigating those influences and causes by reason of which Andrew Cahill had died.

I rose. We said good-night and left the tower, passing back down the path between the shrubs and flowers where a little fountain tinkled in the darkness, filled, as we gained the stair-head, by the mellow notes of the chimes.

"Can you beat it?" Bryce spoke in comment as we waited for a cage. "He'd run out the first part of it, and was just waitin' for our comin'. When he said Cahill was murdered right there at first, he nearly knocked me off my pins. Of course, it was simple enough after he'd explained it. But honest, he has th' darnedest way of doin' things you wouldn't expect to see done. An' now he'll set down a lot of curlimecues an' signs in a lot of circles an' take a slant at th' things—an' from that, without ever seein' th' scene of th' crime or anything most folks would consider doin', he'll get a notion of how and why Cahill was bumped off."

I nodded. Roughly his words were a fair description of how Dual worked to gain the insight and understanding of a matter that enabled him to establish first in his own mind, those facts he sought later to support by material proof.

And as we left the cage on the street level, Jim chuckled. "Maybe you noticed how Ruth Cahill picked out th' point of th' treatments th' Mann girl's been takin'. That girl's got a mighty shrewd mind."

"Naturally, since it coincides with yours," I told him, grinning.

And at that he chuckled again. "Naturally." He paused to light a cigar on the corner where I usually caught my car. The match flared, lighting his heavy face. with its stubby brown mustache and strong, not unkindly mouth. "Well—see you at th' station in th' mornin' m' son."

"About nine-thirty," I said, and watched him swing away through the evening sidewalk traffic. He was a man to depend on, was Jim Bryce, and despite the vagaries of thought and speech in which he sometimes indulged, he was pretty apt in the end to check out not far wrong.

Hence I considered the point of the variance in colors between the stories of Ruth Cahill and Byrne and the cabaret dancer, as I caught my car and went home and explained to Connie, my wife, what had kept me down town so long.

She was all interest, as a woman is apt to be, about such an occurrence, and her first comment showed the workings of a feminine mind:

"She loves him, Gordon, and she's jealous. Poor Ruth! I suppose it shocked her dreadfully when she learned he was on a friendly footing with Miss Mann. But, of course, Mr. Byrne didn't do it."

I pinched her ear. "If he did, it would spoil the romance, wouldn't it, girl?" I said, grinning. "Well, it wouldn't be the first time circumstantial evidence has been wrong."

"Pooh!" Connie retorted. "I can't see that there is really any evidence against him. Of course, Johnson's wrong. Did he try to look up that waiter—the one with drab hair and green eyes?"

"He asked Sloan about the fellow before we left the Kenton," I replied. "There isn't a man on the force matches up to the description. That's another thing makes Miss Mann's story seem all wrong."

"Well," Connie knit her brows. "Maybe the girl wasn't right about him either, if she couldn't tell the color of the balloon."

"Holy smoke!" I exclaimed, and Connie giggled. As a matter of fact, the point seemed worth considering, in view of the other conflict in the stories, and I took it

up with Johnson the next morning when Jim and I kept our appointment with him in the detectives' room at the station. I told him frankly of our call on Dual the night before and he nodded.

"I was hopin' you two would do it," he confessed, without the least hint of evasion. "There's somethin' mighty queer about this whole proposition. It looks to me as though th' girl was stallin', but if he wants that information, I reckon he'd better go get it. Come along inside."

That was rather laying the cards on the table for Johnson, too. He was the typical hard-headed type of city detective, a man who had hammered his way up from the ranks by sheer dogged tenacity of purpose, and he had always been more or less inclined to work opposite rather than with Dual in the past—more, as I know, because he could not accept Semi's methods, than because of anything else. Indeed, I know he had a great respect for Dual as a man. But his means of gaining his knowledge baffled the mystified Johnson. He couldn't understand it, and as with so many people, what he couldn't understand always set him a bit on edge. So that was a very decided surrender on his part he had voiced in his confession that he had hoped, through bringing us in, to enlist Dual's efforts as well in the Cahill case.

Wherefore, I made no comment as we rose and followed him back to the jail, and along ringing corridors of metal to Milly Mann's cell.

And if Johnson had rather reversed himself this morning, it seemed as though some change had occurred as well in the girl, who sat there behind the grating of steel bars.

"Hello," she greeted us, in a fashion almost eager. "If you hadn't showed up pretty soon, I was goin' to send out for you or Sloan, myself."

"Yes?" said Johnson, in monosyllabic interrogation.

"Yes. I been doing a lot of thinkin' since I was brought here, an' I guess in th' excitement last night, I didn't get things about that balloon just right."

Johnson nodded. "Well, Milly, that ain't any information to us."

The girl shook her head quickly at his grimly facetious sally. "You don't get my meanin'. Last night you said them folks said th' thing was red, didn't they? An' I said it was green. Well, there was somebody else thought it was green besides myself."

"What? Who was he?" Johnson demanded.

"Th' waiter—th' feller who gave it to me. Last night I told you he said to 'Give him this one,' but what he really said was 'Give him this *green* one.' I just remembered it this mornin'."

"Yep." All at once Johnson sneered openly with an almost sardonic expression on his usually stolid features: "You remembered it too late, because I called that bet last night."

"Called it?" Milly Mann's blue eyes widened, darkened; that new confidence she had worn on our arrival vanished, and left her staring back at the inspector, breathing a little quicker, seeming all at once shaken, startled, perhaps a little bit afraid.

And Johnson jerked his head in affirmation. "Yep, I went down and combed th' Kenton's force of waiters last evenin'. There ain't one answerin' your description in th' place, and never was."

"But—my Gawd, I *saw* him. He spoke to me—gave me that balloon. He was standin' right there at th' foot of th' stairs." The woman's whole body seemed to jerk and quiver with the frenzy of avowal she threw into her gasping words.

"Hold on a bit, Johnson," I cut in, thinking that this was the psychological moment to strike for information, if ever there was one. "You're sure he had green eyes, and—well, mouse-colored hair?"

"Yes." She turned her staring eyes toward me. "I stood close enough to touch him, and he did."

"All right," I said. "Now, let's forget him for the present. Last night you told us you'd been taking treatment for your nerves. Would you mind telling us just what that treatment was?"

"Why, no-o," she answered, slowly. "It's something new — something discovered during th' war. You know, they

found out they could cure a lot of them shell-shock cases with some sort of light—an' now they've found they can cure other sorts of nervous trouble th' same way. There's a place where they give people treatments over on Grant Street, not far from Park Drive. They been there quite a while an' they've got a lot of trade."

CHAPTER X.

PURELY CIRCUMSTANTIAL.

"AND just how is the treatment given?" I questioned.

"Why—they examine you, and find out what's the matter with you, of course, and then they put you into a room and give you a bath in the sort of light you need. I don't just understand it, but it seems like their idea is that light and sound and all that sort of thing are what they call vibration, an' that nerve force is th' same thing, an' by usin' th' right sort of light they can sort of tune up th' nerves by givin' them a different rate of vibration. It's sort of like gettin' a note off a guitar when you hit a certain key on a piano. Maybe you've heard of that, though I guess I ain't very plain."

As a matter of fact though, she was a lot plainer than she suspected. "I understand fully," I told her. "And now, after taking those treatments, have you noticed anything funny about your eyes?"

"Funny," she said. "Why, sometimes, of course, after one of th' baths, they're sort of bleary."

"Did you take the treatment day before yesterday, Miss Mann?" I asked.

"Yes. But—say—you don't mean that made me think that balloon was green, do you? If it did, how about that waiter?"

"Yes, how about that waiter?" Johnson demanded, roughly.

But I refused to give way to his interruption. "Miss Mann," I continued my questions, "what is your exact age?"

"I'm twenty—or will be in September—th' ninth," she told me. "I—say, I do remember things looked sort of funny night before last, but I never thought about it until this minute."

Johnson snorted. "It's darned easy to think of things with a little help, 'specially if you've got yourself into a hole. If you're done here, Glace, let's be goin'. Maybe by to-morrow she'll have thought up somethin' else."

Milly Mann gave him a glance of positive loathing. "I ain't stallin', no matter what *you* think about it," she said, in a hard little voice.

But Johnson made no answer beyond a shrug until we were outside the tier of cells. "Pretty slick," he growled then, scowling. "They're a wise bunch, these cabaret broilers. I suppose you noticed she fell in with everything you said. That skirt's huntin' for a hole in th' fence she's built around herself."

"Just the same, I'm goin' over an' see that place she told us about," Bryce declared, as was natural enough, considering the fact that he had first suggested some connection between the apparent color distortion and the treatment of Miss Mann's physical condition. "Know anything about it, Johnson?

The inspector shook his head. "No. Some sort of a fake, I guess. Most of them places is. If I want a bath, I take it in water. But we'll look it up, of course."

"You bet we'll look into it," said Jim, and I grinned.

"How is Byrne, this morning?" I asked. "Dig anything out of him last evening?"

"Nope." Johnson shook his head. He seemed more or less disgusted with things this morning. "He froze up after we left Cahill's. Want to take a try at it yourself?"

"Well," I accepted his growling suggestion, "seeing that we're still inside, and to save turnkeys trouble, it wouldn't do any harm."

"I'll tell you," said the inspector. "He knows Miss Cahill called you in. You go chin with him while Jim and I look up this new-fangled joint where they give you a dose of skyrockets because you're nervous. If he's sweet on the judge's daughter, as I reckon he is, he may be more apt to spill somethin' if he sees you alone. Come along, and I'll pass you in."

I considered his proposal briefly, and it

didn't seem a bad one. Byrne might very well speak more freely to one man than to three together, especially after a night spent in considering his present position.

"All right," I agreed, and Johnson swung about to lead the way toward the men's part of the jail, at once.

And if Miss Mann had been eager to see us, Byrne, once I was inside his cell, appeared both acutely suspicious and morose.

"Hello, Glace, what's the notion? Big Smoke Johnson send you?" he accosted my entrance, with an almost sneering grimace.

"As a matter of fact," I told him, "I thought it best to see you, and have a little talk."

"And see if I'd let slip something you could twist into suppositious evidence that I killed my father's friend and mine," he said, almost hoarsely. "Damn it, that's the hardest thing, except one, in this whole works to swallow—that anybody could suppose I'd lift a hand against that splendid man, who took me in as a kid, and treated me like a son. And even if he hadn't, he was Ruth's father. See here, Glace, do you folks think I'm a beast, or a man?"

"The whole trouble, Mr. Byrne," I pointed out, "is that the nature of your father's will gave you a possible motive, and—you knew the girl who gave him the balloon."

"Milly?" He scowled. "But good Lord, can't they see how preposterous it would be for me to do such a thing as that?"

"Not," I said, "if his death had been accepted as due to natural causes. In that case, the whole affair would have been a very clever scheme."

He nodded. "Well, yes, it would have been taken for heart failure, I guess. if it hadn't been for Ruth. By the way, Glace, how is she, this morning? Last night—" And all at once he shut up like a clam.

I confess I respected him for that quick determination, not to discuss Ruth Cahill with another man. But I knew what he meant, as well as he did, and I let it shape my answer. "Last night Miss Ruth was scarcely herself. Have you thought that it rather shocked her to find you on intimate terms with Miss Mann?"

"Eh?" He narrowed his eyes. "But—there wasn't anything to my association with Milly."

"Have you told that to Miss Cahill—explained?" I inquired.

"Of course not—not right after her father's death," he began, jumped up and commenced to pace the cell. Presently he paused before me. "Confound you, Glace—you make me feel better. I've—I've put in a rather bad night, muddling over—well, certain things. As for Milly—the girl's got a crippled father to support. That ain't a lie—I've seen him. And she was breaking down. She told me about it, and I—well, maybe I'm an ass, but I gave her money to pay for the treatments she's been taking—over here on Grant Street—some new-fangled nerve cure. They treat you with light. It's legitimate enough, I guess. You know they treated a lot of shell-shock cases by putting them in rooms done in certain colors, during the war."

So that was it? It was rather amazing in one way and not at all in another. I became conscious that Byrne was regarding me directly, and then he went on. "That brings us up to another point, too, I guess. Judge Cahill thought I was spending too much money and took me to task—and well—after starting in on the thing, I didn't feel like backing out. I was running about a bit, too, but I wasn't doing anything of which I was ashamed."

"And Miss Mann?" I said deliberately as he paused.

His face darkened, flushed. "That's a filthy question, Glace, no matter who asks it," he flared back hotly. "I think you already know I was tacitly engaged to Miss Cahill, and even if Milly does dance in a café, and goes home to a two-by-four room and a man who can't walk across it without assistance, I've no reason to think she isn't straight."

I think I flushed a bit myself. "I beg your pardon, Byrne," I hastened to explain. "I asked that to get the nature of your answer more than anything else. But see here; if Miss Mann is caring for an invalid father. how is it that she has a room at the hotel?"

"Oh, that," he said. "You people are

technical, aren't you, Mr. Glace? As a matter of fact, however, it is one of the chambermaid's rooms. She's been letting Milly rest there between the tea crowd and the evening show, since she's been unwell."

"Just so," I accepted. As an explanation, it fitted in well enough with the rest of his story. "And now another question: we have it on fairly good authority, that during the party Friday evening, your manner was more or less morose."

He nodded. "As a matter of fact, the judge brought things to a showdown Friday afternoon. He told me that unless I got into some definite line of employment at once, and settled down, he would interfere between me and Ruth. That was late in the afternoon, and I wasn't feeling in the best of spirits."

I accepted the explanation and continued my interrogation: "Did you have a gas mask in your possession? One was found in your rooms after you left the house last evening."

"Gas mask?" he repeated. "Of course I had one. Brought it home with me when I came, as a souvenir, but—Glace—good God!"

"Exactly," I said, seeing very plainly that he saw the application.

He sat down on the bunk and dropped his face in his hands. "Did Ruth know they found it?" he asked at last.

I nodded.

"It's purely circumstantial, of course," he went on after a moment, "but—I say—if you've any more questions to ask, would you mind postponing them for the present?"

I turned and rapped on the bars for the warder. Plainly the man wanted to be alone, and I didn't blame him. I left the jail, walked over to the Kenton and dug up Sloan.

And I asked him about Milly Mann's father.

He wasn't very cordial, but he answered me just the same. "Sure she's got a father, and before she left here last night I told her I'd see he was taken care of, and—he is."

I checked that point off to the credit of Byrne's story, thanked Sloan for the information, hunted up a telephone, and called our office. Bryce had not returned from his trip to Grant Street with Johnson, and there was no important word from any one else.

I left the booth, went out to the street, and stood there trying to determine my next step. It was plain enough, too, and it shows my mental attitude on the whole affair at the time that I hadn't thought of it before.

Anyway, I went back to the café and asked Sloan for Milly Mann's home address. He gave it without hesitation, and it wasn't far. Ten minutes later I was mounting a theatrical boarding-house stairs.

CHAPTER XI.

RUTH'S RECOVERY.

THE interview didn't take long, and left me with rather blended feelings. I rapped, and a woman answered. She led me into a room where a man of possibly fifty-five sat in a roomy rocker with a blanket thrown over his knees.

He confessed to being Albert Mann, and talked freely to me despite the information that I was a detective. His attitude was one of regret that Milly was under arrest, but not expressive of as much anxiety as one might have supposed. He was sorry she had got into trouble, but she would come out all right in the end, he felt sure, because she never did anything really wrong. She was a good girl—a good daughter.

Look how she had taken care of him, a wreck of a man who didn't have sense enough to die and give the girl a chance. It hadn't been so bad when her mother was alive. Her mother had been a circus rider, and he—had been an acrobat. He had been injured in a fall, and never of any real account since. Milly was like her mother—the picture of her, and unfortunately like her a creature of nerves. He knew she had been taking treatments lately, and for a while they seemed to do her some good. He admitted knowing Byrne also, and thought him a "nice young man."

Mr. Sloan had engaged the woman who had let me in to take care of him until Milly was released. Every one was being surprisingly kind.

And what can one say to an attitude like that in a man whose daughter has been arrested on suspicion of being the agent of another man's death? I left the cheap little room feeling some way as though something ought to be done about it, and pretty thoroughly convinced that Byrne had told the truth.

And I think possibly it was that which caused me to hail a taxi and order the driver to the Cahill house. All at once it seemed to me Ruth Cahill ought to know the truth of the association between Byrne and Milly Mann—that what had been done was just one of those queer upflashings of altruistic purpose one is apt to meet at times in the path of youth—that it was indeed no more than a youthful impulse which had sent him into it and nothing worse.

And I told her, too, after I was in her presence. And she heard me, sitting slight and silent on her chair until I was through.

Then she quite frankly drew a kerchief and wiped her eyes and looked at me through glistening lashes while her lips quivered into a smile.

"However can I thank you, Mr. Glace," she said slowly, and then more quickly as emotion swept her onward. "I—I love Billy, as I'm sure you've guessed. And last night—I was so terribly shocked—so dreadfully upset, that I—I didn't know what to believe. But now—you've taken one dreadful weight from my shoulders, and—I think you've made me feel—ashamed. I—I guess I'm not much like my namesake, am I? 'Whither thou goest I will go also—and thy people shall be my people'—you know the quotation, Mr. Glace?"

"Imperfectly," I replied, consciously glad I had come to see her, and marveling a bit at the difference between the male and the female of my species. Byrne had felt all the man's diffidence about discussing his attitude toward Miss Cahill, but the girl herself, with the woman's more emotional, possibly more sanely natural impulse, confessed her love in a breath and went on in self-condemnation.

"I've known him practically always, and I think we've always loved one another really. And last night—you heard me tell him he must prove his innocence when I ought to have known it. I—don't believe I really meant that either, and—I'd—I'd like to tell him. Mr. Glace—would they let me see him if I went down to the jail?"

"I think there is little doubt about it, Miss Cahill," I told her. "And I'm sure Billy would be glad to see you. I think he actually took your attitude more to heart than he did his arrest."

"Really?" she said quickly. "I—won't pretend I'm not glad. Any woman would be. I wasn't exactly myself yesterday, Mr. Glace. Learning that Billy knew the girl who gave daddy that dreadful balloon nearly drove me out of my mind."

"And yet you seemed to handle things with a remarkable insight," I suggested. "But for you the real truth of the matter would never have been known."

She appeared to consider a moment, and then she nodded. "I—wasn't really thinking, Mr. Glace, at all. I seemed to know things, but I didn't understand. It—it was just as though I knew without knowing—about Daddy Drew—first that he had been murdered, and then—after we knew how—that it had been in that balloon. Perhaps one might call it intuition."

"Or possibly you followed a prompting of the subconscious mind," I threw in the suggestion and she started. Her eyes turned quickly toward me.

"You believe in such things?"

"Absolutely."

She drew a long breath. "Then why did I let them take Billy away—the way I did?"

"You were exhausted—worn out by a day of unusual stress. A continual hammering of horror on the nervous system, either mental or sensory, will destroy the ability of reaction after a time, numb both nerve and brain."

"Numb," she said, nodding. "Yes, I think that is it. Tell me what else have you learned?"

I told her, and at the end she sat silent for some time without making any comment, then: "And yet I can't escape the conviction of the girl's part in what happened," she said slowly.

"The point to be determined is whether her part was conscious or unconscious, Miss Cahill," I returned.

"And how is that to be determined?" she asked with amazing directness.

"It can't be until we have gained a great deal more information," I confessed, since it was useless with the sort of woman before me to say anything else.

She confirmed my judgment instantly, too. "And how is it to be gained? Aren't you rather up against a stone wall, Mr. Glace?"

"Yes and no," I admitted. "At present things aren't clear, but one would scarcely expect them to be, considering the rather unusual elements surrounding the matter from the first."

"You mean it will take time—that I mustn't be impatient? But tell me: in your own opinion is the Mann girl consciously guilty or not?"

"Personally I am inclined to the belief that she was an unsuspecting agent, Miss Cahill," I replied.

"Then"—she took a deeper breath and her expression became a thing of intense speculation—"you think we are faced by some very deep laid plot? I've been wondering, too. It isn't fair, Mr. Glace, that because of any personal feeling I should keep it from you that from time to time threats were made against my father because of the part he took in opposing those organizations which have as their object the overthrow of what we recognize now as constituted government. Do you suppose this could have been the—the carrying out of such a threat?"

"I don't know, Miss Cahill," I confessed. "It is one of the things we must endeavor to find out."

"You know," she said, "he was a member of the State Council of Defense, and in that capacity he was openly severe on conscientious objectors, or slackers of any kind, and he was back of the anti-sabotage law just passed by the last Legislature. I didn't think of that yesterday, but since then it has come into my mind."

"It's worth considering at least," I agreed as I rose. Indeed, it was so worth considering that I wanted to get back in touch with Bryce and Johnson and thresh it out with them after I learned what they had found in the Grant Street institution. "But—wouldn't you rather consider it something like that than any personal matter, Miss Cahill—that he died like a soldier—because he had honestly performed his duty to his fellow men and his nation."

She looked up and then lifted herself to her feet. Her eyes were shining. She nodded. "Yes, Mr. Glace—oh, yes, I'm sure I would. Thank you for saying that, and for coming to show me how foolish I've been about—another man who served his country." She gave me her hand.

And I took it firmly as man to man, knowing that in her last words she referred to Byrne.

I got myself out of the room, meeting Stephen George in the entrance hall, and nodding in recognition.

"One moment, Mr. Glace, if you please," he requested. "I've been waiting to intercept you. About that gas mask last night—I've an idea, really, that Mr. Byrne brought it home with him from service—more as a souvenir, you know, than anything else."

I nodded again as I answered. "I'm inclined to the same opinion, Mr. George." If one were to judge by appearances, Byrne and his guardian's secretary were friends.

"You've learned something of importance?" he queried.

"Not yet," I said, a trifle more shortly, I fear.

"I see. It takes time, of course," he remarked, and opened the door to let me out of the house.

And after that I got back to our office suite on the seventh floor of the Urania as quickly as I could. I wanted to get hold of Johnson and Bryce.

As it happened, they had telephoned that they were coming, and left word for me to meet them in Dual's quarters, with Miss Nellie Newell, our confidential clerk, who knew of our association with Semi.

As a result of their message, I lost no time in getting to the roof, and thereby beat them to the appointment as a matter of fact. Whereby I gained time for giving Dual a rapid résumé of my morning's work.

He heard me out without comment, in his usual inscrutable way, and then told me to go out into the garden, while he began a rapid astrological computation based on the birth date of Miss Mann.

I obeyed him to the letter, strolling out into the garden flooded with the golden light of a perfect April day. But I brought with me into its peaceful setting, an atmosphere little short of what I may best describe as tense. Knowing him as I did, Dual's manner had been that of a man wholly concentrated on a problem, of one whose brain was working with the driving power of a well-tuned but speeding engine —of a something—I hardly knew what to call it—straining forward toward the accomplishment of a definite task. And there was that about his gray eyes this morning —the barest heaviness of the lids—that made me doubt if since I had seen him the evening before they had known the relief of sleep.

I strolled out. It was high noon. Flowers were blooming in the garden. They made flashes of color among the foliage, white and pink and red. I found myself studying them, half knowing. After all, the world was a mass of color like this garden of Dual's, I thought, and—the same force was back of all the colors—only as it was differently refracted it was red or green—or—I paused and smiled. It was red or green. I was getting Semi's flowers mixed up with the colors of the mystery surrounding Cahill's death.

And why not? Red and green were the same except in refraction—except in rate of vibration. Each was a part of the same power. Take all the colors of the spectrum and blend them and one got white. I knew that from my school days, of course. And so these colors about me, the green of leaves, the red and white and pink of the flowers, the sunlight pouring over them in a flood of gold, were all the same—all differently refracted elements of the same universal force. And so was sound. According to its refraction it appeared as music, or shrieking discord or human speech. And so was heat and cold, and so, too, were even the human emotions, joy and sorrow, laughter or sobs—and that intangible something, life itself.

Oh, yes, I had quite a little reverie there in the garden while I waited for Johnson and Bryce, and Semi-Dual worked on another of those weird charts of his which dealt with still another refraction of the universal element—interplanetary force—that thing the ancients recognized without understanding, when they gazed at the heavens above them and marked the positions of the stars.

CHAPTER XII.

CALCULATIONS.

SOMETIMES even a man in the midst of this present world of ours may pause to question. I lighted a cigarette and sat down on a bench beside a little fountain with gold fish in its basin. Why was it—how was it—what was it all for? I asked myself. Dual likened the circle of the zodiac—the progress of seasons—the *all* of life—to the turning of a wheel. And the wheel went round—and these gold fish flashing in the water before my eyes, they, too, were a part of the infinite plan. And did the stars have anything to do with their well-nigh unconscious lives? And then —I recalled the words of a great Teacher—that not even a sparrow fell to the ground unnoted.

It—in a way it was like Dual's doctrine that every word and thought we spoke or entertained was an element for which we sometimes—God knows when best—accounted—an element that went toward the shaping of our lives. And suddenly I remembered a crippled man who, while his daughter lay in the cell of a common jail, had faith in her vindication and said that "every one was very kind." The thing hit me like a jolt. I threw away my cigarette, got up and took a long, deep breath. What was I worrying about in the muddle of Cahill's death? I was like those of whom

that same teacher, the Nazarene, had cried: "Oh, ye of little faith!" And almost as in answer, my eyes fell on a little sun-dial, with Arabic inscription circling its sun-flooded surface. Semi himself had told me the translation:

> "Eternal justice, eternal right,
> Lie in the hand of God,
> From Whom comes light."

Light, justice, right—they were meted out to each according to his deserts, with the turning of the wheel. And even as I stood there, the wheel was turning and the chimes came softly to my ear and I saw Bryce and Johnson coming up the path from the head of the stairs.

I hurried to meet them.

"Hello," said Jim, "so you beat us to it! Dig anything out of Byrne?"

"Nothing except the explanation of his association with Miss Mann, which I verified as far as I could by an interview with her crippled father," I returned. "Byrne was paying for her treatments. Did you get inside the place?"

"Oh, yes, we got inside of it!" Bryce nodded. "And if you ask me, a rum place it is. If a man's blue, they bathe him in red and yellow, an' if he's yellow—well, I forgot to ask about that, but—if a man's yellow, I reckon it's a hopeless case. But why the sun-bath m' son?"

I explained the reason for my presence in the garden and while I was about it, Henri appeared and told us to come in.

Semi was waiting as we entered. Seemingly the work at which I had left him was done. But whatever it had told him, whatever he had learned concerning Milly Mann's character and nature, her connection with the events of two nights before, he gave no sign. Instead, he asked Jim for a description of the institution he and Johnson had gone to visit, and Bryce plunged in.

According to him it was a more or less elaborate proposition. Seemingly they had met no trouble in their investigation. They had been taken in and shown through the institution and its object fully explained.

"They got a big place, twenty or twenty-five rooms," said Jim. "It's a regular rainbow after you get started. They got red rooms and blue rooms and indigo and violet, and yellow an' orange and green. Then they got some that hit in between—sort of a mixed effect, I guess—and they're all fixed up to the minute. They call it the 'Neuropathic Sanatorium' on the sign they got over th' door, but they ought to call it the 'House of the Hundred Lights.' They got all sorts of machines for producing the colors they use in th' different rooms, an' in some cases they use music with 'em, an' they got a sort of demonstration auditorium where they give public séances once or twice a week.

"That's done to show people th' effect, as th' fellow who took us around explained. They got a funny sort of machine there hooked up to a piano and when you play on the piano it makes a ripple of colored lights run across a screen. An' they got another attachment so that a singer can do th' same thing. It all works by a lot of diaphragms which make an electrical connection when you hit th' right tone. He showed us the piano and, honest, it had a funny effect. After you'd watched it for a while you could almost begin to see pictures—trees an' grass an' mountains an' rivers and flowers an' that sort of thing. It seemed like the music an' those colors ran together an' sort of affected your brain. We asked 'em if th' Mann girl had been takin' treatments there, an' they said she had an' that they were sorry to hear she'd got herself in trouble. We asked what they'd used on her an' they said she was all strung up when she came there, an' that they'd been trying to tone her down. They'd been treating her with red and yellow."

"And," said Semi-Dual, "the complement of red is green." He said it calmly, unemotionally, didactically almost, too, but I stiffened. The complement of red was green. Milly Mann had been treated with red and yellow in the House of the Hundred Lights. Mentally I discarded the name Neuropathic Sanatorium and thought of the place by Jim's half-facetiously suggested title. And after that she had gone to the café and accepted a red balloon as a green one.

I glanced at Bryce and Johnson. The

latter was scowling. The former had paused at Semi's interjection and now sat with an oddly puzzled expression. "Green?" he repeated slowly after that startled pause and puffed out his stubby brown mustache as was his wont at times when somewhat confused or baffled.

"Green," said Semi-Dual. "In my estimation we have arrived at the explanation of the improper functioning of Miss Mann's eyes."

Johnson flung up his head. "You mean she thought that balloon was green really—that she wasn't lyin'—that her eyes was really put on the hummer by the sort of treatments she took?"

Dual inclined his head. "That, I believe, is the truth." He put out a hand and took up a sheet of paper, a thing marked with a circle cut into segments and numerous symbols and signs. "Furthermore, I have Miss Mann's astrological chart, erected while I waited your arrival. From its indications, I am led to the belief that while an agent beyond any doubt, in bringing it about, she was not in any way knowingly connected with Judge Cahill's death. So far as I have been able to complete them, my calculations bear her story out. The same I may add applies to William Byrne."

"What?" Johnson interrupted. All at once his face flushed darkly. One could hardly blame him since he had been the one who made both arrests. "D'ye mean there ain't nothin' on him?"

"Nothing," said Semi-Dual, "or my computations fail. Wherefore, I am about to ask you to release both man and woman and bring them here with you to-night."

"But—see here, Mr. Dual—" Johnson was plainly growing excited.

"Can you hold them long on suspicion only?" Semi's words cut into his protest, utterly unruffled.

"No—but—you've just said the girl had a hand in Cahill's murder, an' if she did, what difference doees it make if she knew what she was doin' or not? I can't flush her if she *was* an accomplice, can I?—unless"—Johnson paused and his eyelids narrowed—"you want her shadowed—want to find out what she does an' where she goes?"

"Miss Mann's knowing or unknowing connection with the events of the other evening makes a decided difference," said Semi-Dual, "since Judge Cahill's death is no more than an incident in the problem by which we are faced."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ACTIVE AGENT.

"INCIDENT? What do you mean by incident?" Inspector Johnson exclaimed, his voice coming gruffly into the silence that followed Dual's level tones.

And Dual answered before he could say more: "I mean briefly, inspector, that once more the forces of evil are unchained—that unless they are combated, those spirits, which for lack of a better name I shall call the Legionaries of Darkness, will work their will and other deaths will follow—that Judge Cahill, bitterly as his death is to be regretted, was but one in a series of victims at whom they aim."

And for a moment after he had finished his statement, silence again came down. My own mind leaped swiftly to Ruth Cahill's suggestion that her father's death was the carrying out of a threat made against him by these elements of social unrest he had combated. Bryce sat puffing out his stubby mustache in an evident excitement of speculation. Johnson put up a heavy hand and ran it about his collar as though to loosen some tension on his throat. "You mean—we're up against a gang, I reckon," he said at last. "But what *makes* you think so?"

Dual lifted a mass of symbol-marked papers from the desk before him, held them briefly and laid them down again before he responded:

"These. You are not in sympathy with my methods, inspector, as I know, but this is no time for personal feelings, personal beliefs, to be taken into account. My study of the situation by which we are confronted, of those sidereal influences represented in these, my calculations, leads me to believe that we are faced not by a single treacherous crime, but by a concerted effort to destroy yet other valuable lives. We are living now in a time of reconstruction, and re-

construction inevitably means mental and social unrest.

" Other men who have stood boldly out in the open in defense of established law and order have ere this gone down before the elements opposed to what they represented —have been fated because of their stand to make the supreme sacrifice. Since this matter was brought to my attention last night I have known neither sleep nor relaxation. I have given it my undivided application. My findings fit into your suggestion. We are faced by an attack not only against the lives of certain prominent men, but against the welfare of the body politic, the nation—yes."

The color ebbed out of Johnson's face as Dual voiced his unequivocal affirmation. And as Semi paused he spoke quickly in a totally different manner from that he had formerly used. " It ain't that I'm what you'd call opposed to your methods, Mr. Dual—I guess I just don't understand. But —I'm a member of them forces of law an' order you mention, myself, an' I ain't overlookin' any bet to put the jewelry on th' wrists of that sort of a gang. So I'm puttin' my cards on th' table. I had a hunch we was up against somethin' mighty peculiar an' I called Glace an' Jim into the thing, sort of hopin' they'd get it up to you in th' end. I reckon, from what you say, it's somethin' a little bit slicker than blowin' a man up with a bomb or shootin' him down in th' streets. That sort of thing has proved too risky an' they're takin' a lot more tricky way of gainin' their ends. Is that what you think?"

" Practically, yes," said Semi-Dual. " They are seeking to strike in a far more subtle fashion—to gain by stealth what they have failed to attain by violence, as it appears."

" An'—an' "—it seemed as though even yet Johnson almost balked the question— " them charts of yours or whatever you call 'em, show you th' Mann skirt didn't know what she was doing—that she was simply—used?"

" She was ' used,' yes." Dual inclined his head.

" An' there isn't anything on Byrne?"

" No, Mr. Johnson."

The inspector nodded. His expression was that of a man lost in a mental haze. He turned his eyes about the room, filled with the golden light of that April Sabbath afternoon, and brought them back to the white-and-purple-robed figure of the man at the desk, as though seeking desperately for some reply to that didactic declaration of the innocence of the man and woman he had summarily placed in arrest.

" But—what's the idea of springin' them two and bringin' them here?" he asked at last.

" In order," said Semi-Dual, " that I may use them myself." As he spoke he looked full into Johnson's eyes.

For a moment neither man moved nor spoke. Almost it seemed as though some intangible thing passed between them. And presently Johnson nodded. " All right, I'll do it. I reckon they'll think I'm crazy at th' station, but—I'll do it," he agreed, and took a long, deep breath.

Dual accepted the promise without comment. " And," said he, " I shall ask Gordon to insure the presence of Miss Cahill here, at, say, eight o'clock."

" You want her brought here?" I exclaimed. Actually his requirement gave me a distinct shock. It was such a reversal of his methods to call others in thus early, since usually until he was ready to close the solution of a problem, he was wont to work to a great extent alone. And, too, it tautened my nerves, flicked my interest to fever-heat, fired me—said better than any words that in his estimation it was a very desperate condition indeed by which we were confronted—waked vague, indefinite speculation in my mind as to how Milly Mann and Byrne and, possibly Ruth Cahill as well, were to be used in meeting that condition—as to what subtle plan, for meeting the situation, combating it, defeating its object, had been already framed in Dual's brain.

For he was subtle, was my most peculiar friend, with a subtlety that preserved the truth even while it gained his ends. There was about him something of the Oriental as well there might be at times—a something that hinted at the blending of Eastern and Western blood in his veins. Born of

a Persian father and a petty Russian princess for a mother, Semi himself was a blending of East and West. I have sometimes thought that was one reason he possessed such a wonderful insight into the workings of human minds. And now as I asked my question, I asked myself, too, what the gathering of all these principles in the human equation might portend.

But his reply gave me no least clue to his intent, for he merely answered "Yes" in that strange inscrutable way of his that always impressed me most.

And suddenly there swept upon me something of that feeling I had often experienced when I knew Dual first—an admiration for that calm, definite hint of knowledge that seemed at such times to radiate from his presence, that positive sureness that characterized his words and actions—that confidence unexpressed which seemed to say tacitly that even with vast issues impending, he was making the right move. Dual knew—his was the position of one forearmed with knowledge. Here, then, was a leader to follow without further question.

"Very well," I said, "I do not doubt she will come if I ask her. What shall I tell her?"

And now it was my eyes into which he looked. "Whatsoever you deem best, my friend."

That was what my ears recorded. And yet it was as though he told me to prepare her in a measure for what, once she had come here, she would find.

"But if neither of those two are guilty, where does it leave us?" Johnson suddenly questioned. "We haven't a leg to stand on. Where do we begin?"

"We begin here," said Semi-Dual. "As for the guilty, thus far outside my own calculations, the murderer has not appeared in the progress of this affair."

"Just how do you mean, outside your calculations?" the inspector asked.

"Precisely what I say," Dual replied. "There appears in the figures of this matter I have erected the significator of an individual as yet not concretely identified, yet to be described briefly as a man of erratic mental balance, in sympathy with the aims his associates have in mind; of slight bodily physique and with probably red or auburn hair."

"And he's the murderer?" Bryce suddeny spoke for the first time while Johnson wrestled with Semi's uncanny description of a man he stated none of us had ever seen. "Holy smoke!"

Dual smiled slightly. He knew Bryce well, and was used to his sudden eruptions. "He is the active conscious agent of Judge Cahill's death, in my estimation, Mr. Bryce."

"Agent?" said Jim quickly.

"Exactly. We may be sure there is a shrewdly directing force back of the act itself, I think, in this. The actual agent of the deed will hardly in that case prove to be one and the same with that force. Hence we must seek not only the agent, but the force behind him in our endeavors to frustrate those things that are planned. Let us terminate the discussion now, however, as against this evening I have as yet somewhat to arrange."

"An' I've got to arrange to get them two up here," said Johnson as he rose.

Bryce and I followed and we left the roof, making our way back to our own office suite on the seventh floor and releasing Nellie Newell, whom I had kept there despite the fact that it was Sunday, owing to the work we had on hand.

We saw her vanish and spent an hour in a practically fruitless discussion of the situation. Bryce rather put our joint feelings into words when he remarked: "He says we begin this evening, but I'm darned if I see how or what on."

I made a suggestion. "Has it occurred to you that he may mean to use the Mann girl as a go-between?"

Jim grinned in rueful fashion about the very black cigar he was smoking. "Go between what?"

"Between us and whoever it is he suspects of the murder, of course," I told him.

Johnson snorted and got up. "She'd be a lot of use, too. Considering what's already happened, she'd think th' murderer's hair was green. Well, I got to go down to th' station an' square things for this evening. This guessing at what Dual means

is like th' song they've been singin' at th' Kenton. We're just blowin' bubbles as far as I can see, an' as fast as we blow 'em they burst."

"I'll go with you," Jim said, rising. He and the inspector had been cronies and teammates in the days when he was on the force.

I nodded, and picked up a telephone to call the Cahill house. I got it, learned that Miss Ruth was out, hazarded a guess all to myself that she was keeping her suggestion to see Bryne, left word I would call early that evening, and told Johnson and Jim I was going home for a couple of hours. We left the office together and took a cage down to the street. And there my two companions set off for the station while I caught a car and rode out to my house.

The golden light of the April afternoon was still brilliant. The car was filled with the Sunday afternoon crowds. The streets were full of them. They were strolling, laughing, chatting. They were appareled in their holiday raiment. It was all very peaceful. It was hard to believe that under the cover of the surface seeming the forces of evil were, as Dual had said, unchained, were plotting against all this established life and the pursuit of happiness I saw around me, were plotting the overthrow of established law and order, murder, possibly rapine, an anarchistic régime, to be marked by disorder, the torch of incendiarism perhaps, license in the name of liberty, and acceptance of their demands or death. And yet—and yet, Semi-Dual was not one to bandy words—and this afternoon his bearing had been that of one convinced beyond any question of the truth set forth in the statement he had made.

CHAPTER XIV.

CLOSE TO THE FLAME.

SO Ruth Cahill had been right in suggesting her father a martyr to his public duty, the victim of those lawless elements in the body politic he had opposed. She was a remarkably level-headed young woman and I found myself planning just how I would approach the object of the evening with her. As it turned out, however, I simply told her the truth. And harking back to my opening remark about fate, do you see how I had laid the ground-work for that the morning of this April Sunday by telling her I believed in the subconscious mind—and not only for her introduction to Dual, but for all that followed as well? The thing actually put us on more or less common ground.

And as a result, when I told her about Dual himself, and his philosophy of life, it didn't seem quite so strange.

For I did tell her briefly the sort of man she was going to meet. I told her about his method of acquiring an insight into baffling problems, and in addition I told her what he had said that afternoon in regard to her father's death. And then I asked her to go to him with me, explaining that I did so at his request.

She took it all very calmly. Such things always appeal more quickly to women than to men; largely, as Dual once told me, because they live a more subconscious life, have a quicker appreciation of spiritual truths—of the laws of that life they transmit from generation to generation—or, as he expressed it—"They live closer to the flame."

Her eyes widened a trifle, it is true, and her face took on a somewhat brooding expression. But she nodded at the end. "I will go with you, of course, Mr. Glace. As for what you have told me, I have never thought much of such things, and yet I know there was a time when they were commonly believed. Telepathy I think I have in a measure proved myself. Daddy Drew and I were very close to one another, and—many a time it has seemed to me that—we read one another's thoughts—or that, if he was away and thought of coming home, I knew it—and wasn't surprised when he arrived. And why not—if, indeed, as your strange friend believes, all force is one—why should people in harmony at least not be able to read the waves of thought force generated in one another's brains?"

"Exactly," I agreed. "Dual says that is what occurs, and he has proved it to me on more than one occasion. More than once he has called me to him from wherever

I might be, merely by projecting the mental demand for my presence."

"Really?" she said, and changed the subject. "Mr. Glace, I went down to the jail this afternoon and had a long talk with Billy."

"Speaking of Byrne," I told her, "you will see him again this evening. He will be present in Semi-Dual's quarters, and so will Miss Mann." I deemed it best to forewarn her of the other's presence, to avoid any undue element of surprise.

And I thought she stiffened a trifle. "You mean the police will bring them there, I suppose, Mr. Glace?"

"As a matter of fact," I rejoined, "yes. But immediately after that, unless I am mistaken in my expectations, they will be released."

"Released?" she exclaimed, in a fashion actually startled. "Do you mean the charge will be withdrawn against them?"

"Exactly—withdrawn, quashed, whatever you like to call it, Miss Cahill."

She took a somewhat unsteady breath. "I won't deny I'm glad for Billy—but I can't forget that girl had a part in bringing about my father's death, Mr. Glace."

"But an unknowing part, Miss Cahill, in Semi-Dual's belief. Personally, she had no animus against your father. She was only a tool at most."

"And," said she, "your friend expects me to go there and meet her, knowing that she was a *tool*, at least?"

"Or perhaps," I rejoined, "he feels sure that, knowing as you do now the seriousness of the situation, you will put aside such considerations as personal feeling and work with him to learn the truth."

It was rather carrying the thing directly to her, but I felt that with such a woman as Ruth Cahill had shown herself until the present moment, it was best.

Nor did she fail to sense my meaning, because for a time after I had spoken, she sat, weighing my words, and then she threw up her head and looked me full in the face. "Thank you, Mr. Glace. I am sure Daddy Drew would have agreed with you and your friend—would have felt it was my duty to do anything I could in such an emergency as he believes is before us, to save other valuable lives. Looking at it from his viewpoint, it is little enough he asks. If you will excuse me a moment, I will be ready to go with you."

Fifteen minutes later we left the house and entered a taxi I had brought with me for the purpose. But we spoke little on the way down-town. A new mood seemed to have settled on the girl beside me. She seemed sunk in a brooding consideration that precluded speech and I respected her silence until the cab came to a stand before the Urania doors.

Nor did she make any comment as I led her through the garden on the Urania roof, though I noted her eyes turn about it as we reached the head of the stairs and a quick tilt of her head as she heard the chimes.

And then we were in Dual's inner room and I had made the introduction. He had doffed his robes and donned a gray suit, gray silken shirt and tie and low russet shoes for the occasion, and he made the commanding figure of a man. I noted Ruth Cahill's eyes sweep and appraise him as he bent above her hand. "I thank you, Miss Ruth, for your response to my request for your presence this evening," he said, releasing her fingers.

And suddenly she smiled. I fancied that Semi, with his old-fashioned courtesy, had already impressed her. "Rather I should thank you for all you are doing in my behalf, as Mr. Glace has told me," she replied.

"Nay. What I am doing is no more than the duty of any true man or woman in combating evil wherever it be found—nor for you, save as you are one of those affected by the plans that evil weaves," Dual returned as he led her to a chair. "I have sent for you, however, in order that you may fully understand."

Hard on his words and before Ruth could answer, there came again the mellow voice of the chimes. Johnson and Jim, Milly Mann and Bryne appeared.

They came in and Miss Cahill stiffened. I noted a tightening of her lips at sight of the other woman. After all, she was but human, and couldn't forget that this girl of a wholly different stratum of life had placed

the toy containing his death in her father's hands. Then, as Bryne went swiftly toward her, she relaxed, and the two found seats together on a couch.

Indeed, the atmosphere of the room was suddenly tense. Even Milly seemed vaguely embarrassed—and in a nervous way disturbed. I caught her shooting a sidelong glance now and then at Ruth after she herself was seated. She seemed all eyes.

"Gee, Mr. Glace," she whispered to me in an aside, "ain't this the place! I've passed here lots of times an' never suspected there was anything like it on th' roof. An' say—Johnson slipped it to me that maybe they're going to spring me after this evenin'. What do you know about that, and who's this guy in the gray suit?"

"He's the man who will decide whether they spring you or not," I told her.

Her blue eyes went even wider than they had been, in a startled fashion. "Gee," she said again, "what is he, a gentleman detective or th' commissioner of police?"

"He's a very wise man, and you want to pay attention to what he says and does," I made answer, and turned my own eyes about the place. Naturally I had done so before, noting the arrangements Dual had made—two squares of cardboard, one of white with a black cross in its exact center, one of drab, so fixed as to be brilliantly illuminated by two shaded drop-lights at one end of the room. I had seen them without a full comprehension of their purpose. Nor could I fathom it now, as Dual, having placed his guests, took his own place in the great chair before his desk.

CHAPTER XV.

VIBRATION.

FOR a moment he sat there sweeping the semicircle of faces before him, a bit strained, perhaps, in the grip of the situation, a bit tense. And then he began:

"We must begin our consideration of the condition by which we are confronted—that condition which my calculations, my study of it, have convinced me is one to threaten not only the lives of individual citizens, but possibly the very fabric of the established social structure, by a recognition of the universal quality of force, and the acceptance of the natural truth that heat, sound, light, color, life itself, even the ego of man, is a manifestation of universal vibration, and nothing else.

"As for the situation itself; it is one coldly calculated, as we may believe, to baffle the understanding, flaunt ordinary reason, and consequently blind comprehension as to its objects and aims. Yet if one applies to it the laws of life and considers it incident by incident rather than as a whole, one begins to understand. Psychoneurasthenia, chromaesthesia—the perversion of the normal operation of brain and nerves; the perception of color as an expression of vibration, have here been skilfully combined. And because of the unusual elements introduced into this matter—elements little understood save by one of exceptional education—we must assume at the outset that our efforts are pitted against highly developed, even if abnormal (as all evil is abnormal), brain or brains.

"In conceiving the possibility of accomplishing the results which my study of Judge Cahill's death lead me to believe are aimed at, the individual or individuals who conceived it must have started with a recognition of the fact I mentioned a moment ago—that all life force is the same; that each manifestation of that force is but an expression of a definite rate of vibration—and that thought, mental activity, the current of perception or volition flowing along the nerves, is no exception to the rule. Only so could they have conceived of employing the nervous organization, the special senses, to produce definite effects upon the mind.

"As to the special senses—each operates through a series of nerve trunks equipped with end organs, and registering the impressions received by them, within certain cells of the brain. Consequently, were it possible to—if I may use an electrical term—cross the conducting nerves, it might be possible to transpose the impressions conveyed to the different centers, and the odor of a violet being switched to the auditory apparatus would be recorded not as a scent, but as a pure contralto tone.

"Indeed, sound, light, color, are very closely connected in their perception. Each depends upon an ascending scale of vibration and each slides imperceptibly into the other. Certain tones and colors in sensitive individuals, may produce what we may denominate intermingling effects, and to a certain extent the parallel between different tones and colors has been determined. A soprano may induce the reflex of yellow, a baritone of orange, a tenor of green, a mezzo-soprano of blue, and a heavy bass of red."

Abruptly Milly Mann sat up sharply, leaning a little forward in her chair. Her manner and expression were that of intense excitement. "Hold on—wait a minute. Are you trying to work out th' answer to why I said that balloon was green when everybody else except th' feller what gave it to me said it was red?"

Dual turned and fastened his gray eyes steadily upon her. So for a moment he sat until she relaxed the tenseness of her pose and sank back into her seat: then: "I am about to give a practical demonstration of the effect of colors upon visual perception," he replied. He drew a watch and laid it upon his palm. "If you will all be kind enough to fasten your eyes intently upon the black cross on the white card for thirty seconds—and then turn them on the drab card when I call time."

We complied. I found myself actually staring—straining my eyes at that black cross through what seemed an interminable drag of waiting, staring, marveling at the scope of thirty seconds, asking myself if ever before they had embraced so great a duration—

"Time!" Semi's voice at last.

I turned my gaze to the other card, and —in its exact center I beheld a cross of white! Only—I knew my eyes were lying to me—because I knew that card was devoid of any device—that until that instant it had been a perfectly blank and even surface of drab.

"What do you behold?" Semi's voice again in question.

"A white cross, by granny!" Bryce boomed out in answer.

"Exactly." Dual put his watch away. "In reality the card is blank, yet your eyes would tell you, did you not know otherwise, that it is marked with a cross in white."

Very faintly, in almost sighing fashion, I heard Milly Mann gasp.

"We may denominate this optical illusion," Dual resumed. "It is, however, very simple and easily explained. In the eye the special organ of sense is the retinal membrane. By it the visual impulse is received and carried to the brain. But like any other tissue, the retinal ability to perceive the impulse may be exhausted after a time—and white is the color which exhausts its perceptive ability most quickly, because of the fact that white is no more than a blending of all colors into one. In gazing at the white card all the retinal cells save only those which covered the black cross became more or less exhausted. Hence when you turned to the drab card the exhausted cells were temporarily in abeyance, and only those unaffected by the black, which is an absence of all color, were in a condition to act. That action they exerted to the fullest capacity possible, which would be the perception of white. As a result, the cross you perceived was not upon the card, but merely appeared so. In reality it was a cross of white perception marked out by the unexhausted cells within your eyes."

Once more Milly Mann sighed, save now her lips moved at the same time and I caught the faint words: "My Gawd!"

But even so, Semi-Dual heard her. "I think that at last, Miss Mann, you are beginning to understand," he said, and smiled.

She nodded, staring straight back at him. "I guess maybe I am. But—go on. What about red and green?"

Dual rose. "The law holds good there as elsewhere," he replied, "save that in using other colors we obtain other reflex manifestations as the vibratory rate and consequently the degree of retinal tiring falls between the two extremes."

He approached the end of the room, removed the white card with its black cross and exposed behind it a jet-black surface supporting a square of red.

"And now if you will repeat the experiment," he requested, once more drawing his watch.

As before, we complied. There was a breathless silence.

"Time!"

I turned to the drab square of cardboard.

"Green! It's green, I tell you. Somebody tell me if it is or isn't! Is it green or ain't it?" the almost hysterical tones of Milly Mann cut through the room.

"It is green," said Semi-Dual, "and should be, since green is the complement of red. Letting black represent an absence of color or zero, and red the first color in the spectrum, what happened here is that the retinal cells were not called into operation by the black card, and that no more than one-half their ability was exhausted by the red. As a result, when you turned to the drab card, the unused cells became fully operative and the partly exhausted cells began operation with their still latent force, giving you the complementary color of red, and consequently a green square. Had I used a yellow square, which is nearest to white and would have nearly exhausted the cells—you would have seen a square of the color farthest removed from yellow in the spectrum, or violet, instead."

"I gotcha." Suddenly Milly Mann rose and turned toward the couch where Byrne and Ruth Cahill sat. "Miss Cahill," she burst out, her voice tight drawn by what one could hardly doubt was sincere emotion, "I guess I see now just what this means, and I want you to know how sorry I am about your father. I—well, I got one of my own—an' I—I wouldn't have done nothin' to harm yours if I'd known. I'd—I'd 'a' given a leg—an' that's the only thing I got to earn me a living—rather than have done what I did the other night if I'd been wise to what was going on. But I wasn't. I never had an idea. I never dreamed there was anything wrong with that balloon.

"That feller just shoved it at me as I was startin' back for th' encore, an', 'Give him this green one,' he says, an'—say!" Abruptly she paused and stood actually panting before she whirled lithely about toward Semi. "Say—maybe my eyes was queer. I know things *did* look funny that evenin', only I thought then it was just because I was tired. But—if you're right, how about that waiter—there was one, so help me God—an' he said it was green too. Who'd been monkeying with *his* eyes?'

"No one, in my estimation," said Semi-Dual.

I heard Bryce catch an actually rasping breath. He saw it, even as I did, I felt sure, that slender thread of leading, that one little connecting link we all seemed to have overlooked, in the mass of conflicting data in our possession, but which he now embodied in his reply to Milly's outpoured flood of gasping words. And Johnson's face was a study in emotions. And, I thought I saw Ruth Cahill's slender figure stiffen the least bit in the world beside the form of Byrne. She, too, saw it—the possible application.

"You mean he knew it was red—that he lied?" Milly panted.

"Once more, in my estimation, yes," said Semi-Dual. "For that reason, your question takes on a double importance. If you will resume your seat."

For a moment the girl appeared to hesitate, then she jerked her head in my direction. "All right. He said you was wise, an' I guess you've proved it. I suppose he's told you what must have caused th' trouble with my eyes?"

"I am about to go into that," Semi told her; and she seated herself with a nod.

"What I have shown you may well explain how one, taking treatment by means of colored lights for an already existing nervous condition, might very well suffer a perversion of sensory function in the eyes," Dual resumed, "especially if, as in the present instance, the color used in the treatments given was largely or wholly red. The complement of red, as your own fatigued retinæ have this evening shown you, is green, the color by which Miss Mann recognized the balloon the other evening, when it was hastily placed in her hand. These facts, being established, bring us at length to the direct consideration of a most unusual crime, which I believe is but the first deliberately plotted and cal-

lously conceived in a most diabolical scheme.

"For consider the diabolical intent back of all this plotting which, in order to encompass the death of certain men, high in the confidence of their fellows, men whose names are synonymous with law and order, would deliberately plan to use as their agents in the carrying out of their designs, men or women, already of unstable balance —would in cold blood decide to make of them the tools of their purpose by a yet further perversion of their already more or less abnormal minds."

His hand crept out and touched a button on his desk, and in response to the action the pulse of music filled the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HOUSE OF THE HUNDRED LIGHTS.

FOR an instant I started, and then I knew what it was, though it had been a long time since I heard it here in Semi's quarters first. It was the playing of the Universalion—an instrument Dual had himself constructed—a thing, he had once told me, played by the power of the ethereal vibration between the spheres. It seemed rather appropriate to me that while we sat there considering the force of universal vibration, it should be playing now. And then I caught myself up and sat listening intently as I recognized the tune: "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles"—the song of the dance in the cabaret.

Softly, but recognizable past any doubt, its rhythm throbbed about us. And suddenly Ruth Cahill spoke. "Please no—not that—not that tune."

Dual's hand crept out again, and the music died. "We are all forever blowing bubbles. Life itself is a bubble—on which are refracted the prismatic colors of the universal Force that creates it," he said. "And life is of the One who ordained its existence. Wo unto him who pricks the bubble, so that it bursts, and thrice wo unto him who perverts the true laws of life and all living to the accomplishment of his ends. He has entered the holy of holies and therein profaned."

"Pardon me," said Byrne a trifle thickly, "but do you mean that we are confronted by some organization of the criminally insane?"

"I mean," Dual replied, "that we are faced by men of fanatical purpose, who do not hesitate to use others of more or less morally abnormal brains. I have indulged in the digression in order that you may all fully appreciate the fiendishness of their plan. Let us now return to a consideration of the man who placed the lethal toy in Miss Mann's hands and told her it was green. In a way, that act partakes of the very common trick known as forcing a card. The thing was done quickly. She was given no time for consideration of the suggested action. The color was verbally suggested also. In the latter fact lies the clue to the entire undertaking. The fact that the individual mentioned the color to her indicates plainly that he was fully aware of the temporary abnormal condition of her eyes."

"Hold on!" Johnson croaked the words rather than spoke them. His voice was hoarse, his face a mask of startled comprehension. "If that's right it hooks you up to—"

"The House of the Hundred Lights," Bryce cut in with something like a bellow. "That guy knew she'd been takin' treatments, an' th' effect they was havin' on her. I reckon that's what you meant when you said she'd been 'used' in th' scheme."

The House of the Hundred Lights—the Neuropathic Sanatorium—that place of varied lights and colors. Bryce's deduction was plain enough when taken in connection with Semi's words, and yet even then—even with the thing held before my mental vision—it was all a fantasmagoria of vibration, or tired retinal cells, of light refractions and complementary colors. It was all nebulous, vague, almost unbelievable—almost staggering to the conception. I sensed it without as yet comprehending it fully, and sat waiting for Dual to answer:

"The incident contains at least a curious application of the story of the one who digged a pit and fell into it himself. Despite all the craft exhibited in the plot-

ting of the crime and its carrying out, its perpetrator committed an error in naming the balloon as green. Save for that, his knowledge of her condition would not have been shown, nor the supposition raised that he must have gained that knowledge either first-handed or from some one who was aware that the change in her eyes had been brought about." He turned slightly toward Johnson and continued: "Once more the rule of your department holds good, inspector, and the snake even in the act of striking left a trail in its own slime."

Johnson nodded. "Yes, sir, I reckon you're right," he agreed to the suggestion. "An' I reckon you've got a pretty straight lead to th' Grant Street house. What I can't see, though, is why they took so much pains to make her think it was green in the first place."

"I have already told you that, in my estimation, there was a trained psychologist back of all their plotting. Possibly he figured that if anything should go wrong and the death not be attributed to natural causes—as, thanks to Miss Cahill's subconscious perception, happened—those investigating the crime, if discovered, would feel Miss Mann's story discredited by the conflict between her statement and the facts, which is exactly what occurred," Dual explained. "Let us now pursue the question a trifle further. Miss Mann, in the treatment given you last Friday afternoon, what color was used?"

"Why," said Milly quickly, "they started in with yellow and switched to red."

"Exactly," said Semi-Dual. "They aimed at a practically total exhaustion of the red perceptive ability in the optic nerve."

I noted Ruth whisper to Byrne, and a moment later he spoke. "May I ask if the House of the Hundred Lights, as Mr. Bryce called it a moment ago, is the Neuropathic Sanatorium on Grant Street?"

"You bet," said Jim in a tone almost of elation. Nor could I blame him, since he had been considering the point of the conflict in Milly's color perception from the first.

"And," Byrne continued, "it is your belief that they were directly connected with this—er—crime?" One could forgive him if his voice was throaty, if he stammered a bit, I thought, for it was he who had paid for those treatments Milly Mann had taken, which had resulted in the end in making her an agent toward the accomplishment of his guardian's death.

"Unusual as the circumstances appear, Mr. Byrne, there are at least grounds for some such supposition, and for an attempt at investigation," Dual replied after a moment in which he seemed to weigh his answer. "That supposition would be strengthened if it could be shown that they had some definite knowledge of Judge Cahill's intended presence on the night in question. Miss Mann"—he turned to Milly—"did you ever, by any chance, discuss Miss Cahil's father with any one in that house?"

And as he paused, Milly Mann's eyes seemed to widen and darken. Her lips parted, and she stammered. "Why—I—I—why, yes—we was talkin' about th' bubble dance when I went there Tuesday—an' they said—they said he'd maybe close it up; an' I—I said I guessed not, as he was comin' to see it Friday night himself. Say—they—they pumped me, didn't they, mister? Oh, my Gawd!"

"And you told her yourself Monday, Billy!" I heard Ruth Cahill sob, and the man's answer, in a husky whisper:

"But Ruth dear—there wasn't any reason to dream of any such terrible plot. There wasn't any reason to suppose—"

"Hush." She put out a hand and laid it on his tightly clenched fingers. Her lips tightened.

"An' from Tuesday to Friday was time enough," said Johnson gruffly.

Ruth Cahill's bosom swelled sharply and she spoke. "Mr. Dual, is it your conviction that this institution concerning which I know something already, is involved in the plot that resulted in my father's death?"

Her voice was cool, almost deadly cold, and I marveled at the calm, deliberate couching of her question, at its directness, smacking as it did of the form that might have been used between man and man.

And Dual answered her at once: "There is room for some such supposition, Miss Cahill, I believe."

"Then"—she took a second deep breath—"because I know that patients are sometimes taken there as inmates and kept for treatment, and in view of all the issues apparently involved, provided it meets with your approval, after my father's body has been given decent interment, I shall enter this House of the Hundred Lights, as Mr. Bryce calls it, and endeavor to learn whatever I may myself."

And after that there came a little pause. We were all a bit startled by the proposition so steadily voiced by the girl on the couch, I believe. I heard Bryce breathe hoarsely again, and knew as well as though I had seen him that he was puffing out the brown stubble on his upper lip in the grip of sheer emotion. Inspector Johnson's face was a mask of blended surprise and admiration. Milly Mann uttered a sound between an ejaculation and a sob. Those things I sensed even while I kept my eyes on the slender girl, sitting rigidly erect beside Byrne, and—waiting.

"Ruth!" Byrne's voice came in a smothered protest.

I turned my gaze toward Semi-Dual. His gray eyes were bent on Ruth Cahill. They were fired, lighted by what seemed a tiny spark far down in their liquid depths. All at once I found myself wondering if this were not the true purpose of our meeting with him; if he himself in his own subtle fashion had not "forced" a psychological card.

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

A PUZZLING QUESTION

BY ELEANOR ECOB

MY beaus are almost always poor—
I don't know why it is
The rich ones never take to me,
Like Jane and Sue and Liz!

It can't be 'cause I'm not so nice—
I've lots of beaus, you see,
But no one knows it, for they're poor,
And can't give things to me.

Jane Brown just lives on candy now;
She's got the ribbon yet
That came on that big five-pound box—
She won it on a bet.

And Sue has roses all the time;
I've only had them twice;
And even if her beau is old,
His flowers are just as nice.

I s'pose I'd hate to have a beau
With eyebrows white like his;
But why should *all* the rich ones take
To Jane and Sue and Liz?

Almost A Christian

by Achmed Abdullah

Author of "A Buccaneer in Spats," "The Blue-Eyed Manchu," "Bucking the Tiger," etc.

IN the last four years Captain Abdullah has achieved an enviable place in literature; but while his earlier stories, the three "God of the Invincibly Strong Arms" series, "Bucking the Tiger," "The Master of the Hour," the "D. and D." series, *et cetera*, have been enthusiastically received and justly popular, it is his Chinese stories that have placed him at the fore front not only of American, but world letters. Readers of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY will remember "A Simple Act of Piety," "Himself to Himself Enough," and the other Pell Street tales —which have since been published in book form under the title "The Hon'ble Gentleman, and Others" (G. P. Putnam's Sons)—so we will only say of the present story that it is in every way a worthy successor of these masterpieces of word painting and character delineation.

CHAPTER I.

THE HONORABLE VIRTUE OF CHON TZU-P'EI.

ON that day a dozen Chinese crowded about the crimson sheet of tough-fibered paper—one of those strident broadsides that represent, to the yellow boys, both the advertising and the "agony" columns of Western newspapers—which Smok Fat, Jack of all trades of the Golden Dragon Guild, had affixed a moment earlier to a wall. It consisted of three announcements, printed side by side, each headed with the ideographs that stood for the name of Chon Tzu-p'ei, the money broker.

The first told in simple language that to-morrow, the fifth day of December, at three o'clock in the afternoon, in the Mission Chapel of Mott Street, Chon Tzu-p'ei would be baptized in the Christian faith.

The second read that Chon Tzu-p'ei, remembering the words in the Book of Threefold Duties, that virtuous manners constitute the excellence of a neighborhood, had decided to subscribe three thousand dollars toward the new statues of the Buddha of the Light without Measure and the Buddha of the Paradise of the West to be installed in the Pell Street joss temple; that to-morrow, the fifth day of December, at four o'clock in the afternoon, or possibly a little later, since he was not sure how much time the baptismal ceremony would consume, he would preside, in his official capacity as governor of the Golden Dragon Guild, at the meeting to be held in the Honorable Pavilion of Tranquil Longevity, and pay cash.

The third asked Huai Ta-Pu, formerly a money broker of No. 467 Pell Street, now assistant in a West Ninety-fourth Street laundry, to come to the house of Chon Tzu-p'ei. It added that the latter had buried the dagger of hatred in the scabbard of for

getting. Let Huai Ta-Pu take notice and come, fearing naught.

As to the clashing incongruity of the first two announcements: a man, perhaps sneeringly, perhaps with sublime simplicity, declaring his willingness to live according to two diametrically opposed creeds, to follow with his left foot the thorny path of the gentle, white Christ and with his right the sluggish, esoteric way of the yellow Lord Buddha—it has little enough to do with this tale except, belike, to emphasize certain points, as the shadows in a frame emphasize its brightness. Futile, the meaning of it was to the men of Pell Street, and they expressed the futility in the polished and curiously insincere phraseology of their race.

"All religions are good," remarked Chin Shan, the retired merchant. "All religions exalt virtue or, at least, try to. Doing or trying—where is the difference?"

"Some people are fond of pork," Nag Hong Fah, the restaurant proprietor, chimed in, rubbing his fat, dimpled hands, and some prefer chicken. There are, furthermore, those who like pork *and* chicken. They are very greedy—"

"Or very wise!" chuckled Dr. En Hai.

"The ways of salvation are many," came Tsing Yu-ch'ing, the newspaper editor's, mild comment. "So are the flowers many. A lover of buds does not neglect the tulip for the sake of the rose—"

"Nor, evidently, the rose for the sake of the tulip," cut in Yu Ch'ang, the priest, just a trifle bitterly.

He disliked Miss Edith Rutter, the social settlement investigator, who was the chief worker of the Mission Chapel; disliked her less because she was his antagonist in matters religious, than because of the atmosphere of threadbare, meretricious gentility which was about her like an anemic aura.

"Let not the yellow tulip complain, priest!" laughed Nag Hong Fah. "For—is not Chon Tzu-p'ei mulching well the garden where it grows?" With thumb across shoulder, he pointed at the joss temple where it bulged out slightly from the neighboring houses as if proud of its gaudy, theological coating of crimson and gold and deep, luminous blue. "Has he not headed your list of subscriptions for the new Buddha statues with three thousand dollars? And will not a fat handful of them stick to your sacred fingers?"

"Possibly!" came the shameless admission. "Even virtue demands a garment. Even holy men must eat and drink—occasionally—"

Thus, with gliding laughter, in a few terse words, typically, they dismissed the matter, to speculate volubly about the why and wherefore of the third announcement.

"'Let Huai Ta-Pu take notice and come, fearing naught.'" Chin Shan read aloud. He smiled. "All honor to Chon Tzu-p'ei," he went on, in the manner of one who is weaving truth close to the loom of lies. "His heart—doubtless, doubtless!—is as pure as the sound of a far flute, and his promise as hard and tight as the skin of the unripened lime. Yet—speaking now from the point of view of Huai Ta-Pu—would a wise man keep meat on trust with a jackal, though the jackal give seventy times seventy bundles of promises?"

"Huai Ta-Pu has no meat," chuckled Yu Ch'ang, "and ah— has it not been said that a hungry belly has no ears with which to listen to the sounds of danger?"

And their voices trailed off into thick, staccato mutterings, and they strolled across, to gossip at their ease over tea and pipes, to the Honorable Pavilion of Tranquil Longevity where, four afternoons and evenings a week, the lodge brothers of the Golden Dragon Guild met: grocers and laundrymen and restaurant-keepers and merchants: well-to-do, staid burgesses of Pell Street.

Gorged, they seemed, with a gross, blotchy surfeit of prosperity—all, except some of the younger, American-born members.

On the other hand, as to Miss Rutter, it was weeks before spiteful tongues—and for reasons that have not yet sifted through the Pell Street gossip sieve—told her about Chon Tzu-p'ei's religious eccentricities; and then, naively unconscious that she was uttering a stony truth the nonrealization of which is the final stumbling block in the path of even the least bigoted missionary,

she sighed out of her sincerity imbecile serenity of faith that—yes!—one could convert Chinese, but that even so they never really became Christians—never gave up that dreadful Asiatic trick of being able to believe in two mutually destructive theories at one and the same time.

"Why, my dear," she confided to a visiting friend from Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, interested financially and otherwise in her pet social endeavor, "look at Chon Tzu-p'ei for instance. He gives to the church—freely, generously! He studies the blessed Gospels. He attends divine service with unfailing regularity. He believes—I am positive—in the creed of our Savior. And yet—oh—"

Her voice broke, splintered; and she pointed a guileless, silk-gloved hand at the window of the joss temple behind which, starkly outlined in the rays of the swinging Cantonese lamps, could be seen the money-broker's obese bulk, clad in coquettish, decidedly unbecoming baby-blue silk embroided with butterflies and magenta roses, and kotowing deeply before the gilt altar of the Buddha.

But this all came later; long after Huai Ta-Pu had returned to Pell Street; long after Chon Tzu-p'ei had accumulated much face at the expense of the younger members of the Golden Dragon Guild in a subtle and delicate manner which is still spoken of, with hushed respect, by the men of Chinatown, and the tale of which has drifted clear across the continent and the Pacific, even to China where, on the banks of the river at Hui-ch'ung, a poet, probably drunk, made him a few stanzas about the gorgeous happening. The song begins:

Almost like gentle mockery fall the echoes of wise, wise age—
Fall the drop, smotheringly, smotheringly, across the riot of youth
Smiling the brave, clanking dreams of silly, silly youth—

Yes. All this came later. But that very day, a few minutes after Smok Fat had affixed the poster, Miss Rutter, on her way to the Mission Chapel, heard about the contents of the third announcement, and explained the riddle thereof, gently, sympathetically—and mistakenly.

"Mr. Devoy," she said to the detective of Second Branch who, police-ly speaking, presided over the Pell Street beat of opium and sewer gas and yellow man and white—"my work has not gone for nothing."

"I hear you, lady!" came the reply.

"You remember the trouble, a few years ago, between Chon Tzu-p'ei and Huai Ta-Pu?"

"Sure. Old Chon copped all the other guys kale, didn't he? By methods—well—you know—"

"Yes." Miss Rutter permitted herself the rare luxury of a smile. She continued fervently: "Chon Tzu-p'ei has at last seen the light. He has offered his hand in friendship to his old enemy. He is willing to atone. Oh"—she spoke with square, austere certitude—"Christianity has done it, dear Mr. Devoy!"

"Lady, lady!" interrupted the detective. "I ain't got no quarrel with Christianity. Me—I'm a good Catholic. But—that fat, yaller fish of a Chink—seein' the light, didya say?"

"Indeed."

"Aw—ferget it! Wot the h——"

Then he saw her thin, pathetic, ineffectual face, the nervous flutter of her thin, pathetic ineffectual hands, and he remembered the congenial fig-leaf which mercifully hid from her mind the world of crass realities. So he changed the oath that was on his lips into a cough and walked away on an apocryphal errand, while Miss Rutter turned toward the Mission Chapel.

Lonely and drab the small brownstone building with the cross above the door seemed here amidst the spicy, warm reek of opium and grease and sandalwood; like a gray, insistent stain upon the tough, yellow nakedness of Pell Street; waging a brave, losing fight against the huge, gilt Buddha who, in the temple across the way, squatted on his carved lotus pedestal, his round head in the shadow of the cobra's hood, on his painted lips the patient, tenuous smile of the cosmic centuries.

Lonely and drab the little church. Stale, musty, dusty. Yet glorious and sweet with white, running lights to the middle-aged, emaciated woman in black taffeta who knelt there and poured out her soul to her Maker,

"I thank Thee, dear Lord," she prayed, "because, in Thy mercy, Thou hast caused my dear brother Chon Tzu-p'ei to see the error of his ways, and to clear his stubborn heart of sin, and to make up for the old wrong he had done to Huai Ta-Pu."

For, she thought, what other reason could there be for the announcement which asked the latter to come to the house of the money broker, fearing naught?

And while that night. over their tea and tasseled pipes, the older members of the Golden Dragon Guild speculated as to what fantastic latter-day revenge the money broker contemplated heaping on the head of his ruined, half-forgotten enemy, the younger American-born members agreed, strange to say, with Miss Rutter—though their joy at the to-be-expected result of Chen Tzu-p'ei's change of heart was rather less altruistic than hers.

For, since several years, although the American-born members of the Golden Dragon Guild were steadily increasing in number and importance and were clamoring to be given youth's right and chance in the direction of affairs, they had been unable to oust Chon Tzu-p'ei from his position of governor. They had, indeed, never dared to vote against him at the annual election, because they knew—and feared—the strangling strength of his gold-baited nets, knew that he was master over the Pell Street credit ledgers.

They had resented this; had resented his habit of gaining face by talking didactically and naggingly on all things spiritual and secular; his eternal complaint that there was no reverence amongst them for the ancient traditions of Sung and Ming, and that they had deserted the old ways, the good ways, the ways of their fathers.

At last, under the guidance of Na T'ung, a newcomer from San Francisco who dealt with riotous, gargantuan audacity in glittering commercial futurities, they had begun to show this resentment by soft, twisted words dropped here and there, proverb or quotation or metaphor, in the slurring Mongol manner, subtly derisive, craftily scurrile, enough to get beneath the money broker's tough, yellow skin; and finally the smouldering rebellion had come to a head, a few days ago, when Chon Tzu-p'ei had again held forth on the privileges of old age, by the same token disparaging and ridiculing the rights of youth.

"Age is a fig-tree, strong and tall, bearing sweet fruit," he had pronounced, "while youth"—with suavely hierarchical irony—"the worth of youth in the reckoning of life—is tinier than a rice corn or a barley corn or a mustard seed or a canary seed—or the pulp of a canary seed."

And then Na T'ung had blurted out, suddenly, that speaking about fig-trees, once his mother had told him a legend—"which," turning to Chon Tzu-p'ei, "might be of interest to you, O brother very wise and very old!"

"Yes?" the other had inquired.

"Indeed. For one day the Buddha asked his disciple what was the secret of the fig-tree's worth, and the disciple saying it was the fig, the Buddha replied: 'Bring me a fig.' 'Lo, my Lord,' came the disciple's answer, 'I have brought a fig.' 'Break it.' 'It is broken, my Lord.' 'What seest thou in it?' 'Lo, little seeds, my Lord.' 'Now, break one of the seeds.' 'It is broken, my Lord.' 'And what seest thou in it?' 'Naught whatsoever, my Lord, except a void!' And," Na T'ung had wound up, "out of this void arises the seed, out of the seed the fig, out of the fig the fig-tree—the fig-tree, belike, of old age, great age, wise age! Still—let us all have faith in the Buddha's blessed miracles. Perhaps—ah—perhaps, in this void of the broken seed, the All of old age finds indeed its final, precious essence!"

Thus had come the insult—insult deadly and unforgivable from the oblique Mongol angle; insult that, typically, implied more than it spoke—and silence had dropped. The older members of the Guild had sat like statues, staring straight ahead, their faces expressionless; the younger had squirmed in their chairs, thinking of credits and discounts and Chon Tzu-p'ei's swollen money bags.

The latter had drummed with his long fingernails on the small, red lacquer table in front of him which supported an incense-burner, a vase for the hot, spiced wine, and

a fantastic tiger in ancient Yung-Ching porcelain.

"Little brother," he had said to Na T'ung, "about that two thousand dollar note which you have asked me to renew—"

And, after a pause full of elusive suspicions and hesitations, a pause splintered by Na T'ung's almost hysterical stammer that he didn't care, that he meant what he had said, every word of it, that he would not apologize and eat dirt, note or no note, even if it ruined him, the money broker had continued, very slowly, very gently:

"Yes. About that note. Come to my office to-morrow morning, and I shall renew it, for three months, at the regular rate of interest. Ah—it has always been the privilege of honorable age to assist enthusiastic youth on the road to prosperity—and"—purringly—"understanding!"

He had risen, had bowed courteously with hands clasped across his chest to the assembled lodge brothers, and had waddled out of the room with a stiff rustle of his silken embroidered garments.

CHAPTER II.

THE EXQUISITE HONESTY OF CHON TZU-P'EI.

A TRAP—a trick! the younger members had told Na T'ung.

"A mule's friendship is kicking!" had come the warning.

But there had been neither trick nor trap. Jake Rosenzweig, the Bowery shyster lawyer, had sniffled over the note as a vulture sniffles over carrion.

"Sure!" he had advised Na T'ung, "y'can sign it. It's poifecly *kosher*."

"But—I don't understand what he means to—"

"C'n y'pay him back in three months?"

"Easily."

"Awright—sign then—"

"But why does he—I—I insulted him—I made him lose his face—"

"*Meschugge is' trumpf!* Mebbe he gotta lota face and can afford to lose a coupla inches. Anyway—you should worry and raise a pimple!"

And so, acting on the advice of counsel, Na T'ung had signed the note; had wondered over the riddle of it—and had solved this riddle, today, to his complete satisfaction, after he had seen the broadside with Chon Tzu-p'ei's three-fold announcement.

The palsying, weakening sentimentality of old age! That was the answer! And, that night, walking by the side of Hop Soy, the young commission merchant, he pointed at the Mission Chapel.

"Christianity," he said, "is a charming creed for those in whom the many years have killed the passions and desires of youth! Here's Chon Tzu-p'ei forgiving his enemies, repaying evil with good, wiping out the stains of hatred with the mop of love!"

"Now will we of the coming generation have our chance," replied Hop Soy.

And, smiling, the two friends turned into the Bowery, were drawn into its purling, eddying vortex of sounds—sounds peaking, spreading, breaking, rising again—sounds of New York, of the great, man-clouted, man-eating sphinx on concrete and steel that looms out of the Atlantic mists, straddling the Hudson on massive legs, head thrown back, shoulders flung wide, screaming the boastful challenge of the New World with lungs of brass.

A fit and proper town for riotous, clamorous youth—

"Ah!" said Na T'ung. "But it is good to be young—and strong!"

"I'll say it is!" agreed Hop Soy, heartily, in English.

It appeared that Yu Ch'ang had been right the day before, when he had opined that a hungry belly has no ears to listen to the sounds of danger. For, that afternoon, a little after four o'clock, a buzzing and purring ran through the grave assembly in the Honorable Pavilion of Tranquil Longevity, as the door opened and in came Chon Tzu-p'ei, still in the unctuous black broadcloth he had worn at his baptism, and by his side, like an underbred terrier by the side of a great, dewlapped mastiff, Huai Ta-Pu, smiling, evidently quite at his ease, waving a wrinkled, gnarled hand of greeting at former friends whom he had not seen these many years.

"Ah!"—a deep, tense breath sucked in almost simultaneously by fifty thin, compressed lips; hands stopping in mid-air with a feathery tinkle-tinkle of tea cups; opium-reddened eyelids winking rapidly, meaningly.

"By the Buddha's toe nails!" exclaimed Nag Hong Fah.

Surprise indeed!

For there was nobody here but remembered the homeric, commercial war between the two money brokers; the bitter feud carried on with the rustle of banknotes, the clink of gold, and the thud of silver; the hidden battles for supremacy in the marts, not only of Pell Street, but wherever they had business connections, in Seattle, San Francisco, and Chicago; the final encounter, the final smash—and Huai Ta-Pu, a ruined man, leaving behind him debt piled upon debt, and fleeing into the far, packed wilderness of West Ninety-fourth Street to earn a pittance by the sweat of his brow with soap and mangle and ironing-board, while Chon Tzu-p'ei squatted on his swollen money bags, like a fat, leering spider.

Surprise—though the news of the latter's announcement that he had buried the dagger of hatred in the scabbard of forgetting, had flitted, via the gossip route of enigmatic backyards and furtive, reticent corner entrances and skulking gables into every last little rickety, secretive, red-brick building of Pell Street and Mott, and was even now being cackled over by the women as they stirred the savory stews of pork and water-chestnuts and bamboo sprouts against the return of their lords and masters.

Surprise — that presently, suddenly, changed into anger—rage—

"*Hi low yah!*" came a clipped, metallic exclamation. "*To hoh wang!*"

And whispers brushed out, sibilant, tense, minatory. Hands gesticulated excitedly. Feet shuffled nervously with a hasty swish-swish-swish of padded slippers. Beady, oblique eyes threw their observant glitter from left to right, and back again.

"I protest!" shrieked a voice out of the trooping, coiling shadows in the corner of the room. "There are yet rites to be observed, even though a man wallow in gold-ankle-deep as a village buffalo wallows in reeking slime!"

"I protest!"

"I protest!"

High-pitched cries—here—there—everywhere.

For the Golden Dragon Guild, besides being a business organization, a local sort of Wall Street where instead of stocks and bonds, the quotations dealt with tea, and silk, and opium, and the cost of coffins, to be shipped back to China, was also a free-masonic lodge which bound its members to a number of intricately detailed duties and ceremonials; and Chin Shan, the retired merchant, voiced the feelings of all of them when he rose and sternly addressed the money broker who stood there in the ring of faint, opalescent light shed by the swinging lamps, one hand dropped, as if protectingly, reassuringly, on the shoulder of his old enemy who, for some hidden reason, seemed to enjoy the situation.

"The rule is plain," said Chin Shan curtly, and he indicated a huge, crimson square of silk fastened to a wall and embroidered, in gold and purple Mandarin ideographs, with the Guild's constitution and by-laws. "Non-members are not permitted within the lodge."

"Huai Ta-Pu was once an honored member," replied Chon Tzu-p'ei; and again there came the chorus of low-voiced, hissing comment, crystallized into Chin Shan's admission that this was so—yes!—once the other had indeed been an honored member, but—he said it mournfully—that he had been expelled from the Guild with black ignominy because he had not paid his honest debts.

"Yes, yes!" screamed Nag Hong Fah. "Three hundred dollars he borrowed from me—never repaid me—oh—the grandson of an addled duck-egg!"

"To me he owes fifty-five—and interest—the compound interest of the many years!"

"Twenty-seven to me!" A lean, yellow hand stabbed dramatically out of the poppy vapors, clenched into a fist, shook threateningly at the silent, imperturbable Huai Ta-Pu. "I trusted you!"

"Five hundred, five hundred! I took his note without security—except his most solemn promise! Ah—a cheat's promise—like a line written on water!"

Dollars! Figures of dollars and cents belching into a chorus of foul abuse; eyes piercing vindictively through the floating, whirling wreaths of smoke that rose from incense-burners and opium pipes, drifted to the ceiling, and floated there like a gigantic bee hive; fingers leveled accusingly, like pistols, at Huai Ta-Pu who stood motionless amidst the storm of invective, a vague, placid smile curling his lips.

He had not paid his just debts! He had committed the one, unforgivable crime in the code of the Chinese, whose whole life, from birth to death and in the hereafter, is based upon a foundation of barter and trade and mutual trust and four-square honesty. And not even the fear and respect with which they looked up to Chon Tzu-p'ei could quell the rage that spread and spread—to be once more crystallized into Chin Shan's stern words:

"Huai Ta-Pu has violated the traditions of the Guild! There can be no forgiving. He had failed to pay his debts. Surely you yourself, Chon Tzu-p'ei"—he smiled a crooked, wintry smile—"know *why* he failed. You were the sickle—and he the ripe wheat which you garnered!"

"I know," agreed the other.

"Then—" Chin Shan pointed to the door.

But the money broker raised apologetic hands; he begged for a moment's patience; and, silence restored, he went on: "Yes—I was the sickle, and he the wheat. And now I shall be the glutinous millet, and Huai Ta-Pu shall be the field—the field that has long lain fallow and worthless—the field again ready to be seeded and fructified—the field that soon will once more yield precious harvest!"

"You mean that you will—" Chin Shan's voice was no longer curt and incisive. His agile Mongol brain, trained to read between the lines of proverb and metaphor, had jumped to a fantastic conclusion. "You mean that you will—pay—his—debts?"

"Yes." Chon Tzu-p'ei had half shut his eyes, and his face, yellow as old parchment, seemed to have grown indifferent, dull, almost sleepy. "Yes," he repeated, very gently, "I shall pay Huai Ta-Pu's debts, every dollar, every cent, with interest and compound interest. I shall wipe the stinking, black stain from his honorable name and make it white."

"*You*—pay—*his* debts?" came Chin Shan's grave, full-throated question.

"Indeed." The money broker smiled. With his right hand he caressed Huai Ta-Pu's shoulder.

"But—why?"

"Because it was my fault as much as his. Through me, through my hardness and cupidity, did he lose his money—and you, who trusted him, yours. Now I shall make the score even, if I may be honorably permitted, dollar for dollar and cent for cent." He turned to the priest. "Tell me," he asked, "does it not say in the *Li Ki* that the wise man who has reached the knowledge of Truth cannot be influenced by money, that wealth is to him but as grass?"

"Yes," replied Yu Ch'ang. "Bracelets do not set off a man's appearance, nor flowers nor perfume. Nothing adorns a man except—ah"—he sucked in his breath—"perfect honesty ,pure and clear as the moon. Perfect honesty!" he repeated.

For to him, too, Huai Ta-Pu owed a meagre sum, and there was interest to be reckoned with—compound interest—and, almost automatically, he slurred the greedy thought into a greedy question:

"Compound interest, did you say?"

"Indeed!"

Chon Tzu-p'ei was silent. He looked faces, the younger members, grouped about Na T'ung, sitting a little apart, smoking their cigarettes as if in protest against the older members' tasseled, small-bowled opium pipes.

"I am old," he said, in a flat, introspective mumble, "and when one is old, one does not like change—as youth likes change—"

He smiled gently upon Na T'ung, who smiled back, whispering the while into the ear of Hop Soy that he had read the situ-

ation correctly: there *was* the weakening, palsying sentimentality of old age which blunted the mind and dulled the keen dagger of passion and softened the soul, as oil softens leather.

"There is, furthermore, the influence upon such a one of Christianity," mumbled Hop Soy.

"Indeed—thanks be to the jade Buddha!" said Na T'ung, incongruously, under his breath, while Chon Tzu-p'ei concontinued, rather wearily, that when one is old one longs for the faces of the days of one's youth, when all the world was blue and golden, and there was never a break in one's heart.

"Brothers," he exclaimed, tremendous entreaty in his accents; his fingers tightened their grip on Huai Ta-Pu's shoulders. "Please—because I am old—won't you—"

He stopped, a quaver in his voice, his question unfinished, his hands gesticulating clumsily, woodenly, up, then down.

"Brothers!" said Na T'ung, and he rose and faced the grave assembly of Celestials. "Listen—"

CHAPTER III.

THE SPLENDID RASHNESS OF YOUTH.

MANY, many years later, long after Chon Tzu-p'ei's dead body had been shipped back to Canton and buried there, in a large and comfortable red lacquer coffin, on the side of a hill facing running water and with a lovely view over the rice paddies, long after the stony drag and smother of success and wealth had crushed the riotous enthusiasm of Na T'ung's youth, the latter, speaking to his contemporaries—ponderous, rather pompous gray heads like himself, Hop Soy among them—about the chain of events that followed Huai Ta-Pu's return to Pell Street, used to remark that the gods in heaven must have laughed when they prompted him, for the first time in his life, to take the old money broker's part and to propose that, out of respect for Chon Tzu-p'ei's righteousness and age, Huai Ta-Pu be readmitted into the lodge, a member in good standing, without a stain on his name, entitled to all the privileges of the Golden Dragon Guild.

"Don't you see," he would say, "with Chon Tzu-p'ei practicing the Christian virtues of forgiveness and forbearance, of atoning for past sins, of helping his former enemy back into a life of ease and self-respect, what a victory I considered it for youth—my youth—hard, selfish, youth? Yes, a victory and, by the same token, a stroke of wisdom!

"Ah—it was nearly a year before I understood the truth of the words of Yuan Mei, the ancient poet, that age and the garnered guile of age are like a library of ten thousand tomes with pendant disks of green and yellow jade, while youth is worth less than the tinkle of a light woman's girdle gems, less than the drifting, passing scent of an orchid spray.

"Ten thousand tomes was the wisdom and the charming guile of Chon Tzu-p'ei! Ten thousand years were gathered in the folds of his tough, tough old brain! And"—he would add, with sublime self-irony—"ten thousand dollars he advanced to me on short-term notes—*ahee—ahoo!*"

Thus Na T'ung's clarified vision of these decades later, after life had burned away the dross of his arrogant, clanking youth. But at the time, when Huai Ta-Pu with the proper rites and ceremonies had been readmitted into the Golden Dragon Guild, there was triumph in Na T'ung's heart, triumph in his voice as, the meeting having adjourned, he asked Hop Soy to step around to Brian Neill's saloon and celebrate the victory of the rising generation—as became modern young American business men—in the Celtic gentleman's potent bourbon.

"Gladly," replied Hop Soy, speaking in English, as was his habit. "Whisky—by all means! It'll wash the sloppy taste of that damned Chinese tea out of my mouth."

Glancing back over his shoulder, Na T'ung saw Chon Tzu-p'ei move with slow dignity down the street, Huai Ta-Pu still by his right side, like an underbred terrier by the side of a great, dewlapped mastiff, and by his left Yu Ch'ang, the priest.

Sharply, the latter's words drifted through the trailing evening dusk.

"'If there were no virtuous men in Loo,'" he quoted from the "Sho Yuan," the "Park of Narratives," "how could a man have acquired such a shining character as you?"

"Perhaps," came the other's flat, cozy voice, with just the brittle suspicion of a laugh, "perhaps it is even as the foreign woman—Miss Rutter—so frequently points out to me—that virtue is always its own reward. Perhaps, though—"

And then the slamming of the saloon door, as it closed upon Na T'ung and Hop Soy shut out the rest of the old money broker's sentence.

When, early the next morning, Na T'ung called on Chon Tzu-p'ei in the latter's house, he was, as usual, momentarily overwhelmed by the splendor of its furnishings.

The four walls were covered with yellow satin, embroidered with meticulously chosen quotations from the *Lun Yu* and the *Hsiao King*.

The floor was buried under a shimmering pile of velvets and brocades so that the whole room was in effect nothing but a divan, a restful couch, immense and princely. The outer light filtered dreamily through heavy curtains of watered silk and cloth-of-silver, and from the ceiling beams seven violet lanterns were hung, throwing shifting, checkered shadows. At the north angle a bronze statue of Wen-Tchang, chief of the five Taoist divinities of letters, was smiling among the perfumed sticks—and, over all, the stealthy odor of the philosophic poppy-drug reigned supreme.

Different it was from the screamingly efficient, pinchbeck modernities of steel filing-cabinets and loose-leaf ledgers, of typewriters and Axminster rugs and mahogany desks with which the younger generation of Pell Street matched the algebraic cunning of their brains against the slum-sharpened wits of Jew and Sicilian and Greek and Armenian.

Yet for all its soft, scented langour, and with no sign of anything which might fall under the rubric of business implements except a great, wooden abacus and a couple of large ledgers, bound incongruously in crimson leather stamped with a conventionalized design of golden dragons fighting for the Buddha's mystic jewel, was it the place where Chon Tzu-p'ei, after six decades of close barter and trade, had accumulated a bank balance that was respectable even when measured with the extravagant yard-stick of the foreign devils; a bank balance great enough for him to play and satiate his fancies, though, as last night, they cost him a round fifteen thousand dollars, wherewith to pay off his former enemy's debts.

For a second or two Na T'ung was nervous. He shuffled his neatly shod feet uneasily. His mind seemed amorphous, pitifully inadequate, groping at the vanishing shadows of the things he wanted to say: the things he had come prepared to say ever since, an hour earlier, he had conferred with his friend Hop Soy and had told him, in English, that it was a cinch—"a dead cinch, old man! We're going to make a whole lot of coin out of it, and Chon Tzu-p'ei's going to back it up." "But—you know, there's a certain risk. After all, there's—" "Chon's risk—not ours! Just let me handle him—that's all I ask, see?"

But now he felt himself blushing, knew that he would stammer forth incoherencies when he opened his mouth. And, inappositely, it was Chon Tzu-p'ei's courtly, old-world salutation: "Ah—please deign to enter my quite wretched and worthless abode!" which made him remember that he was young and hard, that his was the whip-hand of riotous, arrogant audacity, while the other was old and soft—a fruit to be picked—a grape to be pressed—almost a Christian in forgiving and forbearing—

He breathed a sigh of relief, stepped inside without further ceremony, and slurred a casual, faintly impertinent greeting in English: "How d'ye do?"

Then, eyebrows raised negligently, a thumb hooked into a vest pocket: "I want to talk over a little business matter with you."

Chon Tzu-p'ei smiled. He pointed at the west side of the room, as Chinese courtesy demands.

"Won't you deign to choose a place of honor?" he asked in a gentle singsong.

The younger man looked up suspiciously. For a moment he had imagined that he could detect an undertone of irony in the money broker's polished words. But he felt reassured when he saw the peaceful, bland expression on Chon Tzu-p'ei's large, butter-yellow face.

"All right, all right," he said.

With rather ill grace he conformed to the Chinese ceremonial, gave the correct reply: "How should I, the quite unimportant one, dare to sit down in your presence, O wise and older brother?" finally chose his seat and went on: "I guess that's enough etiquette to hold both of us for a while. Now—about that business matter which I came to talk over with you."

Again the other smiled. Had Na T'ung been able to look beyond the frontiers of his conceit and greed, he would have understood that, indirectly, in his subtle Mongol way, Chon Tzu-p'ei was accomplishing what an American business man does when he makes his visitor sit down in a chair near the window where he has to blink against the sunlight, while he himself remains in the mellow, soothing shadows.

"Youth is rash and hot-headed," said Chon Tzu-p'ei, "and prone to leap the barriers of its own making. Youth does not reach the splendid elevation of patience, without age to show the road. Come, little brother, before we talk business—a pipe, eh? A handsome jade pipe with silver tassels and a rose-crystal mouthpiece—" And, when Na T'ung shook his head: "Perhaps a sip of blossom tea?"—he indicated a frail cup of mazarine-blue china—"Imperial blossom tea, stirred, as the ancient precepts say, in clear water without—"

"No—thank you!" Na T'ung cut in, impatiently. "I want to—"

He was silent as Huai Ta-Pu glided into the room on furtive, slippered feet and sat down, without a word, by the side of the money broker. "Yes?" asked the latter.

"I want to talk to you in private," said Na T'ung, brutally direct.

"In private? Why, yes—of course—"

"There's he!" replied Na T'ung, pointing rudely with his thumb at Huai Ta-Pu, who sat there, a smile curling his lips, with staring, sardonic eyes that seemed like jewels set in some hard, wrinkled, fleshlike substance, a single strange, perpendicular fold down the middle of his forehead.

Chon Tzu-p'ei shrugged his shoulders.

"Huai Ta-Pu and I have forgotten our old, withering hatreds," he replied. "He and I are partners."

"Partners—you mean, in business?" demanded the younger man, incredulously.

"In everything! We are now even as twin brothers rocked in the same cradle. Please—deign to continue your charming and harmonious discourse. Business, you said? A chance for profit?"

"Yes. A thousand per cent. and ten thousand per cent. Only—" He paused.

"There is then an 'only'?"

"There always is," said Na T'ung, with a hard laugh, "in a deal that promises a thousand per cent and ten thousand per cent."

"To be sure," admitted Chon Tzu-p'ei, while Huai Ta-Pu cackled deep in his throat. "And this 'only' means that—"

"That I need capital, and"—he raised one eyelid—"other things."

"Perhaps," suggested the money broker, "the wisdom and exquisite guile of ripe age?"

"No," replied Na T'ung arrogantly. "Youth—myself and Hop Soy—will supply all the wisdom and most of the guile. It is the influence, the twisted, mazed influence of old age, which we need—besides the capital." And he lowered his voice and talked at length.

A strange tale he told; a motley, nicked, fantastic tale the mere enumeration of whose characters would have been an ethnographical chart of half the world and a sociological survey of many of the Far East's gaudy, picturesque rogues—to name them all, to put their deeds black on white, would have given the judiciary of three continents scavenger work for months to come.

A business tale it was—of that corner of the globe where trading is still a swaggering, clanking adventure, a spirited gamble with all of fate and some of the man-made laws, a high-hearted, two-fisted romance; where Malay raja or Gulf Arab or Burman

dacoit or Afghan ruffian meet expatriate European merchants behind tightly closed rattan shutters, the velvet punkah flopping lazily overhead, and dip their disreputable noses into the same tumbler of honeyed, spiced brandy, and wink at one another as Greek is said to wink at Greek, and play hide-and-seek with nosy British gunboats; where the men of the outer seas and the men of the caravans prefer a handful of clipped Maria Teresa dollars and Chinese candareens and shoe-shaped, archaic Pekinese silver ingots to a draft on the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street or a certified cheque signed by the Rothschilds, the Morgans, or the Bischoffsheims; where yellow men and gold dispute the eternal Asian trade balance with white men and blood, and where a nabob is still a swash-buckler upon the blue hills and the gray waters, and not a swag-bellied, asthmatic, dollar-coining automaton, safely ensconced behind an army of immaculate, almost sacerdotal private secretaries.

The men of the tale—*and* the obbligato greasing of palms and splitting of loot that went with it—

Why—to pick out just a few, quite at random—there had been, in the Himalaya foot-hills, a gentleman of debatable ancestry, a splendid physique, and wretched morals, with a hook nose, high cheek-bones, a neat beard dyed bright blue with indigo, and a tall, rakish fur cap on his shaven bullet head, who had had whispered dealings with another gentleman out of foreign parts who, in spite of his berry-brown complexion and his tight, coquettish Rajput turban, was named Angus Bruce M'Corquodale and talked with a double-barreled Dundee burr fairly redolent of heather and usquebaugh.

Then there had been an Afghan hill-baron whose stronghold was near the Khyber Pass and whose vocation in life consisted in levying tribute from the Indian caravans; who, furthermore, had entered into certain business arrangements with a Welsh captain of a regiment of Goorkha Rifles—and a bag of rupees divided between Afghan and Welshman, the former, true to the disorderly instincts of his race, spending his share of the boodle in a week's scarlet spree among the nautch girls and the wine cups of Peshawar; the latter, like a sober Briton, losing his half in one soul-satisfying bet at the Viceroy's Derby.

Too, there had been a coral-button Manchu Mandarin in far, yellow Shensi, the home of the black-haired race and the black-haired race's gliding, shuffling iniquities, who had split a gorgeous fistful of Mongol graft, politely called *likin*, with a crimson-capped Tibetan lama from Cheng-lo.

Also a rascally Portuguese skipper out of Macao in command over a crew of sloe-eyed, tattooed Marquesan cannibals who, after a mutiny, had salted and peppered and stewed him down in a large billypot—to fall foul of a Yankee skipper, greedy for salvage and negligent of the sea laws.

Finally, came there into the focus a San Francisco customs inspector whose mistress was the half-caste wife of an obese Cantonese curio dealer near Market Street—who, in his turn, was a cousin on his mother's side three times removed of Na T'ung.

And—the answer to this world-flung riddle of trade and graft?

"Opium!" Na T'ung wound up, hissing the word dramatically through clenched teeth, his right hand stabbing out in a great gesture. "First-chop number-one chandoo! Cases and cases of it! We have formed a little company, I and Hop Soy and a few others of the younger generation. But we need more capital—and, well, certain influences in certain quarters. It is difficult to evade the laws of the Americans—"

"Is it?" asked Chon Tzu-p'ei ingenuously.

And they talked for hours, they figured on paper, and talked again, with Huai Ta-Pu a smiling, silent witness; until morning swooned into afternoon and afternoon into evening; until, outside, the houses of Pell Street changed from jagged, sardonic silhouettes into a drab, indefinite smudge punctured here and there with the red and yellow of lighted windows; until finally Na T'ung rose, excited, flushed, a closely-written sheet of paper in his hand.

"Will you sign now and make the bargain tight?" asked Chon Tzu-p'ei.

The other looked rather self-conscious. "You don't mind—" he stammered, "if I—oh—"

"You want to consult your lawyer, Mr. Rosenzweig, first?"

"Well—yes. It is a big deal—and—"

"Of course!" interrupted Chon Tzu-p'ei; and, relieved as well as embarrassed, Na T'ung left, while the money broker exchanged a silent smile with Huai Ta-Pu, and walked over to the farther wall of the room.

There he lifted a corner of the embroidered yellow satin that stretched from ceiling to floor, and disclosed a telephone instrument. He raised the receiver.

"Hello, Central!" he said in his pleasant, well-modulated English he had learned at Miss Rutter's Mission School. "Worth 47608, please!"

Fifteen minutes later, after a hurried but triumphant interview with Hop Soy, Na T'ung was closeted with Jake Rosenzweig, the Bowery shyster lawyer; a small, thin, red-bearded man with a pretentious necktie and doubtful lingerie, who had a trick of smiling, not with his lips, but by elongating his eyes.

He did so now.

"Na T'ung," he said, "a lawyer's like one of them priests—you gotta tell him th' whole truth and take your chances, see? Wottya wanta me? Come through, you old *gannif*, you! Wot is it? An alibi for a moider you're going t' pull off?"

"Oh, don't be a damned ass, Jake!"

"Well, spit it out, young feller! Tell your loving daddy!"

And, the second time that day, the other told his long, twisted, world-flung tale of opium and graft, winding up with the conversation he had had with Chon Tzu-p'ei.

"He's ready to come into the deal," he said, "and"—he smiled a superior smile—"the way I fixed it, he'll take most of the risk as to the money part, and all of the risk if anything slips and there should be exposure—prosecution. Opium—criminal offence, you know—"

"And—you sed old Chon's willing to—"

"Right. We drew up a little agreement. And that's why I am here. I haven't signed it yet. Want your advice first."

"Got it with you?"

"Yes. Here it is."

The lawyer read, considered, and shook his head.

"Want to sting th' old guy, don't you?"

"Yes!"—brutally.

"Well—wait! This paper you drew up is good—but it ain't good enough. I'll make you out one."

And he worked for half an hour and, finally, gave the other a lengthy document, replete with "Whereas," and "Aforesaid," and "Party of the first part."

"This all right for me to sign?" asked Na T'ung.

"Sure." The lawyer pocketed his fee. "You're a bright young lad. Say—if Chon's toined Christian as they say, you oughta toin Jew. That's how smart *you* are!"

"It's a cinch, boys," said Na T'ung late that night to Hop Soy and his associates after they had all signed the document that already bore Chon Tzu-p'ei's signature, that said never a word about opium and graft, but proposed the incorporation of the Shanghai-New York Trading Company with the younger members of the Golden Dragon Guild in control of the directorate at exorbitant salaries, and Chon Tzu-p'ei as one of the chief stockholders. "Yes—a cinch!"

"I'll say it is," agreed Hop Soy. "Chon's going to hold the bag. Sweet and pretty, I call it."

"But—" Yeh Weng, a young commission broker who had once run foul of Detective Bill Devoy, suggested pessimistically, "what about the risk? Opium—oh—" He shuddered at the chilly memory of Sing Sing. "And Chon Tzu-p'ei isn't altogether a fool—"

"But he is almost a Christian," laughed Na T'ung. "His garnered guile has blown away on the wings of the creed of forgiveness—on the brittle, drooping wings of age."

"Still—"

"It's all right, I tell you. Jake Rosen-

zweig says it is—and good old Jake knows the law, doesn't he?"

"Bet your life he does!" concurred Hop Soy.

And, early the next day, Na T'ung took train for San Francisco to pick up the loose ends of the deal and to wire back from time to time that the arrangements were progressing smoothly, that the profits would, in fact, be greater than he had imagined—great enough to leave a decent margin for the stockholders' dividends after the salaries of the company officers had been paid.

"I'm tickled," said Hop Soy, when he had read the latest telegram. "Not only for myself, but too for Chon. I'd hate to see the old boy lose his hard-earned simoleons." He smiled. "What sayeth the *Hsiao King?* 'Youth should be kind to the feebleness of old age!'"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHARMING GUILE OF RIPE AGE.

MEANWHILE, in Pell Street, winter was changing into spring; spring that, even here, amidst the riot and reek, brought its subtle notes of beauty; with the sun setting in the distant west behind massed clouds that were like mountains of silver-glowing lava, the roofs bathed in peacock and violet light, and the windows, through their grime, flashing with a thousand dazzling reflections.

Spring in the nostalgic blooms of far Asia that grew on the crazy birds'-nest balcony of the joss temple—

Spring in the tiny bouquet of violets pinned to Miss Rutter's sober dress—

Spring, too, in the tough old heart of Huai Ta-Pu—once more a member in good standing of the Golden Dragon Guild, his debts paid, his face regained, thanks to his former enemy, who hovered about him like an obese and protecting shadow. "Why," said Miss Rutter, "Chon Tzu-p'ei is a better Christian than many a fine gentleman who has his private pew in a Fifth Avenue church!"

Four nights a week, Huai Ta-Pu ambled over to the Honorable Pavilion of Tranquil Longevity where he sat, a cup of lukewarm rice gin at his elbow, a smoke-stained bamboo pipe betwen his yellow, stumpy teeth, his wrinkled hands shuffling the deck of painted, archaic Chinese pasteboards; playing, as in former years, the twisted, baroque games of the past, games of Manchu and Fish-skin Tartar—"patting green butterflies," and "ladies on horseback," and "hey-oh! flies the kite!" Chiefly the last.

During his early days after his return to Pell Street, his only opponent was Chon Tzu-p'ei; and it was due to the latter's gentle suggestion that, presently, some of the younger men joined them. Used to such rather more psychological than logical American pastimes as poker and auction-bridge, they found the intricacies and innumerable rules of the ancient Tartar games at first confusing. But, with that gambling instinct which is the core of Mongol character, they continued playing and, after a while, fell under the insidious spell of the game until the evening hour of "hey-oh; flies the kite!" had become a habit.

If, from the start, the older members never joined, not even for a single round, but preferred to watch, whispering to each other in undertones, the younger did not trouble to inquire into the reasons; or, when they did, agreed with Hop Soy's dictum in crude English that—"hell's bells! those old skinflints haven't got enough guts to risk a phony dime on a sure thing, see?"

Thus, incongruously, the supercilious, American-born youth of Pell Street helped to revive at least one of the old-world, Chinese institutions which, congenitally, they affected to despise. Poker and auction-bridge were forgotten—the mazed game of the kite got into their very blood—and by spring, four nights a week, with Chon Tzu-p'ei, they gathered about the table to bet their money against that of Huai Ta-Pu who was the "honorable kite-flier," or banker.

"Hey-oh! flies the kite!" would come the latter's high-pitched, wheezy yell, and his agile fingers would shuffle and deal with marvelous speed.

Clickety-clickety-click! would come the

song of the copper and ivory chips; and, like a morose echo, the duller notes of the dice marked with Mandarin characters: *chi* and *jên* and *pai ma* and an elaborate double hieroglyphic which read "the Ocean of Boundless Harmony" and—typically, saturninely Mongol—meant that he who threw it lost his wager.

An angry *shsh* enjoining silence; a cracking of bank-notes; a tense pause followed by the dry thud of the dice; the cards dropping softly on the duffel of the gaming table—here and there, deep-breathed, staccato exclamations. Then:

"Hey-oh! the kite flies—flies swiftly, swiftly the kite!" Huai Ta-Pu would shout as the winning card, backed by the right dice, would swoop like a carrion hawk from his clawlike fingers that curled a moment later around chips and counters and bank-notes.

Or, from one of the players: "Hey-oh! the kite sinks—sinks gently, gently, the kite!" as they threw the *chi* or the *jên*, while the winning card fluttered their way.

But they lost more often than they won, nor was it the dealer's chance. For even when one of them bid in and bought the bank, the net gain at the end of the evening was nearly always, somehow, with Huai Ta-Pu. And thus, if at first they had played because of Chon Tzu-p'ei's mild suggestion, with a sort of sneering, pitying tolerance for the aged Huai Ta-Pu who liked the pastimes of his youth, they played now with the bitter intent to win, to wipe out their losses which, gradually, were mounting from tens to hundreds and from hundreds to thousands—with the older men, Nag Hong Fah and Chin Shan and Yu Ch'ang, still watching the game, whispering to each other in gliding, ironic undertones and frequent quotations from the classics—

"Ah—" said Yu Ch'ang, the priest, "careless showing of money excites to robbery, as a woman adorning herself excites to lust!"

"Indeed!" agreed Nag Hong Fah, rubbing his pudgy, dimpled hands. "Extravagance leads to insubordination and parsimony to meanness. It is better to be mean than to be extravagant—"

"Dry up, for God's sake!" mumbled Hop Soy thickly, as, with trembling fingers, he tossed on the table his I. O. U. for three hundred and fifty dollars—which Huai Ta-Pu refused to accept.

But the latter reconsidered, pocketed the I. O. U., and passed over its equivalent in chips, when, gently, even apologetically, Chon Tzu-p'ei said that he would guarantee his "young friend's debt." And the older members of the Golden Dragon Guild looked at each other, smiling and winking heavy, opium-reddened eyelids, while Hop Soy, though in a voice that held no more than a fraction of his usual mocking certitude, whispered to Yeh Weng that—sure enough—Chon Tzu-p'ei was almost a Christian!

"Generous cuss, ain't he?" replied the other.

And, while the dice clicked again, Nag Hong Fah bent his lips to Yu Ch'ang's ear.

"Should we not fear the snake," he inquired in accents that throbbed with intense admiration, "even if it were ornamented with jewels?"

Thus the game rose higher and higher, until when May came and washed over the town with the lazy, mellow gold of southern winds, it was a scandal in the nostrils of Pell Street; until many a slim young, slant-eyed, raven-haired wife spoiled the evening rice with tears; until even Jerry Maguire, the captain of the police precinct, though prone to condone human frailties with the wide mantle of his personal laxity, took notice and summoned Detective Bill Devoy—who shrugged his shoulders.

"Aw, cap!" he said, "Let 'em smoke their little pipes and gamble their little piles. They ain't harmin' nobody—"

"It's your beat—and your responsibility!" warned the other.

"Well, s'pose we share this—now—responsibility?" countered Bill Devoy, and he slipped a roll of greenbacks, redolent of opium and Cantonese condiments, into his superior's fist.

"Oh—sugar!" exclaimed the latter.

It was June before Na T'ung, out at the coast, had greased the last palm and seen on

its much-split, spider-webby, furtive sort of way, packed in cases marked "toilet articles," the tins of treacly opium, still flavored with the greed of Afghan chief and Marquesan cannibals and Yankee skipper.

Arrived in New York, flushed with success, he went directly from the railway station to the Honorable Pavilion of Tranquil Longevity where the evening game of "Hey-oh! flies the kite!" was in full swing, with Huai Ta-Pu in the banker's seat, at his elbow, in neat rows of white and green and purple, the chips that represented his winnings.

"Double the bet!" peaked a viscous, sobbing scream as Na T'ung entered.

He looked, blinking against the lamps that glowed with an unhealthy, coppery red through the coiling vapors of poppy and tobacco. He saw the eager faces bending close over the duffel, the twitching fingers, the glistening, opaque eyes, the tense-lined foreheads studded with perspiration, the sagging, quivering lips mumbling their bets—and his nostrils dilated sensuously—almost automatically his hand reached in his pocket and came out with a roll of bills.

"Ah!" he breathed deeply. He, too, was a Mongol, a gambler to the core.

He dropped into a seat, tossed a hundred dollars to the banker.

"Chips!" he demanded curtly.

"You—oh—know this game?" asked Chon Tzu-p'ei.

"Yes, yes!"—and to Huai-Ta-Pu: "Deal the cards—deal!"

He played craftily, warily; for he was from California where, perhaps because of the nearness of yellow Asia, the customs, both good and bad, of China have gripped tougher root than in the gray, chilly soil of the Atlantic littoral. He knew how to "fly the kite," how to slither the cards across the table with the broad nail of the thumb, how to toss the dice with the orthodox, jerky twist of the wrist.

"Sink or fly—and a bet on the *chi*—a triple bet on the *jên!*" he singsonged; and Huai Ta-Pu looked significantly, questioningly, at Chon Tzu-p'ei who inclined his head, almost imperceptibly.

"Hey-oh! the kite—let the kite fly!" laughed Na T'ung.

There was a little dry, dramatic click as the dice leaped from Huai Ta-Pu's nimble fingers and began their erratic journey, as the cards swooped down, as finally, with the Scarlet Card of the Second King of Heaven falling above the one painted with the Pagoda of Blessed Ecstasy, and with two of the dice showing the Ocean of Boundless Harmony, the banker made a triple point and swept the board clean of all wagers, including Na T'ung's—who looked puzzled.

"Damn!" muttered Hop Soy, fingering his diminishing pile. The players coughed, whispered, appealed to the gods of chance.

"Help me, O Spiritual Precious One!" mumbled Yeh Weng, addressing his pet Taoist divinity.

Then, once more, the bets placed, the dice jerked away from Huai Ta-Pu's hands like malign and sentient beings; the cards dropped, swiftly, mockingly. And again the banker scored.

It was after Huai Ta-Pu had tossed the Ocean of Boundless Harmony for the fifth time that, suddenly, Na T'ung raised his hands and enjoined silence.

"Huai Ta-Pu," he said, "you cheat!"

And—through the younger men's hectic chorus of curses and threats and cries of rage, through the older men's echoing chorus of gurgling, homeric laughter—he went on, dry and hard:

"I am from San Francisco. I am familiar with the trick of scooping the dice with the edge of the card. An exquisite trick! But there's not a highbinder in California who doesn't know it!"

"So do others—in New York—nor are they necessarily highbinders," suggested Nag Tong Fah, nudging Chin Shan.

"Indeed!" The latter shook with gargantuan mirth. "Others, too, know the trick, from the memory of the dead years when they used to play the kite game with Huai Ta-Pu—who won—always won!"

And again the older members of the Guild broke into hooting laughter; the younger rose in a body and advanced toward the imperturbable Huai Ta-Pu, yellow hands stretching like claws, eyes glistening, lips mouthing foul threats, when, through the turmoil, Chon Tzu-p'ei's voice cut like a sword.

"Brothers," he said, "you are wrong. Huai Ta-Pu does not cheat!"

"He used to," cackled Nag Hong Fah.

"Perhaps. But he—ah—how do the foreign devils say—he has reformed, in everything. No—he does not cheat!"

"I saw him palm the cards!" insisted Na T'ung.

"Yes," came Hop Soy's thick, whining sob. "That's why we've been losing—thousands—thousands—"

"I guaranteed your losses!" suggested Chon Tzu-p'ei, mildly.

"Yes! And you took as security the cow and the unborn calf!"

"Am I not old and feeble? And, being old and feeble, is it not proper that I should look after my interests to the best of my ability?" He paused. "I repeat," he went on, "Huai Ta-Pu does not cheat."

"Prove it," demanded Na T'ung.

"I will—to-morrow."

"Prove it now!"

"To-morrow!" reiterated the old money broker. "To-morrow morning at my house, Na T'ung, at nine o'clock!"

And he left the Honorable Pavilion of Tranquil Longevity, followed by Huai Ta-Pu, whose mocking, high-pitched laughter fell like a blight.

Na T'ung fell prey to a vague uneasiness the next morning when he went through the usual, stilted ceremonial among the silken cushions and perfumed sticks of Chon Tzu-pe'i who sat by the side of Huai Ta-Pu and smiled upon his visitor as a father smiles upon a naughty, prattling babe.

"Little brother," he said, sliding a fan from his sleeve and opening it with exasperating slowness, "was there not once a wise man who remarked that oversureness withers a man's common sense as the moon withers the lotus beds?"

Na T'ung flashed an oblique glance at him. Again he was conscious of vague uneasiness creeping over him on silent, unclean feet. But, almost immediately he felt reassured when his hand, in his pocket, touched the contract which—Jake Rosenzweig had told him—gave to him and his young associates control of the profits of the Shanghai-New York Trading Company, while it left whatever risk of exposure there might be to the money broker.

"Good old Jake!" he said in his thoughts; then, in a loud voice, smiling superciliously: "I didn't come here to bandy quotations from the classics. I came because you said you'd prove—"

"You yourself will prove it!" interrupted the other.

"*I?*" Na T'ung was speechless with astonishment while Huai Ta-Pu rocked to and fro in a sudden paroxysm of mirth.

"Yes," softly breathed Chon Tzu-p'ei. "You yourself will prove to the Guild that Huai Ta-Pu does not cheat when he flies the kite. You will prove it—and your young friends. How? Ah—by playing with him to-night, and to-morrow night, and every night for weeks to come. By playing with him—and—maybe"—his voice dropped to a gliding question—"by losing to him?"

"Buddha grant it!" said Huai Ta-Pu hypocritically.

"And why, pray," came Na T'ung's sardonic question, "should I do this? Perhaps because you and Huai Ta-Pu are old? Perhaps because you want me to save your faces—because you think me a fool?"

"No. Not a fool. Only a youth whose rashness is as the gleaming ax that hacks at the root of wisdom. Also because there is—ah—a certain trading company of which I am the chief stockholder—and, furthermore, a certain foreign devil called Jake Rosenzweig—"

"Jake—Rosen—" Na T'ung's voice stammered, with overwhelming suspicion.

"Yes. A most estimable lawyer—a most estimable friend. *My* lawyer—*my* friend these many years! A man of most exquisite and refined guile to whom I telephoned shortly after you came to me, a few months ago, speaking about opium and the profits to be derived therefrom! A man who knows how to twist and strangle the written words of a contract until they scream for mercy! A man who knows how to clothe a lie with all the charming, white vestments of truth! A man who, belike, can draw up a document, signed by you, by your young associates, and also by myself, that, if shown in the foolish courts of the foolish foreign barbarians, might prove that I, being a silly

old man, a fat, useless, weak-minded beetle of a man, am innocent of doing wrong while you—"

He slurred, paused; then, as the door opened and Jake Rosenzweig came in, smiling, debonair, a big black cigar sticking from his lips at a truculent angle—"Mr. Rosenzweig! Will you not explain to this rash young man why—"

The lawyer laughed.

"Sure I will." He turned to Na T'ung. "You're stung! Stung good and proper!"

"You—" Na T'ung was choking with rage. "You double-crossed me!"

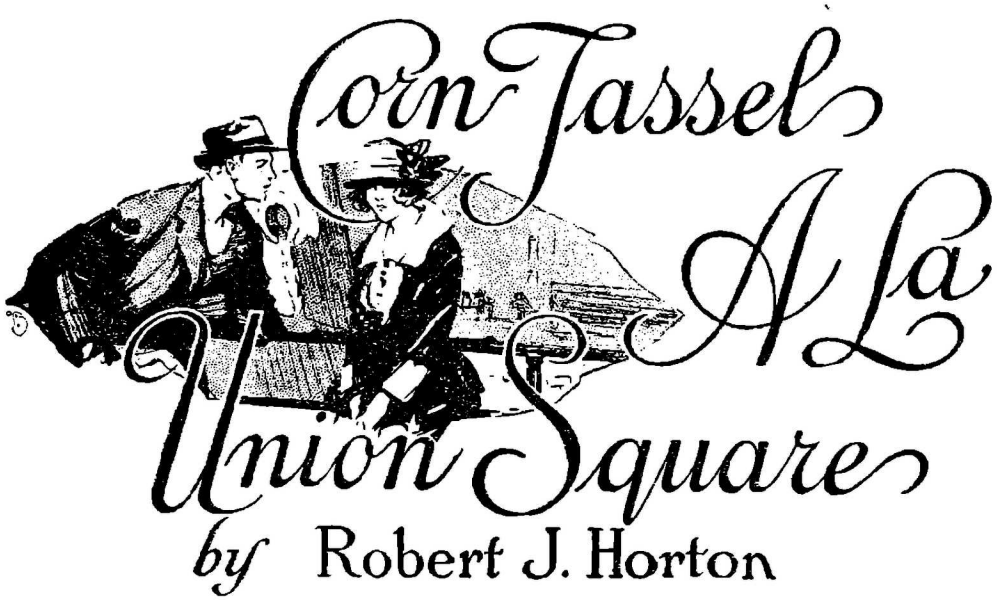
"Aw—keep your shoit on! Woids don't hoit none! And, as for being a sheeny—why—you ain't got enough brains to be one, see?"

And it was hours later that Chon Tzu-p'ei, kneading with loving hands the opium cube which the flame was gradually changing into amber and gold, remarked, apropos of nothing:

"Life to the young is a jest that is both obscene and ironic—while to the old—ah!"

And he was silent, and smiled beatifically.

(The end.)



Corn Tassel A La Union Square

by Robert J. Horton

HERE we have William Grant, late of the land of waving corn—Nebraska—buying a handful of dates from a push-cart merchant at Fourth Avenue and Fourteenth Street.

William was in a retrospective mood. It was along about the time of the annual Ak-Sar-Ben festival out in Omaha, and it would be the first time he had missed this great mid-West event since he had arrived at the festival age.

And here he was in the city of festivals—the town of perpetual carnival, with a three-ring circus in as many blocks—and something was lacking!

With the equivalent of a dozen side-shows on Fourteenth Street; with hand-organs and street-pianos and a casual band or two providing music; with peanuts and candy and red lemonade handy; with display windows and restaurant fronts putting up as good an exhibit as any State fair could boast; and with a dense and colorful crowd jamming the walks—talking, laughing, shouting—there were all the appurtenances, props, plants, and echoes of a carnival-fair-festival except—*except!*

Leave it to youth—for William Grant was young—to ferret out the exceptions to every rule and condition, as well as make them. It works both ways. Youth is always a fifty-fifty proposition.

William munched his dates and reflected upon the very peculiar thing which he had discovered about the big city. It wasn't enough to view buildings so large that Omaha's City Hall, the *Bee* structure, and the Hotel Fontenelle might be dumped into them, leaving enough space to house Nebraska's capitol; it wasn't sufficient to walk along a thoroughfare so brightly lighted that it would be as easy to pick a pin off the pavement at night as it would be to pluck a pitchfork out of a Nebraskan stubble-field at noonday; nor was it fully satisfying just to watch the brilliant traffic throngs on the finest avenue in the world.

These things were in themselves enough to hold the interest of any new arrival spending his first day or two in Gotham. But after that first amazing inspection it was necessary to have companionship to thoroughly enjoy them. Sights to be most truly appreciated must be spoken as well as seen.

At least, this was the way William felt about it.

Three months before he had stood in a Nebraskan corn-field and looked at the souvenir postal-cards of New York that a traveling salesman had given a friend of his in the hotel in town. And through the brazen medium of those lithographed caricatures of Manhattan's beauties the city had sounded its call. William heard and two weeks afterward he shed his blue overalls, donned his second best, packed his Sunday best in a glossy fiber suit-case and came on.

Eventually he was instaled in the second floor front hallroom at Mrs. Pinney's boarding-house—beg pardon! Mrs. Pinney's *select* boarding-house. She selected those who could and would pay and rejected those who couldn't or wouldn't, or something like that.

Next, he found employment in the shipping department of a large and excellent mercantile establishment on Fourteenth Street. (You may as well know right now that this story never gets farther north than Eighteenth Street except in the reader's imagination.)

In the course of the two months and a half which followed he won two fights and one promotion in his department: had his salary raised; bought a straw hat and a knitted tie and wore both out and replaced them with fall models and an overcoat added; visited Coney Island and the Aquarium; made quite a few acquaintances, but—*but!*

He didn't think very much of the crowd at Mrs. Pinney's, for instance. They were all in their respective ruts and young people who come to the city have to make their own ruts.

Martin, the bookkeeper, was an example. William had gone out with him three times. Each time they had repaired to the same restaurant and had eaten the same sort of dinner, served by the same waiter.

"I've been getting my meals from this same waiter now for five years," Mr. Martin had remarked with pride.

They had bought the same evening paper from the same man and had gone to the same poolroom for a game of pool each time. And on each occasion Martin had taken out his big silver watch at exactly half past nine, compared his time with that shown by the house clock, remarked upon its accuracy, and suggested bed.

William, with poor grace, had pleaded a previous engagement on the fourth invitation and had not received one since.

Miss Wilkin had shown promise at first, but later had displayed too much intellect.

Seated in a movie palace she had said: "I must take you to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. You will admire the painted landscapes."

As William had been looking at real landscapes in all kinds of weather for twenty-two and a half years this offer had not appealed particularly.

And Miss Wilkin had read all the movie titles aloud and criticized and forcasted the plots.

"Crude—very crude!" had been her comment when the hero jumped from a three-story building, vaulted a high stone wall, knocked down three of the assistant villains, swam a flooded river and rescued the charming maiden locked in the abandoned cabin on the rocky cliff.

On the way home she had talked of antiques and tapestries and things like that—of which William had never heard—

for she worked in an art store. In all her talk about art the *r* was silent and so was William.

Others of Mrs. Pinney's contingent had disappointed and William did not especially fancy running about with the people whom he worked with, or saw every day at dinner.

Maybe he just yearned for fresh faces or it might have been that he possessed that little spark of romance in his nature which is always looking for the thing that is a little farther away, or unseen, or out of the usual. You never can tell about these fellows from the country. The city plays queer tricks with them, and gets some weird, awe-inspiring ones played on itself in return.

Anyway, William looked to fresh fields for the adventure and companionship that he craved.

This evening, having finished his dates, he wandered into Union Square and was instantly drawn to a small plot of ground within the shadow of a big battle-ship which the navy had erected as an advertising broadside in its battle for recruits.

But the imitation battle-ship, or what it portended, did not furnish the attraction for William.

The thing which drew him was the sight of a cluster of stalks of corn in the demonstration-garden in the southeast corner of the Square.

The long, sear, yellow leaves rustling in the wind, and the gold and crimson silk that dangled from the ears, tempting kids and grown-ups alike, sent his thoughts scuttling over vast areas to his native State, and thus enhanced the exquisite loneliness of the city.

His gaze and fancy quickly changed to one of speculative interest, however, and he began to appraise the corn. The height and thickness of the stalks, the size of the ears and their plumpness—well, he had seen better corn. Certainly this had nothing on the Nebraska varieties, if it was as good. He had his doubts. It—

First by intuition and then by sly observation he became aware of a presence beside him, leaning on the rail and looking at the corn. It was a slim sort of a presence, not so tall as he was, and it had a pair of marvelous big dark eyes. The kind of eyes that always seem to be asking one a question and to be secretly laughing at the answer, unspoken.

"Why, isn't it good corn?" asked a pretty voice.

William faced the girl who had paused beside him and showed his surprise.

"Why, I dunno; isn't it all right?" he questioned in reply.

"You said it wasn't," she answered, looking at him frankly.

"Did I? Well, I must have been talking without knowing it. It's all right, I guess —for *Eastern* corn."

"Oh!" She tilted her head and stepped back from the rail.

William couldn't see her very well, for it was already dark. But he caught the sparkle of her eyes and the flash of her smile. He smiled back good naturedly and a wee bit sheepishly.

"I mean our corn is much higher, that's all," he explained hastily.

"Where is *our* corn?" she asked with unmistakable interest.

"In Nebraska, I meant. That's where I came from. It grows 'way higher than my head out there."

"You're pretty tall at that," she speculated. "Have you got a farm?"

"No, but my grandfather's got one of the best in Powell County. I used to work on it."

"You must know a lot about it," she observed uncertainly.

"I've got lots to learn yet," he said generously. "Look at that golden tassel on that ear"—he pulled off a plume that shone like spun gold in the faint lamp-light— "that's the color of the girls' hair out where I come from. Ain't it pretty?"

"I—guess so. Do you like that color?"

"I love it!" said William, true to a dozen past queens of Ak-Sar-Ben.

He gave her the golden tassel and she took it with a pretty shrug of her shoulders. Again he caught the flash of her smile and the sparkle of her eyes. Some good-looker, this girl.

"You live here?" she asked carelessly.

"I'm working over in the shipping department at Henny's."

"I gotta go—gee! I'm late to supper." She turned away quickly.

William lifted his new fall hat—the brown one, with the green band.

"Good-by," he said, and then: "Oh, say, do you come by this way often—evenings?"

"That depends," she called back haughtily with another shrug.

William grinned and replaced his hat. He left the miniature corn-patch whistling.

And there you are. That's all there is to it. That's the way they do it. Every hour of every evening in New York young people who never saw each other before are meeting and getting acquainted. The Great God Coincidence—who makes the city his favorite playground—does the introducing. And romance isn't above a demonstration corn-patch!

Early the following evening William Grant was at the trysting place. For in the brief exchange the night previous the rail by the garden plot had become just that.

And he was not disappointed.

Because along about the beginning of the twilight—the city's magic hour—he spied his party walking sedately along.

He strolled toward her nonchalantly, as they stroll when they are positively going to meet some one with a view to making it appear the most extraordinary of accidents.

She was dressed tastefully, but inexpensively. She was slender and *chic*. She was fair, like some beautiful, delicate flower growing among crowding rocks and thus profiting by environment. And—William's heart gave a leap—from under the jaunty little cap which was pressed tight down over her head peeped a wisp of hair the color of a golden corn-tassel.

It had been too dark the night before to ascertain the shade of her hair. But now the proof was there in all its bewitching glory. He was glad he had said that about his favorite color. She had been pleased, of course. Somehow it seemed to William that this was just the sort of a girl that a fellow would be glad to please.

After the preliminary remarks which have to be disposed of on such occasions, William suggested a stroll around the Square.

And now the city of carnival suddenly enveloped him with a new appeal; the glare of the street lights seemed brighter; the music of the hand-organs sounded sweeter; the subdued peals of laughter rang truer; the smiles of passers-by became more intimate. It was as if some magic fairy of the brilliant thoroughfares had touched the scene with her wand and made it blossom with a subtle witchery.

"Let's go to the movies," he suggested suddenly.

"I just love the movies," she said eagerly, and the wisp of golden hair bobbed convincingly to his delight.

"What's your name?" he whispered in the gloom of the picture-palace.

"Margery," she answered softly.

"You can call me Bill," he decided.

She did not criticize the plot, Margery didn't. Nor did she read the titles aloud. Instead, she gripped William's arm when the heroine was in danger and asked him now and then what a word meant.

And afterward they walked again through the shady recesses of the square.

"Ever been to the Metropolitan Museum of Art?" he inquired, remembering something.

"No—there's no use going to them high-toned dancing-places," she replied. "We can go right around the block to Clancy's some night if you want to—lots of the girls go there and it's a straight place. Twenty-five cents, inclooding the lady."

"Let's go to-morrow night," he said eagerly.

"No, no," she said quickly. "Night after to-morrow, maybe—I've got to go home now; I'll leave you here."

"Can't I walk home with you?" he asked, disappointed.

"Some other night, maybe," she half promised.

He caught another glimpse of the golden strand of hair as she sped away calling back "Good night—I've had a perfectly lovely time."

It was enough for William.

Two evenings afterward when he reached the rail by the garden-plot he found that the corn had been cut and taken away. Nothing was left but the dirt-strewn beds

and a few rotting leaves that had once adorned the vegetables there, and the blackboard upon which had been recorded each day the record of growth, cost, and value of the crops.

But the dreary aspect found no echo in his heart, and his thoughts were very far away from other scenes of finished harvest measured by leagues instead of inches.

That night they went to Clancy's. And the golden sheen of Margery's hair was a fitting accomplement to her laughing eyes, bewitching smile, and happy sallies as she taught William steps that he could never have mastered except under such an earnest teacher.

Afterward he walked home with her to a regulation rooming-house on East Eighteenth Street.

"I can't ask you in because we ain't got a parlor, an', anyway, it's late," she explained. "I won't dare to light the gas in my second-floor-back this late. She's awful strict about the hours for the gas—the landlady."

"Maybe I can't meet you as early to-night—to-morrow night," said William, deliberating. "Fellows in the shipping department are going to have some kind of a meeting about an annual ball or something. Tell you what I'll do: I'll write on the blackboard down in the garden-plot what time I can get aroun' and if you want to be there I'd—well, I'd be awful glad."

"I don't believe I can come to-morrow night, but I'll see," said wise Margery.

Which explains how they came to make appointments through the medium of plain white chalk and the blackboard in the deserted garden-patch in the shadow of the good dreadnaught Publicity.

And more than one park frequenter puzzled his brains over the remarkable inscriptions which appeared on that forsaken blackboard.

Such inscriptions, for instance, as:

8.15—B
Can't come—M
Awful sorry—B

Night and morning they passed the blackboard; William, on his way to and from the shipping department at Henny's, and Margery going to and from the drug department at Mallen's.

And then on one beautiful evening in November—one of those irresponsible Indian summer evenings—William had an inspiration. With a piece of blue chalk he had brought from the shipping department he printed in bold letters on the blackboard this legend so fraught with meaning:

I COULD LEARN TO LOVE YOU

Then he took a turn around the block to await the time when Margery might be expected to come to keep the seven o'clock appointment already made.

Happy Hapgood, who worked in a little restaurant on Third Avenue and held this well-fed position by virtue of a talent for marking artistically with chalk the menu on the windows, came along whistling the air of a new popular song.

He saw the inscription on the blackboard, chuckled to himself as he idled about a bit, and then went on across the square whistling as before, and whistling the same tune.

William took up his position at five minutes to seven on a bench where he was wont to wait for Margery. She would come and she would see what he had written on the blackboard; and he would know by her action whether it was safe to say much more positively in words what he had hinted in the chalked characters.

It was, to his notion, a stroke of diplomacy.

Margery came—a bit late, as is wise in such cases.

And she read the inscription on the blackboard.

William's heart missed a few beats. Would she think he was fresh? Or would she understand that he really—

What had happened? Margery was in *tears!* He ran toward her as she left the rail fumbling for her handkerchief.

"Why, Margery! What's the matter? I didn't—"

"Go *away* from me!" she sobbed. "Don't *ever* speak to me again. I hate you. *I hate you!*" And she ran and left him alone with his shattered air-castles tumbling about him.

She had been insulted because he had hinted of what was in his heart! She had been using him, probably, as a mere means of entertainment! Thought of love had never entered her head! While he, William —well, he was done with women. Absolutely done!

And then for the first time he caught the full significance of the big, gray battleship. The navy! Why not? In foreign seas, under tropical skies, merged with a man element—and a man element only—he could live to forget. He didn't stop to realize that it is a poor love affair which has no complications; he only knew he wanted to flee from the scene of his heart's betrayal.

He stepped up to a man in the uniform of a United States seaman.

"Can you tell me how to go about it to enlist in the navy?" he asked.

The seaman eyed him favorably. William's muscular build and clear features were health and youth at its best. He would look mighty well in uniform.

"Just a minute," said the seaman; "there's a recruiting officer right over there on the sidewalk, I'll get him."

In the moment of waiting William's dejected glance roved to the blackboard that had dashed his hopes into the dust.

The seaman, returning with the recruiting officer, stared about in bewilderment. "He was right here—fine lookin' specimen, too. He was right here in this spot a few seconds ago. Now where did he go?"

"What're ye tryin' to do—kid me?" snapped the officer.

"No, *no;* he was right here. Maybe he's around on the other side."

But William wasn't around on the other side. He was bounding up the first flight of stairs in a certain rooming-house in East Eighteenth Street. A lodger going for his evening exercise opened the door in William's face. As soon as he reached the top of the flight he busted right into the second-floor-back without any preliminaries.

And there was Margery—sitting on the narrow bed—sobbing as if her heart would surely break.

William dropped down beside her and took her in his arms.

"Never mind, Margery, it's all a mistake; don't cry, please don't cry!" he soothed.

"I did it to please you," sobbed Margery; "that's why I did it—to—to please—you."

Now the incomprehensible thing about this is that it did not seem the least bit unusual or out of the way for William to be there and to have Margery in his arms. They both accepted the situation as a logical but unexplainable matter of course. For the explanation you must explain youth—something the philosophers have been biting their finger-nails over for centuries.

"It's all a mistake," repeated William. "I can explain it in a minute. Please, don't cry!"

But a damsel distressed is not to be denied the luxury of tears or confession.

"I did it to please you," she wailed; "because you seemed different from a lot of the fellas I know and I—I—wanted you to—to like me. I got Marie, who rooms next to me and who's a' expert in such things, to fix it for me. It took three nights—the night I first met you an' the next, when we went to the movies, an' the next, when I wouldn't meet you, an' then the night of our first dance when you was so pleased I—I was *glad!*"

Her words were drowned in tears.

William, with a look of ever-increasing surprise on his face, held her tight and gently stroked her golden tresses.

"I didn't know, honestly, I didn't—it's all a big mistake, Margery; won't you stop crying and come out with me? I want to show you something."

The landlady appeared in the open doorway.

"Well, of all things!" she exclaimed, and retreated a step when she caught the ferocious glare William directed at her.

"Come away!" urged Marie, who was leaving the next room. "He's her man and they're makin' up after a fight; doncha know anything?"

And the landlady, who was proof against the bombshells of dubious roomers asking credit, showed that she still was susceptible to the wily darts of Cupid, by retreating.

After some time Margery dried her tears, reproved William for entering her room, and consented to accompany him in order that he might prove his emphatic assertion that it all was a mistake.

He led her down to the abandoned garden-plot in the square and pointed at the blackboard.

"See that top line?" he began. "I put that there, all right; but I don't know who wrote the other line. Look! My line is printed in capital letters, and the other is written in common script. Can't you see the difference? And *my* line is printed in *blue* chalk while the other is written in *white!*"

Margery thrillingly viewed again the inscription on the blackboard:

I COULD LEARN TO LOVE YOU

If You Didn't Bleach Your Hair.

"Somebody else came along and wrote in that second line," continued William. "It makes the title of a song they are singing now. I didn't know you had bleached it and if I had of known I wouldn't have cared. I've often wished secretly that your hair was the same color as your dark eyes."

"Are you sure?" she asked demurely. "It 'll get that way again when it fades."

—"Sure? I wouldn't lie to you for the world, girlie." He stepped to the blackboard and with his blue chalk crossed out the second, third, and fourth words of the top line.

A few minutes later as they strolled through the Square, hand in hand, he again was moved to speech.

"You say it took three nights to turn the trick and make chestnut hair gold, but how about that *second* night—the night we first went to the movies—there was a golden wisp of hair peeping out from under your cap *that* night."

"That was the corn-tassel you gave me the very first night, 'member?" she said sweetly.

"Let's go for a ride on a bus!" said William.

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THE TASK

BY RICHARD BUTLER GLAENZER

IT is easier far to gain control
  Over a craft with a score of sails,
Over a gear with a hundred cogs,
Over a raft of a thousand logs,
  Over a road with a million rails,
Than over a single soul.

Single I call it, for one it seems,
  Housed unseen in a single shell;
Yet its journeys and moods in one brief day,
For all its dungeon of rooted clay,
  Wander and grope from heaven to hell,
Swing from morass to the kingdom of dreams!

It is easier far to keep control
  Over a jungle's denizen,
Over a river's swelling course,
Over a gale of blinding force,
  Over an army of maddened men,
Than over a single soul!

Janie and the Waning Glories

by Raymond S. Spears

Author of "Janie Pays a Debt of Honor," "Dancing Laura," "A Shortage in Perfumes," etc.

(A "JANIE FRETE" STORY)

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

JANIE FRETE one day received a communication from one Tremaine Valero, of Racklack County, Nevada, concerning her ranch in the Waning Glory Range and Thirsty Creek Valley. Search in her files disclosed legal documents concerning this property, but Janie had no other knowledge of it. Determined to get to the bottom of the matter she went West in her automobile, alone.

Meanwhile, in Reno, Mrs. Uintah Forelane, who had once unjustly used Janie's name in securing a divorce from her husband, was interested in the Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc., and with Valero in the ranch of which Janie had come into unexpected possession.

On the desert Janie overtook Daries Flange, a cow-man, who had killed a rich and ill-tempered ranch owner, Asra Clement. A posse led by Bleak Grisp, Clement's foreman, was on his trail. Janie helped Flange, and he learned that she was bound for Racklack. A woman called Mother Mountain helped him escape and advised him to make for the old Trenal ranch in the Waning Glories, whose owner had been killed while involved in trouble with the White Face and Marvelando cattle outfits, against whom Mother Mountain warned Flange.

When Mrs. Forelane learned of Clement's death she took possession of papers relating to her partnership with him in Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc. She and Valero discussed Janie Frete, whom Valero had met in the past. He was sure that she would not remember him, and started for the ranch to meet her.

When Janie reached Racklack she examined the county papers relating to the Trenal ranch. A mortgage for one hundred thousand dollars was held by Sage-Alkali and the White Face Cattle Company, at six per cent. The county clerk warned her that there was something wrong about the whole transaction. Then Janie went out and took possession of the deserted ranch. Valero met her there and suggested that she pay the interest on the mortgage, and a part of the principal. She deferred her decision.

Meanwhile Flange had made his way to the ranch, which he thought deserted. He told Janie that his name was Tarcass, and she engaged him as foreman, on condition that he get together an outfit that would "fight for her." She told him that Bleak Grisp was now foreman of the near-by White Face ranch, and that a thousand head of cattle owned by Trenal had disappeared.

CHAPTER XV.

JANIE'S DEAR BOYS.

TARCASS slept late the following morning, as he had a right to do. But by eight o'clock he was sitting down to breakfast in Janie's kitchen, and they ate together. Immediately after breakfast he went with Janie to look at the horse in the alfalfa—and the horse was still eating, his paunch hanging down visibly.

"No use," Tarcass shook his head. "I've got to walk!"

"Can't I give you a lift?" Janie asked. "I've a regular goat of an automobile."

"It might save time," he admitted. "It's five miles north to the Pass—"

"I can run down around the marsh, and take you up there," she said. "I've been around here, some, trying to get my corners and see what is here."

Accordingly, she took her foreman in the

car, swung around the marsh and riding with one side's wheels in a cattle path, the other going over or through whatever sage and lumps were in the way, she drove him up the long slope of the Waning Glories, and fairly over the divide, for the pass was a wide one, and cedar-trees growing in it were scattering. But at the crest she was obliged to stop.

Ahead of them, down the back of the ridge, was a land of breaks, pinnacles and gulches, valleys and tall needles, or fragments of rock, extrusions of volcanic flow, and wear of wind and water upon soft stones. It was a wilderness, grown to parks of trees, and cut by a thousand washes.

"There's where they are." Tarcass swept his arm to take in the wilderness. "I'll hoof it from here."

"Shall I wait for you?" she asked.

"No use—it's—well, right smart ways from here to them; may be it 'll be two days before I come back—and again, may be—um-m—if they think anything, perhaps I won't come back."

"Oh— But I— You—" Janie exclaimed, "I don't want—"

"Don't you worry none about me," he shook his head. "Likely they'll be expecting me!"

With that, he took the water-bag, and a little pack of provisions Janie had insisted on putting up for him, and with a bow, he stalked away down the grade—a tall, splendidly built fellow, with a bit of swagger in his gait, and the pride set well on him, in that environment.

He was soon disappearing slowly among the low cedars, trees two feet through and seven feet high. If she watched, she might have seen him a mile, or two miles distant, but having lost sight of him over a brink, she drove homeward to the ranch, there to await his return with her gang of cowboys.

Janie never had had quite this same feeling before—this being "a ranch queen" as people would say. It was interesting, attractive and even a little wholesome.

There was a responsibility that Janie found stimulating. She pictured in her thoughts the return of Tarcass with the men he had gone to hire.

Her reflections included the handsome youth at Fish Creek ranch, with his leather gauntlets, his fine cowboy hat, his graceful figure and his belt. She recalled the Wild West Show, and from among its riders she recalled one or two—almost boys—who performed wonders with their ropes and who shot their guns recklessly, though with fine accuracy. She had, after a time, made up her mind to being the employer of a very handsome and capable outfit of cowmen, horsemen, and fearless range riders.

Late the following day she found her expectations realized beyond her wildest, most vivid, most astonishing of nightmares. She went out to the alfalfa, to feed a handful of salt to the horse which was her only living companion—and the animal attracted her attention by its certain pride and the upholding of its head.

Already, it had recuperated from the terrific trip it must have had. At least, the hollows between its ribs were visibly filling, and the bloodshot eyes were becoming pretty to look at—there was a thoroughbred look in the animal's lines, and Janie liked a thoroughbred. As she stood by the gate, the horse raised its head and looked up the valley.

Sure enough, there was coming a cavalcade, which in less than an hour trotted up within recognizing distance. In the lead was Tarcass, and by his side was a swarthy little man, with one shoulder much higher than the other; next behind was a man riding alone—a long, lank, broad-shouldered fellow, with a regular jowl of a chin-bone, and a scar that cut one straight cheek in two; two half-breed Indians were next in line, and behind them a dark complexioned fellow with a Mexican peaked hat, and spangles around it for a band, loped along beside a slender youth with a blank, immobile face, fishy gray eyes and a figure as straight as a lodgepole pine-tree.

But as though all these assorted men were not enough—as indeed they were not quite enough—they were driving ahead of them a bunch of horses and it seemed to Janie, when she looked at the horses, that they were as assorted as the men—big, lank homely brutes, one of whom kept trying to bite some of his mates in the flanks; there were two calicoes, and three cream colored

animals; there were blacks, grays and all shades of browns. In all, there was a very respectable little herd of forty or fifty animals, and among them were four ponies with packs lashed on their backs, the ropes lying on with a quite obvious diamond on the canvas wrappings.

"Diamond hitches!" Janie breathed. "Mercy—really—"

As they drew up to where she stood, Janie saw that only three of the men were young; they were not boys; the swarthy little man riding beside Tarcass was old, and he was obviously crippled in his shoulder, but none held a better rein or kept a better seat. Their horsemanship was all perfectly beautiful—without a word, working in perfect unison, they headed the fleet of horses past and clear of her, and the youth with fishy gray eyes and one of the half-breeds ran them at a canter till they turned into the corral.

Tarcass slipped down from the horse he was riding, and raised his hat—toward the swarthy man.

"This here's Burke," he said. "And this is Snowflake!"

The man with the enormously round chin smiled and slid down, hat in hand, and the smile, somehow, caused the scar that was on on his cheek to vanish, or to melt into the general good humor of his countenance.

"Bear-Jaw!" Tarcass indicated the breed who was staring at Janie with stolid wonderment. "The other's Dishpan; Chippy, here—he'll be mad if you ask is he a Mexican. He ain't—but that's a hat he took off a man down in Mexico."

Chippy, dark and sallow, stirred uneasily and grinned with embarrassment.

"That slim fellow—he's Sugar. You'll know him better, after a time, but he ain't what you'd call sociable—is he, Burke?"

Burke turned and looked at the young fellow who was drawing up the corral gate, to close it, having thrown a rope over the end to let a strain from the saddle-horse do the work.

"Not exactly sociable," Burke shook his head. "He kind of rides lonesome himself, mostly."

"And now, boys," Janie asked, "aren't you all hungry?"

"Be we?" Snowflake turned and asked Tarcass, with all seriousness.

"Why—eh—yes," Tarcass grinned. "If she'll let us be, we be."

For an instant, Janie stood drawn up taut like a statue. All her life, she had heard about the gallantry of the Western men, about their bearing toward women, about their friendliness—their chivalry—and now she found herself thrilled as seldom in her life before. It was wonderful—splendid—and it was done so nicely, with such delicacy; Janie's voice at first refused to speak as she repeated in her heart that tribute:

"If she'll let us be, we be!"

"Oh!" Janie cried. "You dear boys!"

And every man of them turned and looked away, as though he had been caught—embarrassed by the eloquence of the young woman who with complete understanding welcomed them all and won them wholly to her service. But Janie, wise beyond her own knowledge, instantly ordered them all up to the kitchen, and before they knew it, Burke was making biscuits, Snowflake peeling spuds, Chippy was cutting wood—all hands were busy getting their supper, which was a feast of good eating.

After supper, and when the dishes had been washed, and the kitchen put to rights, they all gathered around the fire place, to talk over the work to be done.

"You see boys, it's like this," Janie explained. "I've decided to take this ranch, and what's a ranch without cattle? Mr. Trenal had some—"

"Yes, he had cattle," Snowflake said. "Finest beef herd in these parts."

"But—I don't know—there's a mystery about this whole matter—"

"That's right," Burke grinned. "To you, yes—and you're wondering about cattle for your ranch? Course, we'll earn our keep—"

"There's mavericks, over the Waning Glories, in the breaks—nobody's cattle." Chippy suggested. "We could round them up, boys?"

"Sure we could!" Snowflake said. "They'll do for a new-class of a herd. There's right smart of mavericks—young and strays, mostly. Some yearlings—"

"There's some of Trenal's, too—his brands, strayed over there. They've run, now, more 'n a year. Nobody tending them," Burke remarked.

"We'll look around, Miss Frete," Tarcass said, "while we're riding out the lines, and finding corners; we'll sure start something—"

"When we get our bearings, we'll see about stocking the ranch," Janie mused. "I never dreamed of raising cattle—but this country gets into my blood. Isn't it beautiful!"

"Yes, it's some country," Burke assented, and all smiled.

Janie spread down a blue print, showing the lay of the land, and they all gathered around the table to study it, and to get the locations by the compass directions, Janie putting down a ruler, to get the scale of miles.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BIOGRAPHY OF IRVING TRENAL.

IRVING TRENAL was born four years before Janie Frete, and lived his first six years in Westfield, in New York's grape belt. Then he had eight years in New York City, and the next six years saw him prepared for and put through college, where he was the amateur middleweight champion boxer, and was up before the authorities twice to see whether or not he should leave Ithaca without standing upon the order of his going.

However, he escaped with a diploma and attended the graduation exercises, where his departure brought a sigh of relief from a number of particular members of the faculty. Within two years he was assistant superintendent of the Predele Chemical Company, and it seemed as though he must become one of the foremost business men and chemical experts in the whole industry; but one day Janie Frete strolled in upon the company and it fell to the lot of Trenal, at last, to discuss with her the preparation of taws and tans for the fur manufacturing company with which Janie happened to be connected at the moment.

During nearly three months the two worked together before finding exactly the dressing she demanded for ermine skins, especially—ermine being unusually difficult to handle in view of the fact that some of them come in with natural yellow spots in their fur that detract from the whole skin's value. As a little side investigation the two added bleaches to their preservatives, with the result that Janie took to her employers a profound trade secret of great value, not only in treating ermine, but also any other white hair or fur that happened along—a bleach, too, that when used enabled the dyers to give an unusually soft and beautiful luster to splotchy pelts.

A wayward and susceptible young man was not apt to enjoy the company of Janie Frete—even with a huge chemist's apron wrapped about her, with her arms bare to the shoulder, and her hair wrapped up in a bathing cap—without becoming subject to overwhelming feelings of *amour*.

Irving Trenal, having held himself staid and rigid for a long time, and having poured all his best and very numerous talents into the business and art of chemistry, was unquestionably a most attractive man, young and with great promise before him. He had already added to a little fortune very considerably. A little later he must have become one of the main reliances of a world embattled.

He gave Janie his best attentions; he gave her his best service; and at last in an outburst, he offered her everything that he had, or ever would have. The proposal did not come to Janie quite without warning, but she had been so engrossed in the examinations through the countless recipes and varied chemical processes of the fur manufacturing business, that she had ignored the warnings, while she, as usual, carried herself with the utmost reserve and tact—as though any charming young woman could ever hide her fascination by maidenly reticence and rigid propriety!

Trenal was impulsive, but underlying his whole character was a broad base of visionary love of adventure. He had, now, his most difficult episode, and when he had fought his own heart for months, he suddenly gave up and under the plea of broken health, drove westward till beyond the

Rocky Mountains he began to see a land as desolate as the feelings in his own heart.

He went to work in a pack-train for a sectionalizing survey through the Wassacht range; he learned patience throwing diamond hitches over the backs of refractory pack ponies; he learned endurance climbing mountains and carrying water across arid plains; he had no need to find in his soul recklessness in the presence of death; his boxing practise at Cornell enabled him to win for himself the unusual respect given a man whose fists are better than the two guns of any shooting bully.

Trenal drifted from Strawberry River westward through Utah, and even herded sheep one winter on the south side of the Great Salt Lake desert, where a few hundred acres of fresh water marsh and a quirp in the climate made grazing good for lack of deep snow and presence of milder weather.

Then he returned to chemistry, and with three burros and a number of bottles of acids and alkalis, a Bunsen burner, blowpipes and sundry other useful articles, he roamed through western and southern Utah, and wandered out onto the bleak and arid plains of Nevada. There, beyond accurate maps and where he traveled up and down two or three thousand miles in the "back country," without meeting more than a dozen people outside of the towns, he came upon an abandoned ranch so far back that it couldn't be sold or traded — and the owners wouldn't live on it!

He looked it over, and enjoyed the appearance; he had the titles examined, and was satisfied with their certainty of hold; he saw in the place opportunities which must have appalled a man of lesser loneliness. So he now withdrew from the East his little fortune, and with the knowledge and experience he had gained as a hired man, cow-man, sheep-man, horse-man, packer and all around ranch and plainsman, he astonished the landscape with his operations, and in fifteen or eighteen hours toil a day, eased the ache and longing in his soul for the young woman, who had with her best effort, and the very story of her own mistakes and the black mark upon her reputation, and by a cruelty which he knew was false to her nature, endeavored to release him of his chains.

How thoroughly he had dropped from her sight may be seen from the fact that she did not even know he had gone to Nevada, and did not even know that he was buried out there in the plateau deserts, never a day going by that he did not remember her in his conscious thoughts—never a day when he did not endure a pang on her account, if for a minute he eased up on the terrific physical efforts that characterized his ranching.

Like many another man who has carried his sufferings and defeat into desert and mountain places, he grew fairly splendid in his skill. He threw a lariat so well that at an annual round-up it was no uncommon thing for him to break horses with the best of the region at roping and tying.

He cared rather less for firearms, but he could draw and shoot a revolver with a seven inch barrel and 38-40-200 cartridge. He kept a number of good rifles and shot guns in his cabin, and later in his cool, stone, comfortable bungalow, with which he entertained visitors who desired to hunt antelope in the open plain or blacktails and bears back in the mountains and breaks.

His herd of cattle multiplied, and increased in quality and market steer or heifer beef weight. His men were all good workers, but he asked no questions regarding their past and they could come, any hour of the day, and draw their wage to depart —if need be on the swiftest horse he had, and no return required. Indians, breeds, Mexicans, Alcatraces, white men all found him equable and unapproachable in the personal sense—perfectly square and good to work for in the business sense.

Having ample funds, unrestrained energy, and business acumen, his affort was markedly successful, and his ranch developed in a region where many a project had failed for lack of one or other of his combined good qualities.

Away back toward Racklack the Marvelando ranch, with at least as good natural conditions, was always on the verge of failure and collapse, changing hands every year or so during two decades. The White Face Cattle Company, away up to the north, just inside the Silver Break Range, had a sinister

reputation—that of law honesty, which circumvented national, State and unwritten laws with a slippery and sinuous ease.

Two years before Janie Frete arrived at Racklack, the September round up of calves led to trouble. There were only three ranches to graze the three thousand square miles of the Thirsty Creek bottoms, and the mountain brims. Hundreds of square miles of that area was, of course, mere alkali, wholly rootless, and barren.

But there was water usually—of a kind—and scattered grass, white sage which was like by the cattle after the frost, and sundry herbs and leaves where the cattle, roving in little bunches, could wax without starvation.

As the herds increased, they scattered and most of them were in bunches of from ten to thirty head. Large herds were impracticable, simply because the feed was so scattering. Naturally, the cattle grew up wild, and except for the riding out of the cow-men, and the general watchfulness over the whole area, the animals hardly ever saw men. Wild horses grazed with them, almost on an equality of outlawry, until late in August the lines began to be drawn, and the bunches thrown together, in the first place to get the calves with their branded mothers, and in the second place—a little later—to take out the shipping stock for market and the profits.

Trenal invariably bought the highest bred range bulls for his herds, and he as invariably shipped the poorest of his animals—all the old bulls, all the rangy cows, all the beef animals that displayed any least blemish of form, color or quality. No buyer could come in and take the pick of his cattle, but was obliged to pass the very finest animals and take what was offered—but the scrubs from Trenal's herds soon were better than the pick of less carefully selected animals.

Trenal brought in, at once, fifty white face Hereford bulls for breeding—and when the calf round up was on, he discovered that four of those bulls had been thrown away up into the Silver Breaks, among the White Face Cattle Company herds—despite the fresh brands.

This was the beginning of the trouble. Instead of going in and cutting out the bulls, which he had discovered by accident, Trenal went down to the company ranch, and with a slow, soft drawl which he had acquired and cultivated, announced his discovery.

"D'je cut 'em out?" Brank Wullsack the then superintendent demanded, angrily.

"No," Trenal shook his head. "They're forty miles from where they ought to be, and where they crossed the divide—you know, the big alkali sink—there were shod horses, three of them, behind them."

Wullsack's hand dropped to his pistol butt, but Trenal merely looked at him.

"Wullsack," he said, "you know what it means, we've got the evidence, and it happened that Sheriff Pluter was visiting me at the time. We even know who did it. Now you bring *all* my bulls back to my corral—and do it—*pronto!*"

Trenal turned his horse on its hind hoofs and rode away. Wullsack didn't bring them; instead, three of his men drove eleven bulls from out in the Silver Breaks, and from opposite in the Waning Glories. The White Face Cattle Company did not graze as far south as the Rising Sun Range, which was divided up between Trenal and the Marvelando herds.

Wullsack had not dared refuse the demand for the breeding bulls he had rustled out into the White Face Cattle Company herds. They would have turned up in the round ups, later, of course. They would have been cut out and thrown into Trenal's brand stock—and then a little later, they would have been rustled away again in the same way.

But Trenal, holding over Wullsack the certainty of a posse and a round up under the authorities, with the revelations the legal inspection would have made, had driven the bull-rustler into complete restitution without the least difficulty—at the moment.

But the White Face Cattle Company superintendent had to make a showing, and with the example of Trenal's beautiful herds before the owners, Wullsack—also a minority stock-holder—tried by craft to make up some of his own deficits and lack of forehandedness. With some of his men, he managed to get away with scores of Trenal's

calves, carrying them, literally, away up to the north end of his range, and far from any of Trenal's strays.

Then Wullsack and his foreman rode down to Trenal's to look over calves that were being branded there. It was legitimate, and even perfectly proper. At the same time, it was, under the circumstances, a very polite insult.

Trenal entertained his guests for two days. On the first day he took the two men more than seventy miles, having relays of horses for them, to look over the whole herd down the Waning Glories; the following morning, after four hours' sleep, he took them three hours to daybreak, and they rode the whole eastern horizon of the Rising Sun Mountains, and if there was a single calf in any of the bunches of cattle bearing Trenal's lopped-left ear and horned-A brand, which wasn't with its mother, or obviously one of Trenal's calves, and Wullsack didn't see it, it was because Wullsack was blind-tired and the alkali was stinging his eyes.

Trenal, at the end of the two days, said that there were some more cattle over in the Waning Glory breaks, scattering and they'd go out and see them in the morning. Wullsack choked as he confessed he must go back to his own ranch in the morning.

He hadn't seen the branding of calves that he came to see. In fact, the Trenal outfit had only just begun to throw the bunches together out on the range, to field-brand them without a general roundup.

Then one of the accidents that expose the range crook occured. Three of the calves Wullsack had stolen, high-bred little brutes and of all the falsely-branded rustled calves gifted with a homing instinct, came down the Thirsty Creek bottoms, straight through the thirsty hell of alkali, sage and dancing sand storms, and staggering, their tongues hanging out and showing the fresh scars of the Winged-O brands of the White Face Cattle Company on their flanks, and the bloody wattles on their throats.

They were seen by Trenal's foreman, Tepper, as they staggered along, looking for their mamas. He knew one of them, instantly, for it had a forked tail, and he had noticed that double-tail more than a month before, and talked about it as an odd freak. But a mass of beggar-lice burrs had hidden the deformity from the night-riding and hurried Wullsack crowd when they made the illicit brand and dropped the calves out of their range. Tepper brought this calf down on his saddle and all the outfit gathered around and grimly witnessed the damning evidence.

Trenal got into his car with Tepper, rode to Racklack, and after duly making information, started the legal processes that would bring to book the criminal outfit over on the slopes of the Silver Break Range. Wullsack heard before hand what was coming, and left his ranch between days; the attorney for the company admitted the calf stealing, and blamed it all on the overambitious and unscrupulous foreman, who had fled to escape the consequences of his crimes; but the company, according to the attorney, very gladly undertook to reimburse Mr. Trenal for all the damages he had suffered, and it restored all the calves that had been stolen—for a discharged cowman turned up as Trenal's witness and betrayed the exact facts.

One day, in February, Trenal and Tepper left the bungalow to go northward into the half-day spring neighborhood, to look after some horses that had strayed from the alfalfa haystack.

They did not return. Three months later Trenal's body was found in a little pass twenty miles north in the Waning Glory Range. It was identified by his half-empty revolver, a ring that he wore, and his hat which was swinging on a cedar-tree bough, where it had caught. His horse, with its saddle around its bare bones, was found a hundred yards further on.

Up the side of the pass, another skeleton was found, and it was believed from the color of the hair, and some of the rags and the 30-30 rifle that this was what remained of Brank Wullsack, part owner of the White Face Cattle Company, and fugitive charged with stealing calves. In his forehead was a bullet hole, and a bullet that exactly corresponded with those Trenal's revolver fired was lodged in his neck. The rock behind which he had lurked bore the mark of another bullet.

The horse that Tepper rode that morning was found the following fall in a herd of wild horses, or outlaws, with the saddle still on its back, but it had rid itself of the bridle and bit. One of the Marvelando cattle men caught the animal, which was ruined by the saddle sores. When Janie came to the abandoned ranch, Tepper had never been seen since that day.

CHAPTER XVII.

PLANS.

TRENAL'S cowboys, with their employer and foreman gone, had worked on till the body was found by one of them. Then they would have stepped into the management of the ranch themselves, but at this time Tremaine Valero arrived among them, and with a show of authority, paid them off and sent them about their own business—but pleased, nevertheless, by a gift of three saddle horses to each of them. The rest of the horse herd Valero had driven over to the Marvelando ranch and the county paper, kept alive by public notices and various other paid-for advertisements, immediately announced that the ranch belonged to Janie Frete, of New York. Nothing was said about the cattle.

Within a month the White Face Cattle Company brought suit against Janie Frete, service by mail and publication, charging trespass on the section known as the Half-Day Spring, since they claimed to have a quit claim to it. This claim to the spring, on the very edge of Trenal's 100,000 acres, which had always been part of Trenal's range, indicated that the White Face Company was losing no time in gripping the whole northern end of the Thirsty Creek Valley, from the end of the Sunrise Ridge to the north end of their own claims.

In the mean while the cattle that had belonged to Trenal ranged and grazed unattended and at their own free will, but the autumn roundup of calves, during September, had progressed at the Marvelando and White Face ranches without let or hindrance—wholly without outside inspection or even knowledge. But out at Racklack, and over east, at the railroad shipping stations, it was rather common talk that some of the finest beef that ever crossed the range, on the way to feeding, was coming a little later in the season before snow flew.

"And they won't be awful particular about having two brands in the bunches, either!" it was remarked, with sly grins.

With beef on the hoof selling around 9.45 or even 9.60—beef that was running, range fed, around 800 to 1,000 pounds—the coming in of a thousand or two thousand head meant a good deal, especially to the ranches which had been ekeing along for years and years, and now had a windfall to look forward to that must mean from $50,000 up, all velvet, with no more trouble than to bring it in with their own average grade herds.

Who could claim this cattle? Where was there any one with a scrap of paper, with even a look in on the brand, to ride in and cut out the Horned-A cattle of the Thirsty Creek Range?

There was, of course, the common law provision that would put into the hands of the surrogate's court the question of the disposition of the Trenal herd. Nevertheless, when Tremaine Valero and Asra Clement, who was managing stock-holder in the White Face Cattle Company, had seen the legal authorities on their appearance in Racklack, whatever had passed in the office of the judge had been eminently satisfactory all around.

Law of the strays applied, and if the strays remained long enough on the range and in the charge of the two companies who were being trespassed upon, they'd eat their own heads off, so to speak. Their board bill would be very heavy, before long—and selling them off to pay the coast of their feed and attendance would follow in due course—and at no very distant date, either.

As Tremaine Valero had told Janie Frete, Trenal had left papers with the bank at Racklack. These papers had been examined, and Valero had consulted Asra Clement about them; Clement, having a great deal of respect for the business acumen of Uintah Forelane, had suggested that she be brought into the affair, and her ideas on the subject entertained.

Looking through those papers, which

were few and included merely the deeds to the land and a few old accounts, did reveal an odd sheet that had immediately been seized upon by Uintah Forelane. The sheet was a letter which had been written by a woman, in a beautiful script; it was gentle and sweet in its sympathy, but unflinchingly firm in its determination to impress upon Irving Trenal the uselessness of his trying to regard her in any other light than that of an admiring and even intimate friend. "More would be utterly inappropriate and impossible," the woman had written, and she had signed herself: "Janie Frete."

It was, to Mrs. Forelane, rather an odd and even entertaining coincidence that the young woman whose naive and sterling qualities had aroused her own wrath, and awakened in her heart a personal jealousy, especially because Janie had done and was doing successfully what Mrs. Forelane most longed to do—because she was so nearly what Uintah desired to be, without the stress of being Janie's moral equivalent—that Janie Frete should appear at that moment, just when Mrs. Forelane had with feminine spite named her as corespondent in the "secret" papers and evidence that enabled the Forelane's to part, legally, was startling and very suggestive.

Accordingly, Mrs. Forelane had discovered another opportunity, and another idea had occurred to her quick, if wayward and lawless mind. Her spiteful hate seized upon the shining example of independence and ability, to use it in schemes that appeared to the men as mighty good business, as well as right good jokes. Mrs. Forelane's proposals were perfectly plausible, and according to the documents existing or very easily obtained under her skillful management. She urged:

"You see, it would be much easier to settle all this matter, having a woman for a figure-head, and yet so contriving that we do not lose any of the very welcome proceeds. And even if everything does go, regularly as we see they may go—suppose she accepts the responsibility of Trenal's ranch, including the mortgage?

"She is perfectly well able to do so—see her commercial rating here! We gain, in any event. Foreclosure insures our possession; payment insures us the $100,000; and on the side, we have the immediate profit—for whose cattle are they? There is, as you see, no heir or heiress in sight—and the impounding provision, with grazing costs and the indefinite price of care rising against the herds? In two years, the Horned-A brand has disappeared from the range, but there are some mighty find young stock with two other brands on them.

"Seems to me you catch on pretty fast—this Western idea?" Clement had exclaimed with admiration. Valero had, with greater delicacy, conveyed to her his own secret admiration. With great skill and the favor of the vast distances that prevail between Reno and Salt Lake, Uintah had succeeded in permitting each of the two men, according to his own instincts, to discover her favor and revel in the distinction she conferred upon them. When the circumstances of the breaking up of Irving Trenal's affairs following his murder in the mountainous desert plateau, threw them together with the necessity of an understanding and a strict silence, while they obtained the fruits of another's intelligent industry.

Asra Clement was dead, now, by the uncommon fate of a bullet. Valero, perhaps the only real witness that could be brought forward in the matter of Asra Clement's equities out there in the mixed and questionable Nevada speculations and affairs, and Mrs. Uintah Forelane, who had played with fire with desperate hope and determination to wrest a fortune in her own name from the flames, now drew together in Reno, far from the scene of their main chance, and sat upon the estate and affairs of Irving Trenal with condor respect and human greed in their souls.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TO DO SOMETHING BIG—FOR JANIE.

THERE was a good deal of repairing and remaking to do on Janie's ranch buildings, and Tarcass saw to this; Burke and Dishpan, who had had manual training in carpentry at an Indian school, put in window-glass where the bungalow

needed it, and fixed up gates in the fences, repaired roofs of the outbuildings that needed it, and strung another wire around the alfalfa field.

Tarcass and Snowflake, taking the blueprint of the ranch lands, went out looking over the corners, and Chippy, Sugar, and Bear Jaw rode over into the Waning Glory breaks to locate the nucleus of Janie's herd to be. A condition existed away back in that country which enabled them to go with confidence. Trenal's herd had broken up and was scattered, and they knew that these animals had bred, and for two seasons, calves and yearlings had escaped the round ups of the only two ranches in that region.

Moreover, there were mavericks of old back in the breaks—cattle that were outlaws, having run wild from some nester's little herd, or from distant ranches—savage brutes as fleet as deer, and as ugly as grizzly bears, as a rule. But caught young, mavericks of these wild animals would break into ordinary beeves, and eventually find their way to shipping sidings.

Chippy, Sugar, and Bear Jaw would go after these cattle, locate them, and when Janie decided on her brand, would put her mark on them. In a day or two Janie would make up her mind in that regard; in the mean while, the cattle hunters would throw the animals together and work them out of the breaks into Janie's Thirsty Valley range —that was their intention, under the suggestion of Tarcass.

Accordingly, they went over the divide through a pass, and found cattle. They found thirty or thirty-five head away up on the back of the first range, the Waning Glory Ridge. The three took a good look at the animals, and then stopped and held a consultation.

They had found a contingency that hadn't been exactly foreseen; there were a dozen yearlings among these animals, not one branded — but all the others were branded "Horned-A," the mark that identified the Trenal herd. Several calves with the cows hadn't been branded, and there were several old steers. The cattle were less than three miles from Janie's bungalow. The three men sat on their horses, looking at them, saying nothing for a long while.

Then on Chippy's suggestion, they rode on without further disturbing the little bunch. When they looked off across the country, over the knolls, hills, and ridges, they could see in all directions, around from south to west and north, signs that to their quick eyes revealed the presence of other cattle. Little swirls of dust, movements of animals among the low, scattered mountain cedars and other trees, and cattle trails with fresh hoof-prints in them, indicated the presence of small bunches of cows.

The three hunters circled out through the breaks, and toward noon ate their lunch at a sweet-water spring.

"Some mavericks!" Sugar mused. "We can round 'em up and cut 'em out—best beef cattle you ever saw, Chippy!"

"Yes," Chippy admitted, "it 'll 'sprise the little lady, eh?"

"Won't it!" Sugar grinned. "Who the hell owns those brands, anyhow?"

"Park Tavern, over to the White Face ranch, says they're real anxious about the calves—been branding right smart of them, out in the desert. Hasn't been no round up since Trenal got killed up. Looks like —um-m."

They rode in late in the afternoon, just at sunset. Chippy went over to Tarcass, who happened at the moment to be alone, and talked to him. Tarcass called to Snowflake, and the three discussed the observations that Chippy reported.

"Cur'us," Snowflake puzzled. "If we round up all them mavericks, there'll be quite a bunch of them! We can drive them in—"

"Or we can just herd them over there, a while. She ain't particular — you know, there on those grass flats and the marsh. Feed there, for them. You know how things are—we all know. She don't. That's certain.

"Somebody's got to look out for her int'rests. That means us. *They* won't!"

"Not 'cordin' to the hints. Them calves —too—" Snowflake mused. "Hit 'd be convenient — right here, this ranch, and everything. You know how it was when Trenal wasn't killed up. Nice feller, and always minding his own business! She's a friend of hisn—if anybody—"

"Them breaks 'll wring-twist the others. We got the advantage thataway, knowing the country. We can use the blind road, in the big drive. But just the trails, rounding them up. We don't want to get that road too plain. They mout use hit, theirselves!"

Tarcass, after supper, went in and talked to Janie for a few minutes. He suggested that they round up the mavericks over in the breaks, and said it would be good winter feed over there, on the south slopes, and that it would be good feeding, late, in some grass on flats over there.

"Really!" she smiled. "You're finding a little herd for me, already? I'll have to ask your advice, about bringing in some cattle—just so I'll have some."

"Better not buy any yet; we just kind of looked around; we'll have enough to do, for a while. Some of them mavericks is powerful mean and wild—"

"Do tell the boys to take care of themselves!" Janie exclaimed.

"Oh, they're used to doing that!" Tarcass grinned, and later he told the boys in the bunk-house what she had asked, and added his own comment. They all laughed, delighted. Janie, in her way, was plumb amusing.

Snowflake went out with Chippy and the other two the following day, and they drove a number of cattle along through the rough country, toward the small flats where Tarcass had suggested they be herded—not that Janie could have found those flats alone, not in a thousand years! They cut out mavericks, and separted the bunches of cattle into brands and mavericks. In this way, sometimes, as Snowflake remarked, dryly, calves some times lost their mamies.

They were fast, competent workers, and Snowflake managed the men, a wave of his hand sending the ones signaled to hither and yon with all the wild abandon that has made the cattlemen of the West heroes of the public imagination.

The gang of men worked in silence, however. Not one of them ever uttered a shout, and at intervals during their work, one or another would manage to get to some pinnacle or high point, there to look off across the country, watching every wisp of flying dust, noticing the motions of the animals in that land, which was so large that anything moving but emphasized the vast stillness, the motionlessness of the country.

Take care of themselves? They romped down mountains, they swarmed the cattle along wonderful slopes and across terrible washes and gulches. It was the roughest kind of cattle country, and they did not care for the jeopardy they were in, should a horse slip or one of the angry charges of driven and cornered mavericks get a short horn home. Among the fancy animals were occasional big-horned devils who did the thorough breed blood no good — outlaw range cattle which had found shelter from previous pursuit in the deep breaks.

Cutting up the little bunches of cattle was hard work, and mean work. The eyes of the practiced cattlemen, especially Snowflake and Tarcass, saw there a condition that they had known for a long time, but which they had not considered with any care. Now the two talked together, arguing in intervals of contact.

"I tell you—we can do it! Why not?" Snowflake declared, and told Tarcass the lay of the land, and showed it to him as they topped a little divide.

There was before them a wonderful panorama. Behind them, to the east, the Waning Glories stood sharply against the sky, but with the distant Rising Sun Range peaks far beyond. To their right, away to the north, were many mountains more, and Snowflake pointed at a deep slash in one of the ridges there.

"That's the Lost Pass?" Tarcass repeated.

"That's it—and when you are moving, moving fast, with lots of help coming behind, swing wide of that round knob, there, cut through by that ridge—be sure you keep the yellow banks on the left, but let your help go to the left of it—that looks the easy way, and everything. Get by that, and ten miles further, swing over to the left, sharp, up the narrow valley, and you'll see a little cañon in the wall.

"It looks like a blind cañon, but go through, and you'll find water; and then a good spring. Good feed for the horse, there, and it's only three days out the other side —saves two weeks any other way through

that country. Burke found it. Reg-lar railroad pass, that; no grade at all."

"You're thinking beef—"

"I know it! What've been doing, do you think? We know!"

"I'd sure like to do something—something *big* for that girl!"

"Reckon everybody feels thataway," Snowflake grinned, "I do."

Accordingly, they called to the others, as they had a chance, and after that the work was a good deal easier, and progressed far more rapidly, but it was no less wild and full of excitement, not less desperate in its speed and horsemanship. From that time, too, as they passed near one another, they exchanged grins—grins of great self-satisfaction, for if ever cattle men were doing skillful work, and having a lot of fun doing it, they were.

One day was like another, after that. The little band of cattle hunters ransacked the Waning Glory breaks, and when they had cleared the immediate vicinity of the scattered animals which they were rounding up, they worked far to the north and far to the south.

Toward the last, Tarcass explained to Janie that they would have to work nights, because they were driving the animals so far that the hot sun bothered them, and it was a long way between drinks in some part of the range. But, as they were working by moonlight, they were under no special handicap—the moon, out there, was as bright as day, though distant objects and distant operations were obscure.

Their later operations, however, called for a lot of skillful work: they found not only Horned-A and maverick in large numbers, but they found the Serpent brand of the Marvelando ranch and the Y—R in the Bit Ring brand of the White Face Cattle Company, and these called for their hardest work, breaking up the little bunches and turning back the animals which they didn't want.

They worked famously, long days and long nights, one or both, as the circumstances required. Janie, realizing how tired they must be at times, spared nothing to show her appreciation. Whatever results would show from this tremendous effort, she would not question—she wanted a few cattle, she said, and then the ranch would, the following year, stock up according to their ideas of what so large a ranch should have.

She went out with Tarcass, and returned by a road through the breaks, on an automobile truck, bringing in ample supplies; then she brought in a five-gallon can of ice-cream in an ice-barrel; Sundays, even though the men wouldn't rest, she had a big feast for them all, with the best that could be cooked or obtained—pies, cakes, and sweetmeats, candys that she had sent in by the keg full.

It was tremendous work, and nothing tasted better than the candy; the cowboys craved sugar, and she supplied it, flavored with old standard flavors, lemon, cinnamon, chocolate, peppermint, wintergreen, anise, and the rest. The candy was put where the men could grab a handful at any time—a little touch that cost Janie only a few dollars, but which delighted the workers beyond anything else.

Janie saw that they were going their own ways, doing their work according to the occasion, and Tarcass, commonly with Snowflake to advise him or discuss matters, took care of all the general work and details. He knew his business, and every day or two, he would tell Janie about the lay of the land, or talk about the fences, and the day's adventures—but Janie was careful not to inquire beyond what he told.

He was sensitive, and he grew confused if she pressed him. He could talk a good deal, about some things—but when it came to details of the round up and the ranch work, he seemed to feel that she should not trespass on his own particular province. He had his own way.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOCUMENTS WELL TAKEN CARE OF.

A CERTIFIED copy of all the documents relating to the Irving Trenal lands, which included the mortgage against them, and the surrogate's acceptance of the antemortem transfer of the property to Janie Frete, was in their hands

when Valero and Mrs. Forelane again sat in intimate consultation over their affairs on Credo Hill, where her real estate office was built with artistic design and kept up with adequate care.

Valero approached the subject that must first be disposed of, and he was obliged to use discretion.

"What will be the outcome of our losing Clement as silent partner?" he asked.

"Are you willing to trust me, Tremaine?" she asked, quietly.

"Oh—certainly! With—everything!" he exclaimed.

"We can't possibly let any one know about this," she continued, as she leveled a hard gaze at him. "You know—Clement and I had merely a—well, a gentleman's agreement. The contingency that one or other of us might drop out suddenly by bullet or—say—an operation—any way!—was only referred to once.

"We had an understanding, then, that which ever way the accident befell, as regards our business relations, the survivor should immediately cover all the tracks. It's a mere bridle path to cover, you know. A matter of one or two papers, and a—well, a match.

"Is that so!" Valero exclaimed, his face beaming. "Then—we—you and I—it's all ours?"

"I inherit his share, without the formality of having the surrogate pass on the matter. Perhaps, as a law-abiding precaution, when it comes to the income tax, I shall astonish the district where I make my return. That is all."

"The Sage-Alkali Lands — Incorporated?" he asked, rather penetratingly.

"You never heard of dummy incorporators?" she asked, astonished.

He laughed, relieved. Asra Clement, she assured him, had fallen from their affairs absolutely, when the bullet of Daries Flange broke the man's heart and spinal column. The specter of the Widow Clement coming into the deals that had been prepared was in a way as little liked by Valero as by the dashing and competent Uintah Forelane.

Uintah, with her hand in his, gave him just a few hints and a bit of necessary assurance—details were not necessary; they were even dangerous and better known to her alone, as he well understood. At the same time, when Mrs. Clement's attorney should appear—Valero needed to know that he could with perfect safety sit tight and tell nothing.

"Every document, every scrap of paper," Uintah declared, emphatically, "is as well taken care of as in our Trenal-Frete affair; in fact much more carefully taken care of, for not one of them is a matter of record. Indeed; Clement never had but one full signature of mine—and I've taken care of that.

"Naturally, there isn't any pink note, or perfumed letter paper with half signatures and kiss-brands, either. Not a single one that contains any least business reference. Naturally, he had a few things to stimulate his imagination — quite crude and even vulgar touches were necessary, in his case, too, and I'm quite certain"—she smiled archly—"that one or two of these did fall into the hands of a female person whose imagination was equally stimulated by them!

"At the same time, unless he talked, the widow cannot possibly know a thing about our business—and they were purely business relations so far as my feelings were concerned. Could they have been otherwise, after we—you and I—met?

"Anyhow, you knew him—his idea of women, till he discovered I was what I am in business affairs. I'm sure he told no one about the business—not even his attorney, who was his wife's brother, you know."

"I didn't know that," Valero said, and for a minute the business sesssion adjourned for affections, as she laughed. Then, with a rap on the table, she called the meeting to order again.

"Clement's ranch?" he asked.

"The White Face Cattle Company? It's a stock company, one thousand shares, no par value. The stock is scattered around a little, but I have, now, five hundred and twenty shares in the company."

"What!" Valero gasped. "Control!"

"Yes; Brank Wullsack had one hundred and fifty shares, and when he was declared dead, Clement saw to it that I obtained that stock. A widow of one of Clement's associates had another one hundred and fifty

shares, and I bought that—there had been no dividends on it, and you know how things were out here two years ago. When Clement was killed—he was the practical cattleman in the company, you know—I shot a telegram to a certain friend of mine.

"A banker in a little town in Utah saw a bid of twenty on the Salt Lake bulletin-board, which had been there a day or two, and immediately he sold. I thus obtained two hundred shares. In the meanwhile, I found in the stockholders' list twenty shares, and paid twenty-five for them. It was, really, very simple."

"And now you have fifty-two per cent of a ranch with a thousand head of cattle of its own, and—ah—equities in a thousand or so more head. Call it one thousand five hundred head with rock bottom value of eighty dollars—"

"It sounds very sordid, your estimating me in that way—at fifty-two per cent of one thousand five hundred times eighty dollars! All clear, too—and you?"

"The Marvelando—" He hesitated at this demand for a showdown. She stiffened ever so little, her lips losing their loose willingness. "We've a good herd—probably six hundred beef, besides breeders, and then, of course—"

"A fifty-fifty divy on the Trenal speculation?" she asked.

"Fifty-fifty?" he whispered. "But you've—"

"Oh—I waive my two-thirds!" she shook her head. "Clement's and mine—you'll attend to the details, and it wouldn't be equitable, really, for me to be so selfish—"

"But you—for you—I'd do it! You know it!"

"No doubt," she laughed. "But do you think I have no interest in you, except what we'll make together—dear? Please let's keep a sort of decent interval between the two relationships!"

For answer he caught her in his arms. If he had tried to describe a woman to suit his fancy, not only in her abilities and her good nature, but in her attractiveness of tact and adaptiveness, he could not have equaled Uintah, who drew the lines between their schemings and their love-makings as sharply as with a knife, without destroying the profit of one, or the joy of the other. Thus Valero assured himself.

Unitah Forelane, when her associate caught his breath and stared blindly from her, overcome by his opportunity, looked at him with a smile from lowering eyelids, and again called their "meeting" to order, to further discuss the necessary details and decide upon their projects.

The Thirsty Creek Valley conditions now required a man's hand—the grasp of a principal in their management. It was determined that Uintah Forelane should remain in the background, as soon as she had had a talk with Bleak Grisp, the foreman of the White Face Cattle Company ranch. This talk, alone, was something that the dark and desperate cattleman was ill-prepared to meet.

"Yes'm," he managed to ejaculate to this overwhelming young woman, as she told him to work with the Marvelando outfit during the round up which was to sweep the whole Trenal herd from the range. The list of stockholders, as edited by Uintah, was perfectly clear to him, especially as she showed him the certificates of stock, all in her own name, to the number of five hundred and twenty out of one thousand shares.

"Mrs. Clement sent me out!" he revealed suddenly.

"She's a splendidly bright woman, isn't she?" Uintah cried heartily. "I'd love to have her business knowledge."

"She's bright," Grisp agreed heartily. "I 'lowed, from the way she talked up, she feared you'd—you'd—"

"Freeze her out? The idea!" Uintah exclaimed laughingly. "Why should I? But, Bleak, you can see what we're doing? You're her friend, I know—"

The man blushed as he nodded.

"You'll look after both our interests, won't you?"

"Yes'm," he promised, adding: "She's an awful particular lady."

"In that case, Bleak, suppose you just get things straightened out here, and we'll surprise her with a dividend at the December meeting of the stockholders? What she doesn't know won't hurt her, till the

dividend check comes on her two hundred and fifty shares—"

"Four hundred and eighty, Miss Forelane!"

"She owns four hundred and eighty shares!" Uintah cried.

"Yes'm—she's zeen buying quiet."

"That's fine!" Uintah laughed. "Isn't it? We'll be rich!"

"She's rich, now," he declared.

"Oh, of course! A great fortune—but I was just thinking—we'll divide a fortune, another fortune, now."

Bleak Grisp left Reno with no illusions in his mind. He had two mistresses to serve.

He swore in his throat from Credo Hill to the railroad, and from Reno over three railroads, the last one a narrow gage; and then three mountain ranges and three valleys, till he threw his hat down upon the ground between the ranch house and corral at the White Face Cattle Company headquarters on the west side of the Silver Breaks.

"I'm a forsaken fool!" he suddenly realized. "I let on Mrs. Clement didn't have it in for me, like we give out!"

As for Uintah, she felt distinctly nervous after her interview with Bleak Grisp. He looked, he acted, he even fairly smelled of his cattle ranch competency. He waddled when he walked, and he had a square, black, bull-dog countenance, and he had a surly disposition which Uintah Forelane, nor her kind, could overcome.

But, seeing those certificates of stock, all in Uintah's name, he knew who his real ranch boss was, when it came to the showdown. No hand to talk, and far less a hand to write, he said nothing of his complications when he communicated with Mrs. Clement. He didn't mind bullfrogging a steer, or cutting wattles in calves' throats, or breaking down a cowboy who excited his ire—but women, especially women owners and bosses!

Uintah surmised Bleak Grisps's frame of mind, as well as she divined his character. Under him, the White Face Cattle Company would prosper that year, and if she knew the character of Mrs. Clement, a good dividend would greatly mollify the dead past's bitterness. Uintah even contemplated an approach to the woman who had, in her marital relations, been outraged by an unscrupulous and good-looking upstart.

"I could use her!" Uintah thought to herself. "She'd find me a mighty profitable partner. All I need—all I've ever needed, was money enough to swing with! And she has it—I know positively she has it, now!

"Not but what I've had my own pickings. I'm business—I'm all business! When I make my little fortune—ah! Won't I quick step, one-step out of this and all its—ugh!"

She shrugged her shoulders. She shuddered in her shrug. She could not force herself to accept the rôle she was playing without that occasional shudder—the revulsion of her whole conscience against her gambling and trading and spendthriftness of heart, soul, and body!

Nevertheless, she assured Valero that all was well, and that it was a fifty-fifty divy on the Horned-A brand. He should see to it—controlling the two foremen through his own and Uintah's complete authority in the matter.

Valero, after a talk with Grisp, discovered that Uintah had paved the way for the round up, with the shipment of three times or so the number of cattle out of the Thirsty Creek country that had ever come through the cañon passes.

Valero, having gone over the whole situation, from Racklack County records across his own company's range, visiting Janie at the Trenal ranch, and thence taking in a few days away up in the slopes of the Silver Breaks, could have no doubt in his own mind about the outcome. He returned to Reno, and told Uintah about his adventures.

"There she is, all alone," he told her. "She hasn't made up her mind about the mortgage. She's fascinated with the ranch, though—she just loves the mountain colors along the Sunrise Range, and the Waning Glories—well, they'd do to paint the rainbow with.

"She went down to the court-house, and bought some supplies, enough to last her all

winter. She's got time under the mortgage in which to make up her mind. You know that—she wouldn't say I, yes or no. She's clever, mighty bright, that girl. I don't wonder that—that—"

"Men love her?" Uintah asked, with just an edge to her tone.

"Oh, she's unapproachable!" he hastened to say.

"You found that out!" Uintah demanded.

Valero, reduced to helplessness, spent some little time assuring her that a thousand Janie Fretes could not compare with one Uintah Forelane. Chastened in spirit, and with nervous choosing of words, he repeated what had taken place during his interview with Janie.

"What 'll happen?" he prophesied. "She'll find some one to keep her company—some Mexican creole or Indian breed, probably, or perhaps some one from away down East. She won't stay there alone, even though she would be perfectly safe."

"You know, don't you, that she's rather well armed?" Uintah asked. "She has rather an astonishing record of adventures —of various kinds. It began away back yonder, when she served time—"

"She served time?" Valero gasped.

"Oh, yes! Caught working with a gang of smugglers, I believe. Since then, she's had a rather varied life. No one, I think, really knows all the details."

Uintah smiled complacently. She had seen, in a flash, that Tremaine Valero was quite disgusted with a woman who had a prison stain on her career. Valero, stunned, forgot to look at Uintah for some little time —and she mocked his astonishment with a still smile.

Valero and Mrs. Forelane went to the Purple Shadows that evening. He must make the most of his now brief visits in Reno. Business interests, his associates knew, were keeping him on the move, now —out in Central Nevada. Lands, cattle, and to a certain extent, mine affairs were pressing him.

It was clear, from the whispers going around, that any day, now, a new financial power was due to sit in at the boards of directors of great new enterprises. There was a whispering, too, that Mrs. Forelane had succeeded in bringing about a commercial condition that must give her a position far above the present standard of a very successful agent and broker.

The whispers could not be definite. No one knew exactly what was taking place. If her connection with Valero wasn't a business partnership, then it was a scandal, and any one could make a guess on the question.

Their arrival at the Purple Shadows was now a social event, and it supplied a good deal of hilarity, some novelty and a basis for further surmising. Their discretion amid the social surroundings allayed most of the suspicions, while their loosening up at the gaming tables indicated the mutual prosperity of their affairs. This had one practical effect on the fortunes of the two. Valero succeeded in renewing notes, with the Marvelando ranch as security, at seven per cent instead of eight per cent, while Mrs. Forelane consummated a timber-land deal in the Sierras involving nearly a million dollars, her own commission bringing her forty-five thousand dollars, in a certified check, which she credited to her personal account, and not to Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc.!

The appearance of prosperity, in fact, brought real prosperity. The gossips, shamed by the evidence of commercial success, shifted their own view-point, and pointed out what a splendid union of business acumen, commercial power and perfectly adapted hearts and souls the marriage of Tremaine Valero and Uintah Forelane would be.

"Poor dear! How happy she would be!" it was whispered about. "Forlane was such a dreadful mistake! But she loved him—and now, having taken refuge in business, isn't it perfectly beautiful to think that she seems to have really found her man among the masculines of the world!"

Their luck at the tables was watched, and when Mrs. Forelane caught a thirty-five to one at the wheel, and Valero amassed considerable pocket-money at the cards, the fact was noted as corroborative

of the ancient belief that when the tide changes in a human's affairs, all currents follow the same channel.

CHAPTER XX.

MAVERICK BEEF.

TREMAINE VALERO, spending some of his time at the Marvelando ranch attending to the rather delicate matter of calf branding and locating the scattered bunches of cattle on the range for the great round up to come, did not fail to visit the Waning Glory ranch, to take a lunch with Janie Frete. Business was business, of course, and he did not exactly lose sight of the main chance, going or coming. Even in her presence, he hardly forgot the fact that she was wealthy, and could easily afford to purchase this ranch—rather pay the one hundred thousand dollars mortgage that appeared against it in the Racklack County records.

At the same time Janie gave the valley of Thirsty Creek an attractiveness beyond any financial value it might have. He found her, on his second visit, with an appearance of life and effort on all sides; a huge stack of alfalfa had been heaped up in the field, and a crooked-post and wire fence built around it, to compel the horses there to feed in the growing green.

A two-ton truck, bright and new, had come across the trail and brought a storehouse full of supplies, and a glimpse he had of the bunk-house disclosed signs of occupancy.

Valero could not help looking sharply at a surly looking half-breed who was repairing the corral fence. He felt a bit of diffidence for Janie at thought of him. But a wagon with prairie-schooner hoops, Indian ponies and a number of more or less clothed breed children, and two or three spudgy women, over by the spring run, indicated that Janie had, indeed, found company.

The visitor had no time to go through to the Indian wagon, for Janie herself appeared, and invited him to dismount. She had been in the garage, and there was a smudge of grease on one cheek, dust on her chin, and her one-piece khaki suit was a sight to behold—but Janie's figure gave even that suit a grace and a style.

Valero left his automobile and walked to the bungalow with Janie. She disappeared toward the kitchen, where he heard her order coffee immediately, and a broiled-steak dinner forthwith—the steak made him wonder a little. He grinned as he asked himself:

"Wonder where she gets her beef?"

The thought had its humorous aspect—could it be that Janie was so ignorant that she had fallen into the error of helping herself to beef, or permitting her outfit to do so? That phase of the matter had its serious aspect, and Valero had just time to think of it, when Janie reappeared, her face quite clean, her raiment the conventional short skirt, long boots, woolen blouse, and beautiful leather gauntlets. A net held her hair, instead of the tight and shapeless dust-cap that she had worn while working on her car.

"What a fascinating land this is!" she exclaimed to him as she entered. "Let's go out on the porch, now, where we can see it!"

"It's beautiful," he smiled. "Can it be—we are going to have you for one of us?"

"One of you?" she inquired. "You live in Reno?"

"Oh, but I spend months out here during the round-up—over at my ranch."

"The Marvelando?"

"Yes; I didn't see you come through with the truck," he suggested.

"You didn't!" she smiled. "I just had to have one; I couldn't abuse my Camper bringing in supplies. I suppose you want to know my mind regarding the ranch. I've decided to take it."

"Eh!" he choked with relief and delight, and then with repressed feelings, not to seem too pleased, he added: "That's fine—it shows your business acumen!"

"I'm not so sure of that," she laughed. "Possibly my sheer romanticism. You know, I'm very, very romantic in my—ah—inspirations."

"That's what Mrs.—a lady I know, said," he said; then added in confusion: "we—I knew you'd like this country—would thank us—"

"For not foreclosing the moment Mr. Trenal died? It was considerate," Janie declared with a seriousness. "I knew you would like to know my mind. The thing was so incredible—so preposterous—at first thought. Now I am quite reconciled to ranching, to having all its responsibilities."

"I see you've a bunch of Indians out there."

"Yes," she admitted, "they are so amusing—I mean the little ones. The women are useful, too. I have one in the kitchen just now, who had a college course in domestic science, and—dear me—she specialized in botany, it appears, and when she wants to humiliate her mistress, she speaks of the dessicated earth of the alkali plain, and remarks on the barium content of some of the desert plants!"

Valero laughed, and Janie continued:

"But you needn't be alarmed; she is positively the most accomplished cook I ever heard of. She takes the most awful things, and she fusses over them, and when we've had dinner, she tells us what we've ben eating. Really, even my boys whoop their unmitigated astonishment."

"Your boys?" he asked. "You have an outfit?"

"Oh, yes," she smiled. One can't run a hundred thousand acres all alone, you know. By the way; the mortgage covers four townships, I see; that is sixty-four thousand acres, according to the government corners, and the land-office blueprints."

"Eh?" he gasped.

"You see, I really haven't entirely found my bearings, yet. We are going over the ground, now. I think, from appearances, that the mortgage merely covers one hundred square miles of the range; you people were very lax in your business arrangements; I found that back taxes were due on the lands, and when I saw the collector he waived the court procedure, and I paid them, including the ten per cent penalty.

"You stood a rather good chance of losing everything, it seems to me, under the reversion provisions. Or by tax sale."

Valero was speechless. They had overlooked a point in their eagerness that might well have proved of vital moment to them; but he hadn't really expected this development. If Janie hadn't come, the mortgage must have resulted in the lands falling into the hands of the Marvelando and Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc., and yet the taxes might have spoiled it all.

The narrow escape startled him. At the same time, he was alarmed by the suspicion which such a neglect must rouse in the mind of Janie Frete.

"We—I—our interests are so many," he half faltered. "It was a detail overlooked."

"And you have no tax calender in your office, and no clerk to attend to it?" she demanded. "Not in two offices—I supposed it was customary!" she sniffed.

"Out West—you see—"

"Oh—you do things 'By Guess and By Gum,' as one of my boys said. 'And sometimes, by gum, you guess wrong'?"

"That's it!" He wiped the sweat from his forehead, laughing despite his feelings.

"In our relations, hereafter," she said with sharply enunciated words, "I think that everything should be made and kept perfectly regular. I don't care to have any of my interests jeopardized by laxity or practises outside the letter and the spirit of the statutes."

"There's a lot of unwritten law out here!" he cried, defending himself, though he couldn't see exactly why. "Courts have to interpret—"

"But courts don't interpret unpaid taxes, and failures to observe the ordinary rules of common sense," she retorted, and then as she glanced into the dining-room, smiled and beckoned him to dinner.

The truck had brought in a rather complete equipment for the dining-room, he observed, and the tall, slender, black-eyed college-graduate breed served a bouillon, first, and then baked mountain trout, followed by an enormous sirloin steak.

"It's not quite beef," Janie remarked, cutting into it, "but it's too old to be exactly veal—it was an eight-months-old heifer."

"And you—you learned about beef down East?" he asked quizzically, and again at his ease, though how he got there he could not have told.

"Not entirely," she smiled. "Did you happen to hunt wild cattle when you were down on the Gulf?"

"Hunt wild cattle?" he repeated. "You mean—"

"In the West Indies," she explained. 'I know you haven't; but I have. It is sport—the kind that before long would turn your hair gray, if you stopped to think about the—ah—excitement of it!"

"And you—you've hunted wild cattle!" he repeated, wonderingly. There was in that a touch of experience, a certain warning almost, that he was *vis á vis* with a person of rather fundamental knowledge.

"Yes," she replied. "You know, at first in a new country, one feels so utterly ignorant, so terribly small and incapable; but, in a little while, out of the past gleanings and stocking up of the mind there come little touches that indicate points of contact. When I shot this heifer—"

"You're killing range cattle!" he demanded.

"Oh, no!" she laughed. "I'm not quite so bad as that; this heifer was a maverick—we found quite a herd of wild beeves over back a ways."

"We—we?" he inquired.

"Yes, my foreman and I."

"Who is your foreman, may I ask?"

"Oh, certainly—he's Tarcass, Bust-o Tarcass."

"Bust-o Tarcass? Never heard of him."

"Oh, probably not—an old friend of mine."

"Experienced—ah—cattleman?"

"Very! And he's perfectly handsome—you ought to see him roping and riding, and especially shooting. As a shot he is—well, diabolical. He carries a 22-caliber automatic pistol—"

"A 22-caliber automatic pistol!" Valero snorted.

"You are a townsman!" she laughed at him. "Didn't you know the cowboys use 22s for practise, nowadays, because heavy ammunition is so expensive? The boys all liked his twenty-two so well that I telegraphed and got them all one.

"You should have seen Snowflake's face when he looked into the muzzle of his and tried to pick up one of the cartridges out of a box with his big fingers. He just looked everything—and then—oh, dear—I wish you could have heard him! He said:

"'Lady! I never owned one of these here before—an'—an', honest, I never did expect to! Now—I'm goin' to pack one.'"

"Snowflake — your outfit — perhaps I know some of them."

"Tarcass is foreman; then there's Snowflake, Burke, Bear-Jaw, and Dishpan—"

"Bear-Jaw and Dishpan?"

"Half-breeds, Chippy and Sugar. There are some others around who came in with that prairie-schooner outfit. Tarcass is working them, I believe. Mrs. Yellow Mountain is cooking for the outfit, and Miss Screaming Eagle, here, is keeping me company, and helping me in the house."

"But — the outfit?" Valero pressed. "What do the men do? What can they do?"

"What do cowmen usually do on a ranch, these days?" Janie asked, laughing with what to Valero was fatuousness.

"Why — of course — the alfalfa, and fences, and you said lines and corners. If you had cattle, of course—"

"You sit here at my table with all that beef," she rebuked him.

"You're—you're going to brand that herd of mavericks?" he asked.

"Yes; and—would you believe it?—we've branded seven outlaw jacks, and three wild horses! Oh!" and Janie threw up her hands in ecstacy, "I'm so glad I came out—it is perfectly glorious! Never—never have I found more to love and take delight in!"

"Never more?" he smiled at her enthusiasm.

"No, I couldn't say this is better, though, than some other things," she shook her head, musing, adding: "of course, perhaps a Westerner like you couldn't understand that—only I—perhaps even I am mistaken. I admit it.

"At the same time, could I go back on the dear old St. Lawrence and poor, shut up Two Canoe cabin? Or the West Indies and the magnificent crystaline Gulf blue? Or—oh—how I love to live! It seems—sometimes—as though it's too good to be true—my living!"

"And the joy of it—it all compensates for the—the—"

"For the past sufferings?" she turned on him rather quickly.

"For one's sufferings," he nodded uneasily.

"I think, perhaps, if one suffers and endures enough in younger years, it adds to the zest of growing old—"

"Growing old!" he looked at her incredulously.

"Age in experience," she smiled.

"And you've had it, all right!" he exclaimed.

"Indeed?" she looked at him.

"Oh, it's all right," he looked sidewise at her. "There's no doubt about it—you're one of the greatest young women who ever came into this country! And you've taken right hold. Out here, nobody inquires about the past, you know."

"Nor even refers to it, if he is discreet," she added, interrupting him.

CHAPTER XXI.

VALERO IS SATISFIED.

FOR a minute Valero had found himself getting along swimmingly. He had found just the right moment in which to refer casually to Janie's past—information he had had from Uintah.

Janie's poise had at first thrown him off his feet, and made him forget what a good-looking, daredevil of a fellow he was. But he had begun to have something in his mind, based on Janie's past—prison bird that she had been.

Then, all of a sudden, he found himself all tangled up in the most wretched of blunders a man could posisbly make! He had, himself, in all the fool cussedness of his masculine tactlessness, opened wide his defenselessness to this imperious, and as he knew, as a witness, perfectly competent young woman.

Man like, in his very soul he cursed Uintah Forelane for making him mistake Janie Frete, going by that hard, cold fact in Janie's past instead of by her every appearance, her bearing, and the fact of her entire competence to take care of herself.

"I'm a fool! I'm a fool!" he choked. "I beg your pardon!"

Janie, having risen to her feet angrily, saw him cringing before her. He bent his knees and bowed his back as he turned his palms up to her in pleading. The Indian-breed girl, stanch and indignantly erect, stood in the kitchen doorway, glaring at him as she reflected with Indian stoic expression on the blunder he had made.

"Keel 'im! Keel 'im!" she was whispering to her mistress, reverting to dialect.

Valero knew that if Janie did kill him she would be entirely justified, for no man insults a ranch queen in her own domain without suffering the possibility of an ignominous and utterly defenseless death. The breed girl was a witness, a wholly reliable and believable witness.

Valero felt in the presence of the two young women the sensations of a murderer waiting for the foreman to speak the jury's verdict. He knew, if any of the employees of Janie had heard his remark of brass, an instant shot must have been the penalty. He knew it, now! But he hadn't thought of it before.

He could feel the slower death of a rope coming up around his throat—one of those rawhide lariats of which he had seen three new ones over a peg under the bunk-house eaves, and remembered now with a vividness that for a second blinded him with new fears.

"I think we understand each other better now," Janie said suddenly, and with a sadness that was heart-breaking to the man. Really, he would rather have been whipped out of the house, and driven from the ranch with a bullet whistling past his automobile, than to have had Janie Frete speak thus to him. There was no forgiveness in the tone; there was no bitterness; but there was the inutterable depths of a heart hurt and a soul tormented by—whatever in her past hurt and tormented Janie Frete.

On the instant she had appealed not to Tremaine Valero's fears nor his deserving of justice! She had appealed to him for protection, for his suffrance, for his consideration! She had stirred the nobility of the spirit and chivalry which he had im-

bibed among the doers of the West; and for the moment what makings of a man he had in him responded.

"Miss Frete!" he cried. "Can you forgive a damned cad?"

"Let's forget it," she asked wearily. "I wonder if our Eagle will let us have some coffee, now?"

Screaming Eagle turned and looked at Janie wonderingly—her expression quivered in indignant refusal for a moment, and then there flashed across the pretty olive face a smile of quick, even electric understanding, and in a half minute she had brought the coffee.

In the fragrant cupful Tremaine Valero had further opportunity to think of his folly, his escape and his pardon. He did not know, nor could he possibly have thought at that moment that others had been equally mistaken and had received a boon as undeserved from her.

But such was his character that shortly he was congratulating himself that he hadn't made a worse break, and he was feeling his way through the devious courses of his mind for self-congratulation that he hadnt' aroused Janie's suspicions as regards the financial circumstances of their relationship.

In fact, he was wondering if, after all, it hadn't been the mortgage looming in Janie's mind that had suddenly brought her to time and an understanding of his own power.

"That's it," he thought. "She's bright, this little woman! Likely she hasn't got the cash handy—perhaps she's stalling for time about that mortgage.

"If I can get her to come across with the interest—that 'll kind of cinch it. A payment on a debt acknowledges its validity!"

As though answering his very thought, and startling him by the evidence of her intuition regarding what was in his mind, she said:

"I cannot take up the mortgage entirely. I think, perhaps, it will be best for me to pay the interest which is due, according to the document, to November; it's run a year and a half, now, apparently; Trenal had paid the first year on it?"

"Why—er—yes, of course."

"By check?"

"Oh, yes—yes! That's my memory of it."

"Any payment on principle?"

Valero hesitated. Her direct questioning had for a moment thrown him off his guard—in view of his social predicament. Now he gathered his wits and shook his head.

"Really, Miss Frete—I don't remember. It was an office detail, and it must be a matter of—"

"I should think it would be a matter of record," she assented. "It ought to be. I didn't notice in the county files whether the payment was noted there or not."

"Probably not," he said promptly. "It would be all covered by receipts and acknowledgments when the mortgage was satisfied."

"That would be it," she mused. "But I was wondering if Trenal, in view of the circumstances, and in order to protect his heirs, wouldn't have kept the county office records up to date. He was an exceedingly methodical man, as perhaps you know, and unless he changed very greatly after he came out here, it is incredible that he should have been lax, or even the least bit negligent in protecting his business interests with every safeguard."

"You knew him well?"

"We worked together for some time—chemical researches. He loved chemistry, and I am surprised—did you never notice any efforts on his part to continue his studies out here? He couldn't have failed to see the opportunities—"

"Out there?" Valero indicated the alkali desert.

"On all sides," she increased his viewpoint. "The mountains, too."

"Why, yes—I did hear something about that," he admitted. "I forget who it was telling me. He used to get shipments of stuff—apparatus."

"I thought it strange, if he neglected his opportunities," Janie mused. "He could have spent years, with a spectrascope—those colors!"

"They're grand!" he approved heartily, and when within the hour he clambered

into the automobile, Janie stood by and was smiling as though nothing in the world had happened to disturb the serenity of her mind, or the good nature of the visit.

As for Valero, he was choked up with delight and satisfaction. In his pocket-book—the long, document, sealskin wallet—was a check. On the back of it, written in type, for Janie's office had a writing machine, was a simple receipt:

Received of Janie Frete, interest on Trenal Ranch:

Mortgage	$3,000
Payment on same	5,000

More than that, Janie had in her own possession another receipt, signed by Valero, for both the Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc., and Marvelando Cattle Company, as agent, to show that these payments had been made by Janie's check, No. mn1301.

According to Tremaine Valero's hopes, and even dreams, Janie Frete had accepted the mortgage on Irving Trenal's ranch; she had acknowledged the debt over her own signature, paying the interest and also a payment on the principal. He could have whooped for joy—nothing else mattered, now. His crass insult to Janie was nothing—she had passed that over!

Moreover, when he drove away, he saw her standing there, watching him till she was just a mere fleck in the dancing atmosphere. She had even acknowledged his farewell wave, when he raised his hat on looking back, two hundred yards or so distant.

"Janie's all right!" he told himself. "She knows men are just naturally damned fools. At the same time, I bet—"

He looked into his spot-light reflector and observed the smooth, rounded health of his face, the rake of his broad-brimmed hat — it was becoming to him — and the lovely soft brown mustache.

"Yes, sir!" he said, "Janie's a great girl; may be next time, when I try again on a new tack—um-m."

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 Best He Could Do

by Charles Wesley Sanders

ABNER McCALL, owner of the big, new side-wheeler, Anna Belle, had condescended to come down to Lamb's water-front saloon to talk to the Anna Belle's engineer.

McCall was a man of large affairs on the lakes in the late forties. He had what was called a considerable fortune in those days. He owned a number of sailing-ships and steamboats. His interests extended from

Buffalo to the newly discovered Lake Superior copper country. He was a little, vain, side-whiskered person, and he was always seeking new worlds to conquer. The building of the Anna Belle had been a result of his vanity and his business acumen.

Racing among steamboats was at its height. Passengers demanded speed. Other things being equal they chose the speediest boats. McCall saw the wisdom of giving them what they wanted. Besides, along the way the first boat into port got the cream of the business. McCall expected to make a good deal of money out of the Anna Belle and he also expected to gain prestige, for the Anna Belle was the biggest steamboat the lakes had yet known and her builders had promised McCall that she would be the fastest.

McCall was a man who valued details. He made it his business to become acquainted with the captains and the engineers of most of the steamboats. Therefore, he knew what he was about when he picked the crew of the Anna Belle. For engineer he chose Sam Bassett, because Bassett had a reputation for being not only efficient, but a dare-devil to boot. He would get all there was out of a steamboat. McCall had heard of his going into Detroit with his hull strained and his furnace doors red-hot, but he had won his race.

"Just the man for the Anna Belle," McCall had said.

The day before the boat was to take her maiden trip, McCall had sent word to Bassett to meet him at the water-front saloon. He wanted to urge on Bassett the necessity for establishing a record.

"You've got the best boat the lakes have seen," he told Bassett as he perched on the edge of a chair and faced the engineer across the table. "The Anna Belle and the Livingston will be leaving at the same time. You're to beat the Livingston decisively."

Basset fingered the glass from which he had lately taken a drink of Jamaica rum.

"Aye," he said absently.

McCall could have asked for more enthusiasm. He thought he was entitled to a word of thanks for having given Bassett a berth like this. Adulation was acceptable to him from any source. But when he had first met Bassett he had been struck by Bassett's stillness. That was the word which McCall himself used. There was an enveloping calm about the man which annoyed the ship-owner. Bassett had a habit of looking at a man straight out of his cool, blue eyes, his lashes held rigid. To McCall it was a disconcerting habit. He liked to see a man up on his toes. On an occasion like this, at least, Bassett might have shown a little excitement.

McCall talked at some length about the boat and the importance of forcing her to set a record. He said he had a great deal of money tied up in her. Cost of operation would be high. Her passenger-list would have to be lengthy each trip to make her pay. Speed would attract business to her. Bassett would have to get the speed out of her.

"Aye," said Bassett.

And so McCall went away greatly disappointed. He was angry enough to have replaced Bassett, but he knew he could not pick up an engineer so good as Bassett in the short time at his disposal.

His anger was increased next morning when he went down to the boat and found that Bassett was not on board.

"Where the devil is he?" he demanded of the captain.

"I saw him standing by the gangplank of the Livingston a while ago," the captain answered.

McCall returned to the dock and walked back to where the Livingston was tied up. He found Bassett leaning against a pile, a moody look in his eyes. McCall did not like that look. It might indicate that Bassett was a man of uncertain temper. If McCall angered him now, he might refuse to go on board at all. McCall would lose at least half a day before he could get another man. Indeed the Anna Belle might not get away at all that day.

"You're going on board soon, Mr. Bassett?" he suggested diplomatically.

"Aye."

"I suppose everything is in readiness. Plenty of wood on board. Plenty of oil. You'll need plenty of oil, Bassett. Plenty of—"

"Aye," big Bassett growled deep in his

throat without looking at the fussy little owner.

They stood in silence for a while. McCall didn't know what to say. He thought he might get some advice from the captain. With that in mind he half turned away. Then he turned swiftly back.

A girl had detached herself from the line of passengers who were going on board the Livingston. She came up to Bassett and stopped in front of him. McCall saw Bassett's cool eyes grow warm. The engineer's red blood crowded up into his face.

The girl stood looking at him out of imperious eyes. She was tall, half a head taller than McCall and reaching to Bassett's shoulder. Her hair was golden and her eyes were brown. They were in striking contrast to Bassett's blue eyes and jet hair.

"You haven't changed your mind, Sam?" she asked in a low voice.

McCall saw Sam Bassett sigh profoundly, straighten up, and look at the girl regretfully.

"I haven't changed my mind," he said in a curiously gentle voice. "How could I?"

She had been holding her hands clasped in front of her. Now she spread them out in a gesture of renunciation.

"Very well," she said spiritedly. "I'll never ask you to do anything for *me* again."

She turned, walked away swiftly, and ascended the gangplank. Without looking at McCall, Bassett left his place and went aboard the Anna Belle.

McCall followed him and sought out the captain.

"Bassett got a girl?" he asked.

"Why, yes," the captain answered. "He's engaged to Jim Hardy's daughter."

"Jim Hardy? The engineer on the Livingston?"

"Yes," the captain nodded.

"They've had a quarrel, I judge," McCall said. "Will that make any difference in Bassett's work to-day?"

"Nothing makes any difference in Sam Bassett's work," the captain said.

McCall was glad to hear it. He didn't care a particle what trouble Sam Bassett might be in with the beautiful girl who had accosted him on the dock. So far as he was concerned, Bassett was merely a cog in the machine. All he wanted Bassett to do was to urge the Anna Belle through the waters of the lakes faster than side-wheeler had ever been urged before. If what the captain said was true, Bassett would do it.

Comforted, McCall strolled about his ship, his chest thrust out, his hands beneath his coat-tails. He guessed that at the end of this trip rival steamboat-owners would have to do honor to his name.

It was a wonder he didn't burst with pride in the ensuing half-hour. The passengers came and still they came. By the time the lines were cast off and the Anna Belle started on her trip, the boat was crowded. McCall was sure that the Livingston hadn't a third of the passengers that were aboard the Anna Belle.

In accordance with previous instructions from McCall, the Anna Belle moved straight out into the lake, so that the Livingston could follow her and come abreast of her. Later accounts must show that no undue advantage had been taken of the smaller boat.

When the two boats headed west they were bow on bow. This position they held for a dozen miles. This, again, was in accordance with McCall's instructions. There would be no excitement for the passengers in the Anna Belle's merely drawing away from the Livingston. The passengers wanted a race and McCall was keen enough to make sure that their wishes were gratified.

Within the next mile, McCall, watching, saw the smoke increase from the stack of the Livingston. Presently the smoke began to carry cinders. There was a trembling through the boat as she began to feel the strain. The Anna Belle was keeping to her former pace and the Livingston began to forge ahead.

McCall went to the engine-room. Bassett was walking about the machinery, his oil-can in his hand. The two firemen were waiting, watching for a nod from the engineer to increase the fire.

"They're putting on all steam, Bassett," McCall said, "and they're pulling away from us a little. You better stir your fire."

Bassett nodded to the firemen. One of them stirred the fire and the other piled in wood. Under a full draft the furnace began to roar. McCall knew that the boat would begin to pick up at once.

"Head 'em and pull away from them a ways," McCall instructed. "Then let them come up with you."

Again Bassett nodded. McCall returned to the deck. In a few minutes the Anna Belle's bow came up to the Livingston's stern. Then the Anna Belle drew alongside her and soon passed her. The Livingston was doing her utmost, but she was clearly outclassed.

The passengers were nearly all on deck, lining the rail. They shouted and jeered at those on the Livingston. There was the silence of defeat on the other boat.

Chuckling, McCall turned to go back to the engine-room. He came face to face with Bassett.

"They're beaten already, Bassett!" McCall said. "By the time they get to Chicago we'll be half-way back."

Bassett did not answer. Standing on tiptoe he was gazing at the other boat. He noted the pouring smoke with the cinders showing red in it.

"God!" he said. "They're carrying too much fire. Something will happen to them if they don't ease off. Them cinders are big enough—some of them—to set her on fire. She might blow up or spring a leak. She's fairly old and she was never built to stand a strain like this."

"If anything happens to her, she won't give us any more competition," McCall said calmly.

"We're two miles from shore," Bassett said. "Have you thought what 'd happen to her passengers? You know what disasters have followed races like this in the past."

"Good Lord! You're not worrying about them, are you?" McCall asked. "Let them do their own worrying. The crew is supposed to know their business. All you've got to do now is to pull away from them. Pull away just as fast as you can, Bassett. Show our passengers what the Anna Belle can do."

Bassett went back to the engine-room. McCall noticed that he kept his eyes on the Livingston till he disappeared within the doorway. McCall leaned on the rail to wait for the burst of speed which he expected. He himself did not know just what the Anna Belle would do and he was eager to know. The race was won. His next best advertisement would be such speed as no side-wheeler on the lakes had ever shown.

But the Anna Belle's speed did not increase. Rather it slowly diminished. Within half a mile the Livingston was abreast of her. Then the Livingston slowly forged ahead. The passengers on her deck began to cheer and wave their hats and handkerchiefs.

McCall was furious. He couldn't imagine what had happened. Doubtless something had gone wrong with the machinery. That would be an excuse in marine circles, but it would be no excuse with the passengers. They did not want explanations. They wanted results.

McCall hurried to the engine-room. To his amazement he found the furnace drafts checked and the firemen idle. Bassett leaned back against the wall, his head bent, his eyes moody.

"In heaven's name, what's the matter?" McCall panted. "The Livingston is pulling away from us. Give your fire air and move lively!"

Bassett lifted his head and looked at him out of cold, hard blue eyes.

"No more racin'," he said harshly.

The little owner stared at him with wide-open eyes and with lips dropped apart. He had a notion that his engineer had gone crazy.

"Wh-what do you mean, Bassett?" he stammered.

"I mean we've raced enough," Bassett said. "It's dangerous."

"Why, there hasn't been a whimper out of the Anna Belle," McCall cried. "She hasn't half shown what she can do."

"There's been a whimper out of the Livingston," Bassett retorted.

The mad rage of a man who is impotent physically clutched McCall.

"What're you doing?" he cried. "Are you selling me out? Did the owners of the Livingston buy you before we started?"

"You're a fool!" said Bassett.

"You're discharged, Bassett," McCall said. He turned to the firemen. "Can you fellows run this boat?" he asked.

"I can," one of the men said. "I'm qualified. I only been waitin' for a berth."

"Take charge then and give me speed," McCall ordered.

Bassett straightened up from his position against the wall. His eyes were flaming now and his face was pale from anger. He picked up a stick of wood.

"I'll brain the first man that lays a hand on this machinery!" he asserted. "I'm in charge here for the trip and I mean to remain in charge."

"Mad," McCall breathed. "Entirely mad—and mutinous."

Bassett turned to one of the firemen.

"Go on deck, you," he ordered, "and hurry back and let me know where the Livingston is and how she's doing."

McCall wanted that information, too, and he was glad to get it without having to leave the engine-room. He felt that he should keep an eye on Bassett. There was no telling what the engineer would do.

"She's half a mile ahead of us," the fireman, returning, reported. "And, my Gawd, she looks like the whole inside of her was on fire! There's a reg'lar flame coming out of her stack."

"Give her air and some wood," Bassett ordered, turning to his levers.

"Are you going to overhaul her, Bassett?" McCall asked.

"I'll overhaul her," Bassett said.

McCall went on deck. He was still puzzled by the engineer's conduct, but he was somewhat relieved by the later phase of it. It seemed to him now that Bassett was only playing with the Livingston. Maybe he had his own idea about the race and its winning. Yet that didn't explain his threat to brain whoever touched the machinery.

The Anna Belle gathered immediate and easy speed. The puzzled passengers again crowded the rail. The Anna Belle's flags stretched out in the breeze her going made. Smoke poured from her stacks and lay along her back in a grayish plume. McCall had a thrill of pride.

He forgot about Bassett as he stood watching his boat overtake the Livingston. He was concerned wholly with the rapidly decreasing distance between the two boats. The passengers were animated again, ready to cheer when the Anna Belle was once more in the lead, and McCall, knowing their temper, was already anticipating their cheers.

But it seemed as if Bassett was stubbornly going to deny him that pleasure. When the Anna Belle was within a hundred feet of the Livingston, the former's speed slackened. For a while she hung to the Livingston's stern at that distance and then it seemed to McCall that she even fell behind a little.

Cursing inaudibly, McCall once more turned to go to the engine-room. But he did not take a step, for Bassett was standing not five feet from him, staring at the Livingston. A haggard, drawn look had come about Bassett's eyes in the last few minutes and a gray pallor had settled on his face.

But McCall, blinded by his anger and his wounded vanity, did not see this. He hurried to the engineer's side.

"I want you to pass that boat," he said.

Bassett turned his head, but he did not look at McCall. He looked beyond him. McCall saw him wave his hand.

"Oh, cap'n," he called.

Glancing back McCall saw the captain hurrying toward them.

"I'm thinkin' the Livingston is going to be in trouble," Bassett said. "Her engines are tearin' her to pieces. Something will happen to her in a few minutes. She'll open her seams or something."

The captain looked at the Livingston with a critical and an experienced eye. He had been so busy that he had paid almost no attention to the Anna Belle's rival.

"You're right, Bassett," he said. "They're askin' too much of her. They're likely to get a rush of water before they know what's happening."

Bassett turned and ran from them. In a moment his whistle began screeching. The screeching meant nothing, for there was then no code of whistle signals. Bassett had merely hoped that the racket would cause the Livingston's captain to order her speed decreased.

But when Bassett again came on deck, the Livingston was pounding along at her capacity.

"Damn them!" said Bassett.

For five minutes the trio stood watching the other boat. The Livingston was not equipped with a steam-whistle, but presently her alarm-bell began to jangle in a signal of distress.

"I knew it," Bassett said. "Something has happened them."

He turned to the captain, his eyes fiercely alight.

"Cap'n," he said, "we better lower a boat and get a line to them. If they've sprung a leak, we'll have to tow them ashore if there's time. If not, we may have to take them all off."

The captain nodded and was about to turn away.

"Here, here," said McCall testily. "There's no use in getting exercised about this till we know what is going on. I don't see any sign of trouble on board the Livingston."

"You can see that they're banking or drawing their fires, can't you?" Bassett asked coldly.

"We'll be running a risk if they are in real trouble," McCall objected.

Bassett looked at the little man in amazement and then a hard smile came to his lips. He saw that McCall's mind was running on single track. He had been so wrapped up in his new boat that he was oblivious to everything else, even to peril to human life.

"You better forget about your boat for a minute and think of all them people aboard the Livingston," Bassett said. "Anyhow, we're going to stand by."

"I don't like the way you say it," McCall said. "Anybody 'd think you were the captain of the Anna Belle—or the owner."

"I'm the captain and we'll stand by," said a voice at McCall's elbow, and he turned to face his captain.

The captain was not afraid for his job. There were other jobs. He was ready to obey the unwritten laws of the sea.

McCall stared at him and he looked the little man in the eyes. McCall's glance wavered away and he turned to the rail and hung over it sulkily.

He saw that the Livingston was slackening her speed and he felt the Anna Belle slacken hers a moment later. Presently the two boats were stopped side by side.

At once a cry that the Livingston was sinking went up from the passengers. McCall stared and saw that the Livingston was shivering in the water like some wounded living thing. Her tremors sent little ripples away from her sides.

The shudder of horror that went through the passengers communicated itself to McCall. There was little of pity in him, but there was a great capacity for fear. He had enough imagination to place himself in the position of those on the other boat.

He ran aft of the right-hand wheel, where a boat was being lowered. He saw that Bassett and two deckhands were in the boat. In the bottom of the boat there was a coil of thin rope, attached to a heavy line on the Anna Belle's deck.

The deckhands rowed to the Livingston, Bassett, uncoiling the rope as the small boat moved away from the Anna Belle. Under the rail of the Livingston the engineer tossed the end of the rope aboard her. The heavier line was then drawn from the Anna Belle.

McCall supposed that Bassett would row back to his own boat to take charge of the engine-room in whatever maneuvers were necessary. Instead, Bassett clambered up the line as soon as it was made fast on board the Livingston.

"What the devil is he doing?" McCall asked the captain, who had rejoined him.

"He acts peculiar," the captain said.

They saw Bassett make his way among the passengers, who were beginning to show signs of nervousness. The engineer's eyes seemed to be roving from face to face. Twice he spoke to a member of the crew, but the only answer he received was a negative shake of the head. Then he disappeared into the cabin.

Now the captain of the Livingston came to the rail and, making a megaphone of his hands, shouted to the captain of the Anna Belle:

"Stand by. We're going to sink. The

water is pouring in so fast we can't do anything with it."

The captain ran below. For a time there was breathlessness and bustle and confusion on board both ships. McCall saw that panic was beginning to rule the passengers on the other boat. This, he also perceived, was justified, for the Livingston was beginning to settle by the head. By the time the Anna Belle came round to move up to her she had dropped down a foot with a queer, trembling, lurching motion.

Then McCall saw a stir among the passengers. Somebody was moving in the press, thrusting aside those who were in his way. McCall discerned the head and shoulders of Bassett. Those nearest the rail fell away from it before his urgency. Presently he was at the rail and the golden-haired girl who had spoken to him on the dock was in his arms, held close up to his breast.

He put the girl on her feet, but he still embraced her with his left arm. She seemed to McCall to be trying to free herself and in her actions there was every indication of anger.

"What in hell is he arguing with that spitfire for when we need him here?" McCall asked herself.

Bassett had leaned over the rail and shouted to the men in the small boat. One of the deckhands held up his arms and Bassett suddenly swept the girl off her feet, lifted her over the rail, and handed her down to the man below. The man took her in his arms and deposited her in the stern of the boat. Bassett leaped nimbly down.

As the small boat was rowed back to the Anna Bell, McCall ran down to the lower deck. The boat came alongside and Bassett lifted the girl and passed her through the forward gangway. He followed her.

"I'm sorry," he said to her, "but that boat was no place for you."

She stood looking at him for a moment and then she turned away from him. McCall saw that her dark eyes were lighted with scorn. Bassett watched her for a moment and then he, too, turned away. She went to the upper deck and McCall followed. He was interested. Perhaps the girl could explain why Bassett was acting like a freak.

He approached the girl when he found her and lifted his hat.

"You're Hardy's girl, aren't you?" he asked. "I know your father well."

"You're McCall," she said. "I hope some day you lose this boat and every other boat you own."

Then she turned her back on him.

"I'm damned if I seem to get anything but insults aboard my own steamboat!" McCall said to himself.

He walked away in disgust and confronted Bassett. The Anna Belle was now almost alongside the Livingston and the line which Bassett had carried had been hauled in and made fast amidships. Two other lines were cast on board, fore and aft. These operations seemed to engross Bassett. He did not look at McCall.

Now gangplanks were run from the Anna Belle to the Livingston and the passengers began to crowd on board the former. The crews of both boats lined up to keep the frightened passengers in order. The Livingston was still dipping down with that queer, lurching movement. Bassett, seasoned sailor that he was, knew that at any moment the boat might bury her nose and dive down. He knelt and took off his shoes and then stripped down to his trousers and undershirt.

He stood erect, lean and tall and strong, bronzed face held high on bronzed neck. He seemed to be waiting for something. As he stood there, the girl turned her head. She stared at him, but her eyes were fixed on the other boat.

Twenty minutes passed. All the passengers had been removed from the Livingston. Only the crew remained. The captain and another man stood at the rail while the crew passed over. Then those two started to follow.

At that moment the Livingston shook her nose and buried it a foot in the water. She wallowed and then she started to slide over on her side. The rail where the two men stood was lifted high in the air. The men clung to it. The gangplanks slipped from the decks of both boats and dropped into the water.

"Cut away!" the Anna Belle's captain yelled. "Cut away!"

Sailors cut the lines that held the two boats together. The Anna Belle immediately moved away from the Livingston.

On board the Anna Belle a man in undershirt and trousers plunged through the crowd as a football-player plungers. He gripped the rail and leaned over it, his eyes on the Livingston.

It had seemed in that moment as if the Livingston must drop swiftly to the botom, but as her head settled still further she rolled back and came to an even keel. Now her head was nearly submerged and her stern was lifted out of the water. Her end could be but a matter of moments.

The two men who had been left on her appeared at the rail, leaped to it, and then sprang far out into the water. Simultaneously Bassett sprang. The two men had stripped down in the little time they had and the younger struck out at once for the Anna Belle. He seemed to be a strong, sure swimmer. The other floundered. If he remained where he was when the Livingston took her final plunge he would be sucked under.

Bassett struck out for the man while five hundred pairs of eyes on the Anna Belle watched him. He came to the man floundering under the dipping rail of the Livingston, got under him, lifted him to his chest, and started back.

The Livingston's head began to bob as the water swept into her with greater volume through ever widening seams. Then for just an instant all motion in her seemed to cease. Gradually and then faster her head dropped down after that moment of rest. Her head disappeared, the water washed her amidships, her stern was lifted, and with a last plunge she disappeared entirely.

"My God, they're gone!" breathed McCall, the drama having pricked even his veneer of selfishness.

But they were not gone. There was a dark blur in the wash which the plunging vessel had made and then Bassett flung his face up to the air. He breathed deeply and dragged his burden up to the air also.

When a boat had been lowered and they had been taken on board, the man whom Bassett had saved was unconscious. Bassett, water running from him in little rivers, stood staring about him. There was a look of expectancy in his eyes. The captain came toward him, but he looked beyond that officer.

Then the look of expectancy was replaced by one of eager certainty. The golden-haired girl, followed by McCall, was coming down the stairs from the upper deck.

At the foot of the stairs the girl hesitated a moment, searching Bassett's face. He smiled.

"Sam!" she said, and she ran to him and put her arms about his neck, drenched as he was.

McCall stood staring. He was puzzled and curious.

His curiosity led him to seek out Bassett in the engine-room a little later.

"I own this boat, you know," McCall insinuated. "Would I be likely to get into a row with you if I asked you a question or two?"

"Anybody would have a hard time getting into a row with me now," Bassett said. "I know what you want. You want to know why I been acting so peculiar. It was this way: You know Briggs, the owner of the Livingston, don't you? You know Hardy, whom I just pulled out of the water. You know, too, that not many steamboats have passed the Livingston in times gone by. Well, old Briggs wouldn't get it into his head that the Anna Belle could and would beat his boat.

"He's peppery and stubborn. So he went to Hardy and told him that he mustn't let the Anna Belle win that race if he wanted to keep his job. Hardy knew his job was as good as gone. He told his daughter so. We've been engaged to be married for some time. She came to me and asked me not to win the race. Her father couldn't afford to lose his job. I told her I'd have to do the best I could. You saw how chilly she was on the dock this morning. That's all."

"All?" McCall cried. "I guess it isn't all. You told her you'd have to do your best and then you lay back so that Hardy could keep ahead of us. You saw yourself losing your girl and you betrayed me."

"My, but your thick-headed," Bassett

grinned. "Man, I laid back because I knew something would happen to the Livingston if they didn't ease the strain on her. Why, that was putting my girl in danger! Do you think I was going to run a chance of losing her altogether?"

"Oh!" said McCall.

He stood staring at his engineer. Bassett turned briskly to the fireman.

"More wood, boys!" he said. "Fire her up. Give her air and lots of it. We'll show Mr. McCall some speed now."

The men piled in wood after stirring the fire. The heat grew. The furnace doors began to glow dully. McCall fidgeted.

"Bassett," he said, "if you fire up like that, you'll put your girl in as much danger as she was before."

"Danger?" said Bassett. "Not while I'm around to take care of her."

McCall fidgeted some more.

"Bassett," he said, "we're not racing now. No use to get up any more speed than necessary to make good time."

Bassett pointed an accusing forefinger at him.

"Tell the truth," he said, "you've got your belly full of racing. You can still see the Livingston plunging down."

"Well, the Anna Belle is a new boat and costly," McCall argued.

"More wood, boys!" Basset ordered. "Give her air!"

"Bassett!" McCall screamed. "Ease her off. I don't know how much strain she'll stand. She's a new boat. I don't want to lose her!"

Bassett laughed.

"Here, you," he said to the fireman who had formerly volunteered to take his place, "you're such a damn good engineer, stand by for a while. I've got to go lookin' for a certain party to see how her and her dad are gettin' along."

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THE SHIPS

BY EDNA VALENTINE TRAPNELL

ONCE we manned great galleons—saw them sail away—
Watched their topsails filling far across the bay,
Watched them from the shore-wall, watched them from the height,
Until our galleons faded far into the night.

Ah, but success seemed sure to us as we watched them sail away;
Fame and gold flung their lure to us o'er the rainbow-tinted spray;
Other ships might be lost at sea, wrecked on the coast of Barbary,
Sunk or shattered—small care had we—ours would come back one day.

Weary days we watched for them, but they never came:
Down behind the shore-wall sank the sun like flame.
Up against the shore-wall bits of wreckage beat,
Brought to us by wind and wave—tidings of our fleet.

Then for a while hope died to us, for a while despair held sway,
Until faith rose again for a guide to us and held us on our way.
The ships we watched from the old shore-wall were gay with flags in their topsails tall;
Now we are building them gray and small—mere cargo-boats are they.

And up the shallow channels where the small craft go
We watch our little cargo-boats plying to and fro—
We, who sailed great galleons out across the foam:
Ah, but we are happy when our little boats come home!

Sara Was Judith

An Enigma

by Julian Hawthorne

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

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ACOLYTE.

BEFORE our departure from Paris, Judith had occupied herself with conferences with her bankers and lawyers. She didn't tell me what she was doing with them, but I think she was getting all her possessions into the form of cash. Among other things, she disposed of her wardrobe, which, if not quite so abundant as Sara's, was costly and magnificent enough for a princess.

"Are you going about in a swimming-suit again?" I asked her.

"I may take the veil!" was her reply.

Drake had once spoken of her "burning her bridges." She seemed, at all events, to be separating herself from all former connections, with no visible symptoms of resuming them. But what of the cash to her credit? There must be millions of dollars of it. With it, she could buy everything back again.

Finally, she sold the house in the Faubourg, and she presented the "Dejanira" and the "Salammbo" to one of the Paris picture-galleries. I'm not enormously rich, but I would have been willing to pay her a reasonable price for them; but she smilingly shook her head.

"All that is over and done with, aunty," she said. "Now, we begin!"

And, as I have related, she smashed the Rodin.

She traveled to Geneva with one trunk. For my own part, I made no particular alterations in my equipment, though of course I didn't prepare myself for fashionable social functions. Upon the whole, we made the trip in very modest style, and our apartment was adapted to two maiden ladies of quiet habits and moderate means.

After unpacking, and adjusting the furniture to suit us, I had gone forth to my unexpected encounter with Lyof Rudol; Judith had declined to accompany me. Upon my return, after the interview, I found her seated before the mirror in her bedroom.

"Prinking, after all!" I said to myself. But in the middle of the room I stopped in astonishment.

She had a pair of shears in her hand; heaps of coiled gold lay about her on the floor. She had been cutting off her hair! The outrage had not been very neatly accomplished, but she had reduced her incomparable banner of beauty to about the length of a schoolboy's crop. This act more impressed me than all her other excesses. I had never seen such another splendor of hair as hers, and now, there she sat, with a burnished bronze fledge that didn't cover her ears! Those heavy, glittering serpents of fascination were gone forever.

I notice that some of our contemporary females have adopted a coquettish coiffure —Ganymede locks clustering over the forehead and at the nape; but there was no insidious intention in Judith's performance. She had disarmed herself of one of woman's most potent weapons.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for May 1.

It was true that the contours of her head, thus revealed, were symmetrical and beautiful—the high-arched crown and the depth in front of the ears were noble, and the setting of the neck on the shoulders had inalienable dignity. But nothing could compensate for the sacrifice of those red-gold coils. It was profanation!

I had been stricken motionless for a moment; then I walked up to her.

"You might now try shaving your eyebrows," I said bitterly. "And why not have your front teeth drawn out? You have still some traces of decent comeliness left, and Rudol is not yet so good-looking as you!"

She glanced round at me with a smile, and then contemplated her reflection in the glass. She sighed contentedly.

"Judith, it was a mistake!" I said; "never so much as now did you need your full armor. Crimes are excusable; but follies are fatal. We may as well go back to Paris."

"Aunty," she said, "from now, I'd like you to call me Sara—not Judith."

"Sara had faults, but she would never have done what you have!"

She answered: "If what can't be seen of me isn't enough to conquer with, victory would be defeat. And unless Lyof Rudol has eyes to see Judith through Sara, he isn't the man I want. He and I are not going to fence with buttons on our foils!"

"But you want to be yourself don't you—not somebody else. You might as well put on a pair of overalls, and call yourself Sam Hill!"

"You are jesting," she said, "but I'm serious. Can I see him to-day?"

"You have till to-morrow to continue your preparations." And I told her of my talk with Rudol. Her face became very grave as she listened. And as I looked at her I recognized a strength and resolute energy in her aspect that hadn't been so obvious before—an older, more concentrated look—a beauty, I might say, of a more masculine order. Her head and profile might have been those of the young Achilles, or of Alexander in his apogee. Not all beauty is skin-deep.

In stripping herself of external graces she may have been under an impulse like that which, in her childhood, prompted her to divest herself of her clothing. Her motive in wishing to be called Sara was more obscure. It must have been subjective; to Rudol it would, of course, make no difference. I acquiesced in the whim; but in this narrative I shall continue to speak of her (for the present) as Judith.

"So he expects me!" was her only comment upon my story. And she drew in a long breath. During the next four and twenty hours she was sparing of speech. Toward the hour appointed she dressed herself in a plain frock of rough material such as might have been worn by a peasant woman. She knotted round her head a blue bandanna handkerchief. Her skirt cleared her ankles by several inches, and she imbedded her feet in a pair of heavy, low shoes.

There was a flavor of the histrionic in all this, but it might be regarded as in keeping with her idea of reducing herself to the simplest terms. With a blue apron, and sleeves rolled up to her elbows, she strode forth beside me with a manner of imperturbable gravity.

Rudol's abode was a ground-floor apartment in a narrow-fronted building in the middle of a shabby block. The front room was his shop and work-room; this opened through a dark passage on the right into the kitchen, and beyond that was the bedroom. The kitchen was also used as sitting and dining-room. In the passage, on the left, was a closet with a piece of carpet hanging by way of door, and a similar contrivance at the end of the passage veiled the entrance into the kitchen. These details must be borne in mind.

On warm evenings it was Rudol's habit to sit outside the street door in a rude chair, which I fancy may have been his own handiwork. Here he would smoke his little black pipe, and exchange greetings with passersby, or enter into talk with them. Everybody in the quarter knew him, and smiled when they saw him, as one smiles at a welcome object, or at a pleasant happening. But no one treated him with ceremony; I won't say he didn't command respect, but the terms of intercourse on which

he stood with the people were familiar and informal.

He was "little brother" with them all, the diminutive being affectionate, not descriptive, for he was tall and bony. But there was love in his looks and tones, and in his deeds, too, for all who came in contact with him. In that dark and crooked street, with nothing beautiful to invite the eye, there seemed to be always, around Rudol, a pool of warm human sunshine, and objects dingy and commonplace derived charm from it, and the faces of his interlocutors were softened and brightened.

He was a sort of beneficent magician; for how was he able to do so much good without money? He knew the private affairs of hundreds of families and individuals, and by personal interventions and negotiations would ameliorate them in ways seemingly magical. Some ruthless landlord would unexpectedly relent; some domineering official would turn kind and considerate; some calamitous rake of poverty would be shown a way to avert starvation without stealing; some hopeless woman would find hope; some sick child, crooned over in his arms, would get well.

Rudol wouldn't wait to be asked; he had the faculty of appearing when wanted. In the pocket of his gray Russian blouse there was the ball of yarn that the mother needed to finish the sock, the foot-rule to replace the one the carpenter had lost, the rubber rattle for the teething baby; and the pair of trousers that the young fellow required to make a decent appearance when asking for a job—why, there it was, hanging over Rudol's arm! Man and wife had quarreled, and the man was angrily packing his belongings in a sack and going to leave her: behold, Rudol, with his kind face and his gentle, tender words, and presently the pair were crying in each other's arms. Or if the delicatessen dealer in the next block were in perplexity on the question of enlarging the business, Rudol happened in, and the advice he gave solved the whole riddle.

I have accompanied Rudol scores of times on his rounds, and have been amused and amazed at his skill and felicity in handling such matters. All was done in a way so artless and spontaneous, as an affectionate and thoughtful member of a family might serve his kindred. That he was also in touch with affairs far larger and more far-reaching than these, and that, in a certain degree, I had been privileged to cooperate in them, I have already hinted, but I don't feel at liberty to discuss them here, and I doubt if they were as near his heart as were these homely transactions.

In truth, of my own personal knowledge, I know little more of Rudol than what I have stated, but I believe that there is in the world no society so august that he might not have claimed a place among its leaders. Have you ever heard of a group of persons, few in numbers, scattered over the earth, to whom a name is sometimes ascribed which, in English, might be called "The Living"? Then you know nearly as much of Rudol as I do.

He was seated in his chair as we came to his door, and he got up and took our hands with a pleased, welcoming gesture.

"It is good for me that you came," he said to Judith, animatedly. "I had had a feeling—how can I tell it—like the feeling we have in spring that we are to see a new heaven and earth—that we are to set forth on a wonderful journey! But yesterday Miss Klemm told me there was to be a new friend: and since then I have felt as we do when we are coming to our journey's end, and the new earth and heaven are around us!

"That is the most wonderful journey—to another person! Orion and the Pleiades are not so far, and our own hearts are not so near. But I said you should have supper, not talk; come, then—the kettle is on the hob inside, and the bread and cheese shall become nectar and ambrosia in our mouths, as when the gods sat at table with Baucis and Philemon!"

In society, we flatteringly entreat one another, with a view to our own vanity and aggrandizement, and call it hospitality. But that lovely old fable of Baucis and Philemon—the two poor peasants welcoming the disguised gods so sincerely that the earthenware and the crusts and the milk in the pitcher became a banquet fit for Olympus—there is the authentic miracle! Angels

wait upon the table, and for the time being love renders the banqueters themselves almost angelic.

Bread and cheese, and the old Russian samovar with its inexhaustible tea! Three apples had been added for dessert—or were they the golden fruit of the Hesperides! The chipped and cracked cups and plates were priceless porcelain; the table-cloth, improvised from a couple of rough towels, was embroidered damask. The breaking of the loaf was a joyous symbolic rite; and the good-will that went to the cutting of the cheese invested our host with royal grace—the royalty that rules by serving. Rudol, I think, had ceased to be conscious that he existed as anything but an ardent energy to minister to his guests.

Judith sat with eyes mostly downcast, a timid and humble acolyte, speaking, if at all, in low-voiced monosyllables. She seemed modestly to shrink from observation, as one admitted beyond her hopes or merits to princely favor. Was this attitude a mask, or genuine?

Rudol, whom homage, tacit or open, would have distressed and disconcerted, had no misgivings. Not that he was deceived by her costume; her face, manner and tone must have discounted that for one of his penetration; but he had no small curiosities, and I fancy he accepted her as a great lady who adopted this method of indicating her weariness of the shows of things. He treated her with a delicate but frank, brotherly deference.

He was in a festive humor, with a touch of playfulness in it, and, as always, a fragrance of good and truth flowed out from him, wooing forth whatever was good and true in his company. But his behavior would have been the same in the society of avowed criminals; because, I take it, he recognized only good and truth in human beings, and regarded their evil as transient and accidental.

But I had always felt, and I feel now, that this brimming love of his was not influenced by person or sex. Though no lover of Judith's or of mine would have more gladly sacrificed himself for our sake than, upon due cause, would Rudol, yet no lover's impulse would have been involved in it. His love, in other words, was given to what of the Creator was or might become manifest in the creature: whatever apart from that might belong to the creature, he ignored.

Nevertheless, being himself a creature and finite, I won't undertake to affirm that, be his principle what it might, he was always able to act up to it: the secret magnetism, drawing or repelling, that is interwoven with the mystical gift of personality and of sex—my mind refuses to believe that Rudol could have been invariably and wholly free from it. Yet I doubt not that he would never allow it to sway him from the highest and noblest path his feet could follow.

Meanwhile, I observed this first contact of the sphere of Judith with his with the liveliest interest. It shed a strange light upon our simple little supper table.

He and I gossiped and laughed like children—such was his delightful contagion. Judith's reticence was outward only; the soft changes of expression in her eyes and lips were as eloquent as speech would have been of her sympathetic participation in our intercourse.

Now and then I saw her bend upon him, under her nunlike lids, a glance of poignant intensity.

At last I happened to speak of the difficulty which the caste system in India opposed to the British administration, especially in the handling of the bubonic plague. Judith looked up.

"Is there much sickness among the poor of this city?" she asked.

"Only as among the city poor everywhere," he replied.

"Why does India have to be overtaken by pestilences that Europe seldom knows?" she asked again.

I expected him to mention neglect of hygiene, lack of temperamental resistance, Oriental fatalism, and the like; but what he said was:

"We need not fear pestilences that kill only our bodies."

"But the wicked, as well as the good, die at last."

"You and I are not speaking of the same death," was his reply.

The pregnant and unlooked-for dialogue stopped there. Judith lowered her lids once more. There was a few moments' silence, as if a spirit had passed before our faces.

"Now I will move our chairs out in the air," said Rudol, with his former cheerfulness. "The best of our evening is to come."

But Judith, in the matter-of-course manner of a well-trained domestic servant, gathered together the remains of our supper and carried them to the sink. "Go out, you two," said she, "and let me do my work."

"But you are my guest!" he remonstrated.

"Then I may do as I like!" she returned, laughingly pushing him toward the door. "If you forbid me, I can never come here again."

This was the first time I had seen or imagined her performing household chores; but she betrayed no unhandiness. Rudol, however, after a look of comical perturbation at me, exclaimed: "But I too, in my own house, must not be forbidden! Come, we shall be housemaid and butler! And Miss Klemm shall be housekeeper, to oversee us and keep us busy! All will be soon done, and then we will be fine folks once again!"

Judith acquiesced in this compromise, and we all three fell to work, and washed up and dried and stored away with laughter and frolic, Judith's dark eyes gleaming under the bronze floss that peeped out beneath the edge of her headkerchief. It was a free and happy half hour, and a spirit of comradeship sparkled through it like wine.

But Judith, in the midst of her gaiety, never abated the reverential attitude that she had adopted from the first—the king might unbend, but the subject must not presume! She even avoided letting her fingers touch his; perhaps the bodily restraint might give more liberty to the spirit.

But I was conscious of forces at work which I couldn't fathom.

When the work was finished, Rudol was for continuing our festival as "fine folks," but her timidity, or reserve, seemed to return, and she would not stay.

"This is only our beginning, remember!" said Rudol, bidding us farewell.

I said to myself, "What will be the end?"

CHAPTER XXV.

PESTILENCE.

"HOW do you like him?" I asked her, as we walked home together.

We had walked nearly half a block before she answered, "He's what I needed!"

"What shall you do next?" continued I; but she only shook her head.

That domestic scene had appeared so natural and genial that I had thought the whole thing might end in an ordinary, happy romance, and that Judith's gigantesque designs would come down from their ambitious heights to encamp in the fertile meadows and beside the gentle stream of matrimony. With her hand heartily in his, Rudol might accomplish for human good more than he could alone. Her spectacular conduct until she met him might be due to a sort of mental aberration caused by the circumstances of her origin; having found her true mate, she might also find her true self. She was a woman after all, and I fancied I knew something of my sex.

But was Rudol, at this stage of his career, capable of taking any woman to be his wife? The question apprised me how slight my understanding of Rudol was. I knew much about him, but of him, very little! An enthusiast, a fanatic—and he was something of that order perhaps—might so far have separated himself, at Rudol's age, from the common relationships of human life, as really to have forfeited the mating instinct.

Yet there might still be a chance of his redemption; and from this point of view it struck me that Judith's unheralded plunge into his domestic affairs had deep wisdom in it. After she had, as an acolyte, proved her practical value to him, she could make good her footing on a more enduring basis.

The events of the few days following seemed to warrant this notion.

After dressing the next morning I crossed

the hall that separated our apartments: her rooms were vacant, and a note on her pincushion informed me that she wouldn't return till evening. Of course I knew where she must have gone, but I was piqued that she hadn't told me of her intention. She came back after dark, her eyes glowing, her frock soiled, her hands chafed and scarred. "You're still not disappointed in him?" I inquired.

She had begun taking off her dress, and she looked around at me over her white shoulder.

"I'm his servant!" she announced.

I was still a little out of temper.

"Do you find his yoke easy, and his burden light?"

"I was with him at sunrise," she said. "I got his breakfast, and swept out the shop, and cleaned the stove, and made his bed, and oiled his sewing-machine, and I cut out a suit of clothes ready for him to make up. While he sat sewing, I went out and marketed for him, and cooked his dinner, and waited on him—but I wouldn't eat with him.

"Then I found his old pipe and filled it and made him sit out in front and smoke. Afterward, we took the clothes to the man they'd been made for; and then we visited several persons who were sick or needed help, in narrow, crooked streets, in cellars and attics. On the way back to his place we talked of his tailoring business."

"I recall a period when clothes and their making didn't interest you. Had your ideas prevailed, Rudol would have had to choose another trade!"

"Nakedness is the garment God made for us, but we polluted it. It is a merciful work to make veils for that pollution!"

"You've caught the drift of his philosophy quickly!"

"It's as simple as nature!"

"Yes, I know—nature is a kingdom of service, and man the only rebel. Be good to your neighbor and forget yourself, and everybody will be happy. So say Confucius, Buddha, Christ, Rudol and others; but the old nursery rhyme tells the truth—'I know the right, and I approve it, too; I know the wrong—and yet the wrong pursue!'

"We drive our brain and heart tandem, and brain, the leader, is always luring off poor old plodding heart out of the straight path, and the universe is strewn with wrecked wagons. But you can never make the Rudol sort of people see it; like the young Zoroaster, they're for tearing down our tiresome old sky, and building a new one. But, my dear girl, veiling pollution doesn't purge it, and what is the use? I shall spend my income and live in comfort all my life, and so will you, after you've tired of the novelty of losing your heart to a transcendental Russian tailor!"

My exhortation didn't seem to annoy Judith, who sat at her dressing-table, rubbing one hand thoughtfully over her bronze fledge. But at my last words she looked up.

"Remember that it's Sara is in love with Rudol—not Judith!" she said.

That startled me unpleasantly. I held to my irony.

"Are you sure there's no jealousy between the two ladies?" I asked.

She smiled. "Judith knows that she can reach him only through Sara!"

My lips turned dry. "Would you strike the man you love because you hate him?"

"I find his flesh sweeter than honey in the honeycomb; but his soul is bitter!" was her answer.

"Damn your paradoxes!" I exclaimed.

She yawned. "Yes, they are damnable. Good night!"

However, these were words merely—Judith had a tongue! Acts are usually safer guides. She was off to him again at dawn the next day, and came back only at bedtime; she meant to hold her position as Rudol's housemaid, apparently. I was left to my own devices, and I had a hundred minds to leave Geneva, but none of them prevailed over my disposition to remain. The culmination of the whole drama must come soon, and I must see it!

Days went by during which I exchanged hardly a score of words with Judith, and didn't visit Rudol at all. I had a few old cronies in town, however, and one of the most conversable of them was a vendor of antique beads and other small curiosities, who lived in a tiny shop not far from the

bridge. She was a widow of fifty, and she never, so far as I knew, ventured outside her shop; and yet no one else was better informed as to what was going on everywhere, or more prone to communicate it to proper listeners.

Her name was Mme. Duval. She spoke French, but in a way of her own—like the lady in Chaucer, "French of Paris was to her unknown." She was religious and dealt justly with her customers according to her creed—which was that honesty in trade is the best policy when everything else has failed.

But to me, who during the past ten years had paid her a minimum of one hundred per cent more than they were worth for the wares I purchased of her, she was truly friendly and confidential, and I found her a resource in these days. Her priest and father-confessor, Père Lamont, would sometimes sit in with us—a charming old man.

It was on the fifth evening after Judith's encounter with Rudol that the reverend gentleman entered Mme. Duval's shop. She and I were sipping lemonade and smoking cigarettes in the little patio at the rear, which commanded a view of the front part. He greeted us with his customary urbanity, but he seemed depressed; he sat down, wiped his forehead, and sighed. *Madame* filled a glass for him. "*Fait chaud!*" she murmured sympathetically.

"It may be that," said the père, emptying his glass in two swallows. "This weather is assuredly unseasonable. There is much trouble over there." He indicated the poor quarter of the town.

"You mean, poor Hyppolite and his family are still sick?" said *madame*, refilling his glass. "It is a queer sickness, that!"

"The doctors are puzzled; they do not find a remedy. Geneva is such a healthy town, but this disease has no precedent. Hyppolite died this morning; two of the children are very bad; the poor wife is distracted: what can she do!"

"Hyppolite dead! Oh, la-la! He was so robust a man—like a bull!"

"That is not all; six other families in the same street have been attacked; there are others—many—in the same district; none who catches the sickness has recovered; most of them die on the second or the third day. One would say, there is a contagion—a veritable pestilence!

"Already the authorities are suppressing the facts—a bad sign, *mesdames!* It creeps from house to house, from street to street—where will it end? Your lemonade is excellent, my daughter—no more, I entreat—well, half a glass!"

"The Virgin protect us!" said *madame* piously. "But this quartier where it has broken out—is it not where the little brother lives—you know, M. Rudol? They say he is as an angel of beneficence—that his very touch brings health and good fortune! If he is there, perhaps the trouble will be diminished!"

"Ah, Rudol! *En verité*, yes, he is a good man; but, alas, he, too, is human! It has happened, too, that he had visited Hyppolite the day before he was seized with the sickness; and most of the families which have succumbed have been of those who were the chief objects of his service and help.

"It happens so—that is all; but these poor people, being alarmed, you know them—they have ideas without reason! Only an hour since that old Thérèse—she of the fruit-stall in the market—whispered in my ear that it was perhaps he, Rudol, through whom the pestilence was communicated! I bade her be silent; but, *en effet*, the poor man is not of the church; it is most unfortunate!"

"Is Rudol working among the people alone?" I asked at this juncture.

"Now that you mention it," said the good father, filling his pipe, "I think I remember of being told that, in the last few days there has been a woman working with him—a domestic apparently, but active and intelligent—but I did not make inquiries. In fact, in my duties during this period, I have not chanced to see Rudol; she might be a sister, perhaps, or a nurse to apply remedies; but I do not know!"

I made my adieux, and went straight to Rudol's house. The door was closed, no one was within. On my way to my own lodgings, I passed through the neighborhood where the pestilence had appeared.

Most of the population seemed to be in the streets; in front of certain houses little groups had gathered, agitated, whispering together; now and then, these would be dispersed by *gens d'armes*.

The sky overhead was cloudy, the atmosphere warm and sluggish. Fear was abroad —fear of the unknown; death, in itself, does not cause fear of this kind. Should it develop into panic, serious things might happen.

When I reached my own place, I found that Judith had not returned. I didn't undress, and did but doze intermittently all night. At breakfast she was still absent.

I paced the rooms, or lay on the sofa, all the forenoon; she did not come. The local newspaper had a brief paragraph, mentioning that sickness, of an obscure nature, had appeared in some parts of the town; that the doctors had it under control, and the authorities felt no anxiety. Evidently the censor was at work!

"Unless I take myself in hand, I shall worry myself sick," I said to myself. I took off my clothes, bathed, and went to bed. After a struggle, I succeeded in emptying my brain of conscious thought; I felt the great, cool currents of the impersonal flowing steadily through my mind, and I slept.

I awoke refreshed at evening. Before I had finished dressing, Judith came quietly in.

Her aspect shocked me. I had pictured her to myself as having passed through the valley of the shadow with Rudol. It was not merely the harrowing and pathetic scenes of death and anguish that she must have witnessed; but she couldn't have escaped the thought that these were an incarnation of the destructive principle which she had imagined herself to portend. She had called herself the living spirit of evil in mortal affairs that Rodin had so appallingly portrayed in marble; and a saturnine destiny had brought her face to face with the reality itself of the plague!

Perhaps it was a punishment which she merited, but the effect which it must have wrought upon her, I had hardly dared admit to my thoughts; I feared it might have withered and darkened her beyond recognition. Moreover, the superstitious attitude of the ignorant populace, which Père Lamont had suggested, might have broken out in some overt demonstration; she might have been compelled to face an infuriated and panic-stricken mob, from which even Rudol's influence might have found difficulty in saving her. She might be brought home beaten, broken, possibly worse than that!

She walked in with an elastic step, erect and tall, fresh, sweet and clear-eyed as a nymph of the prime. Smiles dimpled at the corners of her mouth, as if she were a child who had played truant, and knew she deserved a scolding, but relied upon her pretty wiles to avert it. Her attire was somewhat defaced, but less so than that of the average peasant that it had been her humor to parody.

"Aunty dear, it has been wonderful!" she exclaimed as she came toward me. "We're in the midst of it, but I just came back to change my things. People are dying by dozens, and it's getting worse every hour! Wherever I go—whatever house I enter—new cases develop! You'd think I scattered it off my finger-tips and carried it on my breath!

"It's the real plague of the Middle Ages, my dear—nothing less! But the funniest thing is that the people are getting suspicious of Rudol! It never occurs to them to think of me! Rudol! who has slaved for them for twenty years—and is as near being Christ Himself as any man who has lived since then. If anybody were to call out 'Crucify him!' I believe they'd do it!"

She made a movement to kiss me, but I drew back. She laughed indulgently.

"But why should you be annoyed with me, dear? I've performed prodigies of unselfish humanity! The doctors themselves are shy of touching the bodies, but I've dressed a score of them for burial with my own hands! I've fed the babies, and driven the hospital-wagon! Children cling to my skirts; mothers call to me from the windows—"

"Rudol!" I interrupted her, fiercely; "what of him?"

"Well, it's really ridiculous! Of course he and I are always together—Satan and

saint hand in hand—Satan undoing what the saint does, and nobody suspecting it less than the saint himself! Imagine the poor innocent dispensing what he supposes to be holy water to heal the afflicted, and all the while it's deadly poison from the caldron of hell!

"My language may sound sensational, but the situation is beyond belief! And it's a fact that the pestilence has broken out only in those places that he and I have visited! The inference is, that the more we enlarge our radius, the farther it will spread! Give us a week, and we can wipe out the population of Geneva! The only thing to prevent it would be that they'd fix on him as the agent, and murder him on the spot!"

"Well—you are here!" said I.

"Don't be uneasy, dear, the virus seems to work only when he and I are together. I need his holiness to give an edge to my deviltry! It's the combination that does it; you are in no danger!"

She walked hither and thither, opening her trunk and getting out a clean frock, setting the water running in the bath, unfastening her dress—bubbling over a sort of eager pleasure, like a beautiful woman preparing herself for her lover, proud, confident, queenly! She was in her element at last: her hour had come!

For a few minutes I watched her in silence.

The horrible repugnance first aroused by her words and bearing subsided, and my mind became cold and trenchant. It seemed to me that I saw through her and understood her to the marrow. For me, henceforth, her spell was broken. The glamour was gone; the apparent enigma of her existence ceased to engage me. Her monstrous conception of herself and of her mission on earth was a delusion.

Theories of diabolic obsession were out of date. She was a madwoman, at this moment in the ecstasy of her madness. She was not to blame; what she was was the inevitable consequence of what her forerunners had been, in propensity if not in act.

Be that as it might, one thing was certain—all intercourse between her and me had arrived at its term. It had severed itself spontaneously, and could never be renewed. Realizing this, I became conscious of an indescribable uplifting of the spirit, freed at length from the fantastic fetters that had so long confined it.

My duty was plain and urgent—to warn and save Rudol. His danger was real; whatever was best in me I owed to him; time was precious.

"I'm going out," I said to her. "I need air—I've been indoors too long. You will probably be gone before I get back—so, good-by!"

She was in the act of stepping into her bath; she looked round, smiling archly. How beautiful she was—and how hideous!

"You won't find him, aunty!" she said, with the quick cunning of the insane. "And if you did, you'd be too late. He's mine!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"CRUCIFY HIM!"

I WENT to my own rooms, threw over my head a long black Spanish mantilla, crossed it over my breast and fastened it behind my waist. My skirt being dark, I was sufficiently inconspicuous.

Once outdoors, I started mechanically for the water-front, and had come in sight of the lake before I realized where I was going. My brain was in a whirl, and I felt faint. On the corner of the street there was a low stone post with a flat top. I sat on it.

The scene with Judith had cost me more than I thought. I intended and believed our parting to be final. It had seemed easy to say good-by and to close the door, and I had felt strong for the moment; but there was a gaping wound in my spirit, through which my life-blood was flowing out. I comprehended, now, that she had been for many years the inmost companion of my being, and this sudden wrench asunder was like parting with life.

But Rudol must be warned—that thought struggled back to me and helped me to hold on to myself. He was betrayed, and none but I could save him. It was unlikely, however, that he would be in his own house at this time. Where seek him, then?

The night was very dark and the air heavy. The street lights were wide apart and flickered dimly. The place itself had an unfamiliar aspect. Geneva is one of the oldest cities in Europe; before the Romans came, it was already populous and active. It must be thronged with ghosts—thousands of people long dead, amid the scenes of their labors, triumphs, tragedies and crimes. But there had been no crime like this!

If Judith's purpose were carried out, there would have been no other such tragedy. It was enough to open the graves!

She had won the confidence of a man whose life had been devoted to love, mercy and self-denial, and was using him as her instrument for devilish destruction! And the mob's vengeance would be wreaked not on her, but on him!

This had been the struggle for which she had armed herself, and her victory seemed imminent! Whether she were a devil incarnate or a madwoman, was beside the question; the crisis was here, with me alone to avert it; and I felt my weakness, for I was not guiltless—I had fed her pride and her vanity. Whither to go and what to do I knew not.

I stood up and stared about dizzily. The street was empty— No! Over yonder two figures were walking. They stalked solemnly, garmented in flowing black cloaks. They passed into the shadow of the houses and disappeared. Were they not the Bedouins whom I had seen leaning on the bridge with Rudol on that first evening here?

I hastened after them, trying to recover the strength of my legs. When I reached the corner, I thought I had another glimpse of them turning into the next street. But now there were other persons—and perhaps the Bedouins were an hallucination.

I hurried on however: they had given me a direction, and I now perceived that I was going toward the stricken part of the city—hallucination was my most trustworthy guide! Somewhere amid that dark complex of crooked lanes and alleys Rudol must be.

There came to my mind a sentence—God is not mocked! It stood up like an immutable rock in a shifting quagmire. Many a wicked enterprise, skilfully organized and resolutely pursued, had dashed itself against that rock, and had been crumbled to dust. Whether I were in the spirit or in the body I hardly knew. I kept on.

There was a confused, pervading noise from all sides, occasionally punctuated with sharp cries or hoarse shouts. The crowd became denser, and the people forged to and fro aimlessly or gathered for moments in excited groups. Sometimes there was a rush in one direction of numbers; then they lost their objective and scattered, or they would be dispersed by the *gens d'armes*.

I could no longer follow any predetermined course, but was swept this way and that in these currents and eddies. The faces that passed me in the pale lamplight had a strained, terrified look, and I caught evil, savage mutterings; the people seemed to be hunting for something, yet without clearly knowing what it was, or where it was to be found. I had the sensation of being in a foul whirlpool, hurtled about, driven, pulled, fearful of being submerged and suffocated.

The dark, irregular fronts of the houses glowered overhead, leaning toward each other across the narrow ways, their unlighted windows like sightless eyes, or glowing redly at intervals. My feet stumbled on the rough pavements. Stale odors of filth and poverty hung in the air. At times I thought that this had been going on for thousands of years, that I was drifting in the misery, squalor and malice of ages past.

The heavy clouds seemed to sag down as low as to the chimney-tops; they were heavy with the burden of the pestilence! And here, forcing its way through the press, preceded by police with sabres drawn, appeared a fearful procession—flimsy structures like skeleton cots, borne on men's shoulders, fluttering with ragged draperies, and carrying undefined, prostrate shapes—victims stricken with the disease on the way to the hospital, or corpses being hurried to their graves. From one of these death-cots, as it staggered past me, the coverings fell off, and disclosed the naked, shriveled body of a child, disfigured with black blotches.

Rudol—and Judith—where were they?

A piercing voice shot up out of the turmoiling mass—*"Par ici—par ici!"*

The thing most to be dreaded—a leader of the mob—had arisen. The leadership might be transient, but it would be passed from one to another. Anything might happen!

The mob, the individuals composing it, impotent by reason of the press, but one and all frenzied with the mad mob instinct, surged round the corner of the street and swept to the right, carrying me with it. My feet, at moments, hardly touched the cobblestones of the pavement. To fall would be death. I fought for my life.

From above the doorway of a house further along the street swung a lantern, the flare from which was spilt out in wavering rays upon the heads of the crowd below—upon their dark hair and pallid, twisted faces. I recognized that lantern. Many a time had I idly watched it hanging on its iron hook, or vibrating sluggishly in a draft of air, as I sat with Rudol in his doorway opposite.

Under that lantern the forward movement of the mob was arrested — it had reached its goal! Rudol! Rudol!

I was helpless. I was holding my arms with elbows bent against my sides, to prevent my ribs being crushed in. I was projected to right, to left, forward, backward, twice all but losing my perpendicular and being hustled down beneath those brutal feet. I struggled desperately; now I felt against my shoulders the hard, flat surface of a wall—the wall of the house of the lantern.

Glancing up, I saw sticking out above me the rusty end of an iron bar embedded between the stones. I made a grasp for it, and caught it with one hand, then with both. I drew myself upward by main strength, as a damned soul might draw itself up from the Pit.

Under my feet I felt an outjutting ledge —the frame of a basement window perhaps —narrow, but enough. Here, then, I stood, waist-high above the crowd, grasping the bar, supported by the ledge. No one noticed me. The faces were turned toward the building opposite, the house of the savior of the poor, Rudol. The voices screamed and growled for murder.

A solid stone-porch over the doorway made a little shelter above the front of Rudol's house—a space where he had been wont to sit in the evenings, to chat with friends or to exchange greetings. Standing in this space I saw two persons.

The mob raged and threatened, confronting them, at a distance not further than the reach of an arm; there was no visible barrier; yet no one crossed the narrow space.

Rudol's gray blouse was in tatters, on his forehead was a bloody bruise, and his left arm hung helpless. But on his homely features was a look of pitying love and of spiritual tranquillity, without fear. It conveyed the spirit of the words uttered from the Cross—" Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

The woman, Judith, beside him, was dressed in white, and the lantern-rays seemed to concentrate upon her, making her radiant in contrast with the darkness. The little wavy locks on her bared head were red-gold flames. Her eyes beneath her white brow sparkled black and triumphant. Her bosom was lifted queenlike. She shone dominant and victorious.

The dark huddle of shapes facing her, embodiments of ignorance, misery and blind hate, were body and soul at her mercy. And she was merciless, beautiful, infernal, sucking the milk of her life from the breasts of death. No one dared invade her boundaries.

But there was in the bowels of the crowd one man, the leader, a few hours since a husband and a father. Nothing was left to him now but the corrupting corpse of his child, which he held gripped tight to his breast. Shrieking with frenzy he fought his way forward through the writhing mass. Foam frothed over his mouth. Nothing human could be more ghastly and terrible. Snarling and biting like a hyena, he gained at last the space before the threshold.

There, he shifted his burden to one arm; in the other hand he carried some weapon. Lurching forward, he aimed a blow, not at Judith, but at Rudol.

But as his arm lifted, Judith struck it aside. It crumpled, as if palsied, the knife clattering on the threshold. He choked, his body arched backward, and he fell. The plague had smitten him. Those nearest him

yelled in horror and dashed themselves against the human wall behind to escape.

I saw Judith point to the fallen wretch, and I fancied that her clear cheeks curved in a mocking smile. Rudol knelt down, and with his uninjured arm tried to drag his would-be murderer out of the trampling of the crowd.

But now a new and shriller uproar arose from the outskirts of the mob further down the street, and from my perch I could see the front rank of a squadron of men, mounted and helmeted, striking with naked sabers. They came forward at a quick trot, driving before them or riding down the mob, swinging those long, keen blades to right and left, and not always heedful to strike with the flat of the weapon. The steel helmets glittered over the grim visages, the horses plunged with iron hoofs, men and women were borne down, bellowings of rage thinned into screams of agony. The wedged mass of bodies was forced onward like the interwoven débris of a torrent.

Awful minutes passed like lingering ages, swirling and roaring at my feet. Rank after rank the squadron thundered by, striking, trampling, gaining speed as the fugitives found openings for flight, till all were swallowed up in the stifling darkness. Then came the heavy rumbling of wagons to gather up the broken or lifeless remnants of the struggle—poor, inert fragments of what so lately had been tense with furious passions. Neck and crop, pell-mell, they were snatched up and hoisted into the heavy vehicles. An officer or two, riding leisurely, trim and calm and soldierly, directed the clearance.

These, too, passed. Order had been restored, and the narrow street lay silent and vacant, fetid, smelling to heaven.

I looked across the street. The porch of Rudol's house was now empty. The bodies of the father and his child had been removed in the tumbrels; but where were Rudol and Judith? I had lost sight of them during the charge of the troopers. Had they been swept away with them? Or had they found refuge within?

So completely had the scene preoccupied me that all my bodily sensations had been suspended; so that the return of physical consciousness was acutely painful, as nerves and muscles were forced back to their functions. I felt like one who has fainted on the rack.

The strained posture in which I had kept myself so long relaxed with pangs. How different, compared with the exhilarating fatigue incurred in my fight against the storm and hurricane on the New England coast, was this harrowing exhaustion wrought by the foul human outburst!

Before attempting the descent from the ledge, I glanced down the street. My brain was swarming with picturings of memory that were like visions, and I was ill-qualified to distinguish between realities and specters; but it seemed to me that I discerned at a distance of some fifty paces, the two figures, black robed and stately, that had twice before haunted my imagination. But my eyes were blurred; and now, even as I looked at them, they appeared to dissolve into the shadow in which they stood, and out of which my disordered fancy had probably conjured them—no, no one was there!

I unclasped my stiff fingers from the outjutting iron bar, and crouched down sidewise, clinging with my right hand to the irregularities of the wall. It was hardly a four-foot drop from the ledge to the pavement, but my knees couldn't support my weight, and I fell in a heap. I lay there for some minutes, jarred and bruised.

But the thought of Rudol and Judith cut like a knife through my inertia. He had seemed all but helpless, she full of bright strength.

Why had she warded off that blow? What was she doing with him within there?

In a sort of feverish panic I scrambled to my feet and reeled across the street. For a few moments I clung to the stone pillars supporting the hood of the porch. Then I put my hand on the latch of the door.

It opened before me, and I entered the shop, which was unlighted; but a vertical line of light appeared at the further end of the little passage between the shop and the kitchen, in the doorway of which, as I have explained, hung a piece of carpeting in lieu of a door.

Stepping noiselessly as a thief, I crept along the passage, till I felt on my left the entrance of the closet. These two openings adjoined each other at right angles, so that by ensconcing myself in the closet I was able, pushing the hanging carpet a little aside, to peep into the kitchen.

Thus concealed, what was said in the kitchen was audible to me, and I could get partial glimpses of what was being done there.

CHAPTER XXVII.

EXORCISM.

THE candle from which the light proceeded was just outside my range of vision on the table, but half of the latter was visible; and Rudol was seated in a chair beside it, his back toward me. Judith, facing me, stood in front of him, and was binding up his left arm with a strip of linen. The arm, in the region of the elbow, was purple and swollen. He must have received a violent blow upon it.

In order to operate, she had slit open his blouse, baring the whole arm and the shoulder. The instrument with which she had made the slit lay on the corner of the table. It was Constantino's poniard. I had not seen the poniard since our coming to Geneva. Had she taken it with her this evening as a protection against possible violence? She hadn't used it when she confronted the mob; and the mere touch of her unarmed hand had been enough, as it had seemed, to strike Rudol's assailant dead, as if it had been a bolt of lightning!

The white cotton frock that she wore had been somewhat rent and defaced in the mêlée. The front had dropped apart at the throat, so that the pearly swell of her bosom was disclosed as she bent over Rudol. By my surmise he and she had been surrounded by the mob at some distance from his house, and had been jostled and mishandled; but evidently Rudol, not Judith, had been the object of attack. Perhaps she had saved his life more than once during that terrible passage. But why, if she desired his destruction?

There were no signs of intending mischief in her now! Her touches, as she ministered to him, were as tender, light, and firm as those of a mother tending her hurt infant. An earthenware basin with some healing tincture in it stood at hand; she dipped it up at intervals with a sponge and gently applied it to the injury.

Her movements were soft and caressing. Her face expressed a solicitude grave and beautiful. There was no trace in it of the mocking defiance with which, a few minutes ago, she had flouted the mob. I could almost believe that that other had been but a diabolic similitude of this devout, nunlike being, whose soul breathed the perfume of sweetness and mercy.

"Is the pain less now?" she asked, lifting her dark eyes to his. Her voice was low, and her tone was intimate, suggesting a relation which, though reverential, was familiar and almost domestic.

They had spent five days together from dawn to dusk, in close physical and mental contact. They had visited and relieved sick and destitute persons together. They had seen and heard together the revelations and the voices of naked poverty, had attended wretched women in childbirth, intervened between vice and its victims, followed human life in its most exposed and unreserved manifestations.

In former years I had passed months working in hospitals with Topham Brent, and I knew how such an experience may attenuate the conventional barriers between a man and a woman. One nature being common to us all, we insensibly are subdued to what we work in, like the dyer's hand. We relinquish toward each other the reserves which have ceased between us and others. Our words are not guarded; and words may unlock doors!

Rubbing shoulders with death, too, leads toward negligence of minor things. After all its victories and defeats, there lies the mortal theater of the struggle, bereft of its honor or its shame! Its shame and honor were alike due to fortunate or untoward constitution or accident, and the conflict, the triumph and the remorse can have no significance for the soul.

Let us take our pleasure and do our will without fear. Shall immortality be held re-

sponsible for time? Time is an illusion, and immortality a guess! And when war or pestilence strikes us down wholesale, faith in even a Divine justice is weakened, and we see only a blind power which makes no discrimination between good and evil.

Had Judith availed herself of these conditions to dissolve the foundations of Rudol's integrity? Still more might she be aided by the contrast that the inward and private scene offered to the outward. In the intervals of their labor she had brought him home, and soothed him with sweet and comforting offices and observances.

He had never known the gentle consolations of a woman's care: which would lapse about his sterile shores like summer waves about a lonely island, undulating, softly insinuating, imperceptibly inundating the rugged contours with their warm, transparent tide. Gentle feminine insistencies would gradually mitigate the lonely severities of the rock, and secret ardors cause it to bloom with flowers. The subtle mysteries of sex would transfigure the wastes of the solitary spirit, and redeem its chilly abstractions to the tender personal thoughts and impulses of the human creature.

These thoughts strayed through me in the short interval before Rudol spoke. My mind and emotions were much disturbed during the dialogue that followed. I tried not to hear the words they spoke, not for honor's sake, but for my own. But they were driven into me, though perhaps my agitation distorted their purport.

Rudol stretched out his arm: the lean muscles played over the shoulder-blade. Then he drew up the severed sleeve of his blouse.

"The bone isn't broken—you've been very skilful and kind. Now I can go back to the people—they have no protection!"

She cried out: "No, no, no!" and slipped an arm round his body. "Not to-night, dear master! The streets are patrolled and you'd be arrested. Come, you're my patient, I'll put you to bed. That wound on your forehead still bleeds! Let me stay with you to-night, and I'll make you strong for to-morrow!"

He was very weak. She had got her shoulder under his and was drawing him toward the bedroom. The urgency of her low voice sounded irresistible — Lilith still potent over Adam! I was on the point of breaking in—interrupting; but he turned, and I saw his face and knew that his weakness was physical only. No, I had no license to meddle. The issue was between these two!

He glanced down at her with the smile of a father opposing the waywardness of a child. But, oh, those dark, pleading eyes of hers! She was putting forth her power. I had felt it and remembered its strength. Could anything masculine stand against it!

He patted her head playfully.

"You shall stay here till I come back, little one," he said indulgently. "A woman must be prudent. I shall get no harm; whatever strength I had was created by the need of those poor folks, and they were never in such need as now."

The blouse had again fallen from his shoulder. She laid her cheek against his bare breast, and both her arms were round him.

She was sobbing—I had never known her to shed tears before—how could he escape being kindled by the fire that burned through her flesh into his! Her voice was tremulous and indistinct, a hurried, passionate monotone.

"Don't go—don't leave me—stay with me, Lyof! You give love to worthless animals, greedy only for food and shelter—just now they were howling to tear you to pieces! Love me! Feel how I worship you! Lyof—Lyof!"

He was silent, taken by surprise. He pushed her a little back from him, and searched her upturned face intently. I thought there was tenderness in his look, but still more, compassion. The power of beauty is incalculable; but something awful is latent in the power of a being absolved from self.

"How could this come to pass, little one?" he said at length.

"I've lived for you. I was brought into the world for you. When I heard your name, it beckoned me! A woman loves her child—and the more for the agony of giving it birth. How could I not love the man my soul foresaw? Open your eyes and see me!

If I'm beautiful it's because I was made for you!

"We're man and woman, Lyof. God divided man into male and female so they might find each other again—turn their loneliness into joy—bring heaven to earth in one another! Don't dare to despise me!" she cried, lifting her head and gazing in his eyes. "Love makes me worthy even of you! Don't fear I'll prevent the good you do—I can make it a thousand times greater!"

All this poured from her like a torrent, and my knees shook under me as I listened. It wasn't her words, cogent though they were, but the woman resonant through them, various, eager, sweet, compelling, conveying the myriad magic of sex to sex. Had I been Rudol, I must have yielded, even knowing what I knew! What was he saying?

"I have no claim to this—you misjudge me. When I was young, God saw in me things so foul that He drove me into the wilderness, lest I corrupt others and destroy myself. I was unfit for common intercourse with my kind. So my devil was benumbed, and hope given me—though no good was in me, I might bring good to others; but to seek it for myself would be death—the death without resurrection! No! Stand away! You would pollute yourself, and my devil would come back with seven others. Stand back!"

The candle-light flickered. Was there a struggle? His voice had sounded sharp. I couldn't see clearly.

In a moment Judith's tones came full and strong:

"Lyof, beloved, hear me—don't you know me! Yes, in the wilderness! Look—look through into my heart!" She was tearing her frock open, uncovering her bosom, laughing strangely in her throat. "Here—the mark—it was fading out for need of you, but it's all black and burning again!

"Kiss me! I bring you all the kingdoms of the earth! Feel my lips, and suck back joy and liberty! Beloved, I doubted a little at first, but my soul said: 'This is he!' Come, possess me! Nothing can stand against legion! To-night was the beginning of our festival. Together, we'll depopulate the world! Come—"

It seemed to me that such words as these were spoken; but as I write them down, my assurance wavers. Perhaps I did but catch the contagion of some insanity. There are things which mortal senses cannot compass.

Her voice—if it was hers!—ceased suddenly, and at the same moment the light went out, and the figures vanished in thick darkness.

In the darkness there was a noise as of feet scuffling on the floor, and low gurgling of laughter, and breath drawn pantingly. Then arose a great voice, making the narrow space vibrate with the passion of its appeal. There was a note in it that appalled me. Never had I heard its like. The appeal of a man to his Maker, crying for mercy, not for himself but for another.

"O Lord God! Whose hand opens the gates of heaven and hell! Come in Thy power, and free this woman from her enemy! Cleanse her from evil! Bring her peace! Thou who didst grant redemption to the Gadarene, be with us now!"

Thereupon arose a confused outcry, monstrous and terrifying, as of fearful creatures, human and bestial at once, struggling in a death-grip. An astounding ululation, now savagely growling, now rising into broken screams. A gnashing of teeth, and a rending. And withal a sickening stench of unspeakable corruption.

Monstrous and deafening though it was, it did not overpower that appeal, as of silver trumpets, uplifted in the voice of Rudol. And from without came a sound like a strong wind rushing out of the sky, carrying purity and healing on its wings. But the words Rudol was now uttering were in his native tongue, known to me but imperfectly; yet so resounding and masterful was the emphasis lent to each syllable, that the meaning seemed to declare itself beyond the trammels of mortal language, and to clothe itself in the deeper tongue of the spirit. It was the soul of the man that spoke, communing with his Creator, denouncing the ancient exorcism!

Then, as I crouched, burning and shivering, in my hiding-place, a shaft of light shot out along the passage and struck into the

darkness of the room beyond. I saw a tall, writhing shape, spectral white, like the phosphorescence of decay, twisting and untwisting, cowering and elongating, serpentine and obscene; and a face disclosed or obscured as it turned itself to light or shadow, corpselike, grisly, convulsed, but stamped with a likeness which my eyes strove vainly not to recognize; for the fiend had not yet wholly torn itself from the flesh of the mortal. But the gray figure of Rudol stood high and commanding. His features brightened with spiritual victory, and his eyes soft with human love.

Measured steps were approaching, traversing the little shop without, and now entering the narrow passage, following the rays of the lantern. Two lofty apparitions, shrouded from head to foot in waving black robes, moving forward, silent, dignified and calm. I thought they brushed against me as they passed. A faint aromatic scent accompanied them.

The white specter was in the throes of its final struggle. It swayed violently this way and that. I saw the gleam of an arm reach out, swift as the darting of a cobra, and the fingers snatched up from the table the Italian poniard.

The arm whirled upward, and descended. With that blow, the uproar and turmoil ceased, and I heard only the dull noise of a body sinking to the floor. But I was huddled down with my face hidden on my knees in the closet. From without came the undertone of the rising wind.

After an interval I heard again the measured tread of the Bedouin, moving more heavily, as if bearing the weight of a burden. They passed slowly, and the solemn rhythm of their footsteps died away. There was another interval, but my face was still hidden, and I did not stir.

At last it seemed to me that there was a broken, moaning sound in the room beyond. It was querulous and thin, like the inarticulate complaint of some aged creature rousing itself from a painful dream. I trembled, but did not lift my head. How long a time passed after that I cannot tell.

Then I heard another step upon the outer threshold. It was infirm and irregular. It entered the shop, and paused there; but presently there was the scratching of a match, and the steps came forward hesitatingly, as one walks gropingly in the obscurity of an unfamiliar place. I raised my head a little. The light of the match was tossed to right and left along the walls of the passage, and now I had an impression of a person in dark clothes, somewhat bent in the shoulders, feeling his way along with a hand dragging against the wall.

As he came opposite the doorway of the closet, the match burned out. He stopped to light another, and as the light flared in his face, I saw old John Roadnight.

He went on, muttering to himself, and blundered into the room. He must have found the candle there, and relit it. What else would he find? I made an effort to get up, but I dropped back again. I had no interests here. The world I had dwelt in had come to an end.

But it startled me to hear John's cackling laugh in that room—that amiable, foolish, well-remembered cachinnation in a place still reverberating with the echoes of an inconceivable event! Following this, the quavering, kindly voice, with its homely Yankee intonations.

"Well, well, Sara, old wife! So I've come up with you at last! I figured I'd track you down some day! Says I to myself, she must have her fling, like the others, and I'll sort of track around after her, till she gets good and ready, and then—

"Why, pretty slim quarters, here, eh? Must have run short of cash, did you? Well, there's plenty left in the till, and I guess we'll find the old house on the North Shore standing yet! Yes, I fetched a cloak along, in case it should turn chilly; them snow mountains, come a change in the wind, is liable to give you trouble, if you don't watch out. What's that?"

"Where are we, John?" mumbled Sara's voice.

"Why, this is the town the pretty watches comes from, wife. Geneva, you know! Got sort of mixed up, chasing around so much, didn't you? Well, what do you say—shall we be moving along? I got a room up at the hotel—I was thinking I might meet up with you.

"Well, well, seems good to feel you lean-

ing on my arm again! I was looking up the trains. There's one leaves in the morning, so as we can connect with the boat for New York, and be back home before you know it. Lean on me, that's right. I'll show you!"

"Oh, John," she was whimpering, as they felt their uncertain way along the passage, "I've been lost, I guess, or been dreaming, maybe. It seems as if all sorts of queer things had been going on. Judith had gone out in her boat, and there came up a big thunderstorm, and you away off in New York—I don't remember much, but I was awfully anxious! But, Geneva did you say? Why, that's in Europe! How did I—"

The voices trailed away.

After a long time, I pulled myself to my feet and went into the room. The flame of the candle was smoking. Mechanically I snuffed it with my fingers. My foot touched something on the floor. I picked it up. It was the Italian poniard. There was blood, still wet, on the blade. The little weapon lies on my writing desk now. The stain that came from Rudol's heart is still upon it. It is my only memento of him.

I stepped out of the house into the street. The wind was fresh and cold from the snow mountains, and I drew its purity deep into my lungs. The heavy clouds had been blown away, carrying the pestilence with them. As I passed over the bridge, the river was rushing into the lake like a messenger bearing glad tidings to a weary world. The stars sparkled in their immemorial constellations; but the ruddy tinge of dawn had begun to flush the snow on the summits.

I left Geneva that evening, and, traveling uninterruptedly, was met by Topham Brent as I got out of the train at the Boston railway-station.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AMEN.

A WEEK after my return Topham and I accomplished our long-deferred project of hearing Paderewski play the "Moonlight Sonata."

"Beethoven must have been thinking of the Lake of Geneva," I said, when it was done.

"You and I have several things to say to each other," he remarked. "Where shall we go? Boston is all before us, where to choose!"

"We want to be by ourselves," said I. "Come to my house."

So there we sat once more, in the bay-window, with the Common before us. The electric lights sparkled far and wide. The trees were clothed in autumnal robes, but their hues, in the artificial light, had a theatrical look. If we would only let nature alone!

"How are affairs at Saraband?" I asked.

"They got back there only a few days before you came. John sent for me. I found a very nice old woman, quite normal—except that, physically, she's the oldest person I ever saw, and mentally a rather dim-witted schoolgirl."

"Do you mean Sara?"

"I don't mean Mrs. Prime, though she was there, the same as ever. There was no one else of that sex. What were you thinking of?"

I was not ready to take up that subject. I was by no means sure that I would speak of my experiences at all.

"Sara isn't so old!" I said, after a while.

"She's several centuries old, at least," he said, "and it won't be long before she crumbles to dust and disappears. John will outlive her."

"How do you account for it?"

He made a gesture. "I haven't the courage of explanations! A bolder person might say that while Sara was asleep, some very active and enterprising person had stolen her body and played ducks and drakes with it! Only the flimsiest rags and tatters are left! And the poor creature has no recourse—the enterprising person has disappeared! One can only hope that some of the exciting adventures that her mortal garment must have had were shadowed forth to her in dreams. But I fear her sleep was too sound."

"Try not to be clever, Topham," I said. "I'm not in the vein."

"Well, won't you give me my cue?"

It lay on me like a burden, which could

be relieved only by sharing it with somebody — and there could be no one but Topham to share it. Disconnectedly and reluctantly at first, I began the tale of what had happened from the time of my going to Judith in Paris. But the fever, passion, mystery and horror of it seized me as I proceeded, and I dare say I succeeded in conveying to him some partial realization of what I had—or believed I had—seen and heard.

Even now, after all these years, I sometimes doubt! He sat with arms folded and his eyes on my face. I was half crying the latter part of the time, and when I had finished, I broke down, to my mortification. He behaved perfectly; that is, he sat still and silent till I recovered myself. There can be wonderful sympathy in silence!

By and by he said, in his steady, solid way, that makes one feel like a ship safely anchored after a stormy voyage, "Rudol is a unique type, almost. Such a man makes you feel that things we fancied were legends, vision, apocryphal, may really take place.

"On the steamer last summer, coming over here, I fell in with a fellow, a missionary—he'd been twenty years in China, up in the back country. He told me a lot of queer things—things he believed were true, and maybe they were!

"He was quite simple and honest. He said that obsession by evil spirits was common among the Chinese peasantry, and that in a number of cases he had personally exorcised the victims, in right Biblical style. The spirits 'tore them, and departed,' he said. All one needs is faith in God, he said. He wasn't an imaginative sort. And the things he told must have happened, somehow. I was tempted to mention Judith and Sara, but considering your—er—position, I didn't feel at liberty."

I nodded. When was Topham not considerate!

"My notion would be," he went on, "that Rudol was never in any danger at all; I mean, he felt no temptation. He had taken the woman to be what she gave out to be—a penitent, or something of that sort—and was roused, at the last, only by her self-revelation. Then, as my missionary would have put it, he recognized the Evil One—distinguished the obsessed from the obsessor—and came to grips with him. But your story outdoes any of his Chinese yarns. Thank goodness, you were fortunate enough to get through alive!"

"But Rudol!"

"Yes, an old-fashioned Christian — an apostle, one might say! Glad to give his life, I suppose, for the most insignificant of his fellow-creatures."

"Insignificant in herself, but not in what she stood for! But his death made me feel how impossible death is for such a man! His spirit seemed to fill the world and purify it, even while they were carrying away his body."

"It was odd about those Bedouins!" he remarked thoughtfully. "I was thinking, at first that they were fantasmal—creations of his own thoughts, perhaps—but apparently there must have been something substantial about them. Did you ever hear what actually became of his body?"

I shook my head. "The report was that he'd been killed in the riot, and had been buried unrecognized with the other dead people. Has Sara never hinted at—never alluded in any way to him—that it was she who—"

"I'm satisfied she knows nothing whatever about it. Her consciousness ends, so far as I can make out, with the time when she locked herself into that clothes-room of hers after the thunder-storm. And yet it was that poor old feeble claw of hers that killed him! I wonder what a judge and jury would make of such a case! She's absolutely innocent and incapable—but she did it!"

"Poor Sara! What a life! She has a soul of her own, I suppose! No, life doesn't end here, Topham! And hers won't begin till she's dead!"

As we sat silent, the door-bell rang, and Dora presently came in with a telegram. It was from John. Sara had just died. Would I come on to Saraband?

"She's alive at last, in other words," said Topham. "God bless her!"

I said: "Amen! God is not mocked!"

(The end.)

An Art Shop in Greenwich Village

by Ray Cummings

THE little shop was dimly lighted—a lurid red glow at one side and a faint amber radiance from above. For a moment I stood looking around uncertainly—at the slovenly display-cases and tables, the unframed paintings on the walls, and the long shelves crowded with curios.

"Perhaps something in particular the *señor* would wish?" suggested the little old man ingratiatingly.

I glanced back into the black shadow that shrouded the farther end of the room, and then turned to meet the snakelike little eyes that were roving over my figure appraisingly.

I shook my head. "No," I said; "nothing in particular."

The little old man straightened his bent back with an effort, reaching a skinny hand toward the shelf above his head.

"The *señor* plays chess, perhaps?" His hand held a little white figure carved in ivory; he dusted it off against the faded black of his coat-sleeve. "A wonderful game, *señor*. This set is of the Moors—they carve superb in ivory, the Moors. Perhaps in the London Museum of Victoria and Albert the *señor* has seen the work before?"

"No," I said, and moved away down the length of the table. "I lived in Spain a year. Your place interests me."

He laid aside the ivory figure and followed me down the room with feeble steps; I noticed then that one of his feet dragged as he walked. It was peculiarly unpleasant—indeed the whole personality of this decrepit little old man seemed unpleasant and repulsive. I stopped in the red glow of an iron lantern that hung from a bracket upon the wall.

"I lived in Spain a year," I repeated. "That is why, when I saw your sign, I stopped in to look around."

He stood beside me, looking up into my face, his head shaking with the palsy of old age, his eyes gleaming into mine.

"In *Espana* you have lived, eh?" The thin, cracked treble of his voice came from lips that parted in a toothless smile. "That is good—very good, *señor*."

"In Granada," I added briefly.

He put a shaking hand upon my arm; involuntarily I drew back from his touch.

"The *señor* has lived in Granada! My birthplace, *señor*—yet for fifteen years have I been here in your New York. Fifteen years, selling here the treasures of *España*. You have lived in Granada—ah, then, *señor*, the Alhambra you have seen?"

"Yes," I said, "of course."

He picked up a little vase from the table before us. The fire of patriotism that for an instant had lighted his face was gone; cupidity marked it instead.

"The *señor* perhaps is interested in

ceramics?" His voice was almost a whine. "The great Alhambra vase—greatest example of the ceramic art of the Moors in all the world—here is its miniature, *señor*. See—gazelles in cream and golden luster upon a blue field.

"And there—over there you see a Moorish plate, painted with a luster of blue and copper. And there—the golden pottery of Malaga—you have heard of that, *señor? Madre mia*, what beautiful pottery they made—those Musselmen of Malaga!" He pointed at the lower shelf. "See it gleam, *señor*, like purest gold. But to you, *señor*, you who have been to *España*—because we understand these things, you and I—will I sacrifice my treasure."

"No," I said. "The price does not matter."

On the wall, above the red glow of the lantern, hung an unframed canvas. In the amber light that shone on it from above I could see its great splashes of color—the glittering, gaudy parade of a bull-ring.

"That painting there," I asked—"what is that?"

Again he put his hand upon my arm, and I felt myself shiver in the close, warm air of the room.

"The *señor* perhaps is rich?" His voice came hardly above a whisper; he strained upward toward my face as though to exchange some darkly mysterious secret. "*Un Americano rico*," he said, "and the money perhaps does not matter?"

"Perhaps," I said, and shook off his hold upon my arm.

"If that be so, *señor*, there are many among my treasures I could show."

"I have no money with me to-night," I said.

He raised his hand deprecatingly. "Naturally, *señor*. We understand each other. To have money in the pocket—it makes no importance if one understands."

I glanced up again at the vivid, colorful bull-ring pictured upon the wall. His eyes followed mine.

"Francisco Goya," he said. "Greatest in *España* to follow the great Velasquez."

"You mean that is an original Goya?" I exclaimed.

His voice fell again to whining. "Ah, *señor*, no more can I tell you than they told to me. You, perhaps, who are of the art a judge—you can say if indeed it is of Goya."

He waited, but I did not answer.

"A person very droll, *señor*—the great Goya. A fighter in the bull-ring once, before he took the brush. And with the women—*Madre mia*, how they loved him—those women in the court of the fourth Charles! He painted well, *señor*. And his pictures of the bull-ring—like that, *señor*"—his hands went up as though in benediction—"there are none better."

I stood for a moment looking up at the painting.

"If the *señor* wishes," he added softly, "it troubles me not to take it down."

I shook my head. "A realist, this Goya," I said.

"He had no heart, *señor*. What he saw he painted without pity. He was, as you would say, a satirist."

I had no idea that the painting before me was genuine—nor indeed did I much care. But this little, withered old man, and his musty, cobweb-laden shop, had about them something vaguely sinister that fascinated me—a subtle sense of mystery I could not escape.

"I have studied art," I said. "You interest me."

Again I met his glittering eyes, and it struck me then, I think for the first time, that there was in them a light that was not the light of reason.

For an instant I could see him hesitate, and then as though he had reached a sudden decision, he motioned me to a chair and seated himself, facing me in the red glow of the lantern overhead.

"The *señor* is very young," he began softly; again he hesitated, glancing swiftly over his shoulder as if to reassure himself that there was no one else in the room. "Very young, *señor*, but also—shall we say—very rich?"

His eyes were fastened upon mine; the red beam from the lantern lighted his hollow cheeks with a weird, unearthly light. I took off my hat and laid it on the table at my side.

"That need not concern us," I said.

"*Muy bien señor.* We understand each other *seguramente.* Of the character I am judge—for I am an old *señor,* and many people have I known."

He pulled a watch from his pocket. "The hour is late. No one comes to buy."

He rose to his feet and locked the door that led to the street.

"That is better, *señor.*" He came back toward me with his tottering, dragging step, and switched off the amber light in the ceiling. "The *señor* will remove his storm-coat?"

I laid my overcoat on the table and sat again in the little wicker chair. The shadows of the room were close around us now. In the heavy red of the light I could see only a corner of the table and the shaking figure of the little old man as he sat facing me. Behind him the solid blackness had crept up like a wall.

"*Bien señor.* That is well. Now we talk."

I felt my pulse quicken a little; but I held my gaze firm to his.

"Only to you, *señor,* would I say what now you shall hear." His glance shifted upward into the darkness, then back again to mine.

"Francisco Goya, Velasquez, Sorolla y Bastida—all these great men of *España* are known to the *señor.* Is it not so?"

I nodded.

"But one there is—we shall call him Pedro Vasquez y Carbajál—of him the *señor* has never heard?"

"No," I said; "I have never heard of him."

He leaned forward in his chair again; his locked fingers in his lap writhed upon each other like little twisting snakes.

"A wonderful painter, *señor,* for he knew the secret to put life upon his canvas." His voice fell to a sibilant whisper.

"Vasquez y Carbajál," I replied. "No, I never heard of him."

"Only one picture, *señor,* to make him famous. Very old he is, this Vasquez. One picture to make him famous. Five years it has taken him. Five years of working—working—" His voice trailed off into silence.

"Yes?" I prompted.

His head had sunk to his breast; he raised it with a start at my word. The fire came back to his eyes; he sat up rigid in his chair.

"A picture of the kind none other could paint, *señor.* The secret to put life upon canvas. Is that not droll?" His querulous, half maniacal laughter echoed across the shadowed room. "From the mortal living, *señor,* we take the life, and upon the canvas we make it immortal."

I pushed my chair backward violently, half starting to my feet.

"Stay, *señor.*" He raised his hand, pointing a finger at me. "You who are of the art a judge—you would see this painting, no? This picture by the great Vasquez that soon will be seen by all the world?"

He laughed again—an eery laugh that chilled my blood.

"One moment, *señor*—one little moment, and your eyes shall see that which they have never seen before." He rose to his feet unsteadily. "Life upon canvas, *señor.* And beauty—vivid and real to make your pulses beat strong."

I stood beside him under the lantern.

"We shall look upon it together, you and I." He raised a hand apologetically. "That is, of course—if the *señor* desires."

The mystery his words implied appealed to me—I was in my twenties then—and to the spirit of adventure that has always been strong in me. It was chicanery, I knew, but interesting, and I would see it through.

"Very well," I said. "I will look at your painting."

In silence I followed him into the shadows of the back of the room.

"Careful, *señor*—a chair is here."

He suddenly drew aside a curtain in the darkness, and we stepped into a dim hallway, with a narrow flight of stairs leading to the floor above.

"I shall go in front, *señor.* You will follow. The way is not long, and there is light."

The stairs were narrow and uncarpeted; they creaked a little under our tread. On the landing a window stood partly open,

its shade flapping in the wind. The snow on the ledge outside had drifted in over the sill.

We stopped on the landing, and the old man closed the window softly.

"We speak not so loud now, *señor*, so—" He broke off abruptly. "It is better we speak not so loud now," he finished.

At the top of the stairs we turned back and passed through a doorway into a room that evidently was immediately over the one we had just left.

It was a room perhaps thirty feet in length and half as broad. My first impression as I stepped over the threshold was that I had stepped across the world—in one brief instant transported from the bare, ramshackle, tumbledown Bohemianism of Greenwich Village, into the semibarbaric, Levantine splendor of some Musselman ruler. The room was carpeted with Oriental rugs; its walls were hung with tapestries; its windows shrouded with portières. Moorish weapons—only symbols now of the Mohammedan reign over Spain—decorated the walls. Two couches were piled high with vividly colored pillows.

The rugs and all the hangings were somber in tone. The whole room bore an air of splendid, lavish luxury; and yet there was about it something oppressive—a brooding silence, perhaps, or the heavy scent of incense.

"My room of work, *señor*," said the little old man softly, closing the door behind us.

I noticed then that there was one other door to the room, in the side wall near the front where there were two very large windows almost like a side skylight; and that this other door stood slightly ajar.

There was a huge fireplace with a blazing log-fire. I think that without its cheery crackle the oppressive feeling of mystery that hung over the room would have been almost unbearable.

"We shall have more light, *señor*." The room was lighted only by a wavering yellow glow from the fire. He touched a switch, and from above came a flood of rose-colored light that bathed us in its sensuous warmth.

Over by the windows a large canvas, its face covered with a cloth, stood upon an easel; in front of the easel, nearer the side of the room, by the fireplace, I saw there was a model-stand—a small board platform resting on the floor.

"You have a luxurious workshop," I said casually.

The little old man looked over the room with an appraising, approving eye.

"One must have one's ease, *señor*, when one creates." He turned another switch, and a long row of hooded electric bulbs across the top of the windows cast their brilliant light directly downward upon the shrouded canvas.

"Come here," he said. The whine had left his voice. He spoke the words as though now unconsciously he had slipped into the rôle of master, displaying to his pupil a great work of art.

He grasped me by the coat-sleeve, pulling me forward until I stood with my back against the portières, and faced the shrouded canvas. Then abruptly he jerked down the cloth, and in the brilliant white glare from overhead the painting stood revealed.

I stared at the canvas. What I expected to see I do not know. What I saw left me gasping—first with amazement, then pity, then with an almost irrepressible desire to laugh. For upon the canvas was only a huge smear of many colored pigments—utterly formless, without meaning. I stared an instant, then turned and met the eyes of the little old man beside me. They gleamed into mine with triumph and pride, and in them I saw again—and this time plainly—the look of madness.

I held back the smile that struggled to my lips. "This—this painting—is it you who—"

"Is that not life, *señor?*" His thin, treble voice carried an exultant, masterful note. "Can you not see it there? Human life—painted in with pigments to make it immortal."

"Was it you who painted that—that picture?" A great pity rose in my heart for this poor, deluded madman.

"I? Oh, *señor*, you do me great honor. It was painted, I have said, by Vasquez—Pedro Vasquez y Carbajál. A wonderful

man, this Vasquez. They are children beside him, these others. Is it not so?"

I said nothing, but gazed again at the miserably grotesque daubs on the canvas.

"Look, *señor!* Is that not a soul you see in those eyes? A human soul?" He pointed a shaking finger at the smear of color before us, his eyes shining with pride. "You call them realists—these Goyas and these Zuloagas. You have seen the girls of Zuloaga, with their white faces and their lips of red. You have looked into their eyes—these girls he paints—have you ever seen there the soul?

"'Naturalism,' they say; 'a richness of tone!' or 'with a subtlety he paints.' Or perhaps it is a 'fuller impasto.' Bah! They are but words—tricks of words for the critics to play with. They paint of life—these masters, as we call them—but their paintings are dead. They cannot capture the soul, *señor*—the soul that always struggles free—the human soul never can they hold imprisoned upon their canvas.

"And those lips, *señor*—see her beautiful red lips—are they not about to speak? The breath that trembles between them—is it not a little sigh she would breathe—a sigh to tell us she cannot understand this life that stirs within her?

"She would have music, *señor*—music to whisper those little woman secrets no man shall hear. See the lute she holds—her fingers have but brushed its strings, and she has laid it down.

"And that hand—there upon her breast. Closer, *señor*—bend closer. Can you not see veins upon that hand? Blue veins they are, but in them there is red blood flowing—red blood to feed the flesh of her body—blood to give her life and hold imprisoned there the soul. Can you not see it, *señor?* Human blood—the blood of life in a portrait."

His voice rose sharp and shrill with triumph, and he ended again with his horrible senile laughter.

The jangling of a bell rang through the house. The little old man met my glance and hesitated. Then as the ring was repeated—I could hear it now; it was in the shop down-stairs—he muttered a Spanish oath softly to himself.

"Some one wants to see me," he said. "A customer, perhaps—who knows. The *señor* will excuse me one little moment?"

"Yes," I said; "I will wait for you here."

"When the business calls, *señor*, it is not good for the pleasure to interfere." He looked around the room uncertainly, and then started for the door through which we had entered.

"I leave the *señor* not alone"—he glanced significantly at the canvas—"and only for one little moment."

When he had left the room I stood again before the canvas, partly enveloped in the great folds of the heavy window portières. On the stairs outside I could hear the dragging footsteps of the old man as he tottered back to the shop below. I examined the canvas more closely now. There was upon it every color and combination of color, like the heaped-up pigments on a huge, untidy palette. But I noticed that brown seemed to predominate—a dirty, drab, faded brown, inexpressibly ugly, and somehow very sinister. It seemed a pigment color I had never seen before. I could see, too, that the paints were laid on very thick—it was done in oils—as though it had been worked over and over again, for months or even years.

A light footfall sounded near at hand, a rustling of silk, the click of a latch. A girl stood in the partly opened side door—a young girl, hardly more than fifteen or sixteen, dressed in Moorish costume. She stood an instant hesitating, with her back partly turned to me, looking about the room. Then, leaving the door open behind her, she picked up a lute that was standing against the wall. I had not noticed before that it was there—and crossed the room toward the fireplace.

The girl crossed the room slowly; her back was still partly turned as she passed me. It took her but a moment to reach the fireplace, yet in that moment I had a vague but unmistakable feeling of being in the presence of an overpowering physical exhaustion. Her shoulders seemed to droop; she trailed the lute in her loose fingers over the heavy nap of the carpet; there was about her white figure as she

walked a slackness of muscle, a limpness, a seeming absence of energy that was almost uncanny.

She reached the fireplace and sank on a hassock, holding the lute across her knees, her eyes staring away into the distance behind me. It was as though without conscious thought she had dropped into a model's pose.

I must have stepped forward into plainer view, or made some slight noise, for the girl's gaze abruptly shifted downward and met mine full.

"Oh, *señor*, I—" She showed no fear. She did not start to her feet, but sat quiet, as though in sudden bewilderment—yet with a mind too utterly exhausted to think clearly. "Oh, *señor*, I did not know. I thought only the *maestro* would be here. I came to pose for him. It is the hour."

I tried to speak quietly. "He will be here in a moment," I said. "I have been looking at your—your portrait."

The girl did not smile, as I think I hoped she would, but stared at me apathetically. I held her glance a moment; then it wandered vaguely to the easel as though her thoughts were still groping with the import of my words.

In the shop down-stairs I could hear footsteps on the board flooring. After a moment I stepped forward out of the window recess, and, drawing up a chair, sat down beside the girl.

She dropped her gaze to mine without emotion. I could see her face had once been beautiful. From this close view-point I could see, too, that her lips were pale with an almost bluish paleness. Her cheeks were very white—a whiteness that was not a pallor, but seemingly more an absence of red. And then I got the vague, absurd impression that I could see into her skin—as though it contained nothing to render it opaque.

"Do you pose for the *maestro* every night?" I asked. My tone held that gentle solicitude with which one might address a child who was very ill.

"*Sí, señor;* every night at this hour."

Her manner was utterly impersonal; her eyes still held that listless, apathetic stare. I gazed into them steadily; and then, far down in their depths, I seemed to see lurking a shadowy look of appeal.

"I have been examining your portrait," I said. "It is a very—curious picture, is it not?"

A faint little glow of color came into the girl's cheeks. She seemed somehow stronger now; but it was a gain of strength rather more mental than physical. I sensed dimly that, talking with me, her mind was clearing. She hesitated, regarding me appraisingly.

"A very, very curious portrait indeed it is, *señor*." Again she paused; and then, as though she had come to a sudden decision, she added slowly: "A very curious portrait, *señor*. To me it has no meaning. Once I said that to the *maestro*, and he was very angry. He told me I was mad, because I could not see the art—the wonderful art in his work. He beat me then." She shuddered at the memory. "But that was very long ago, *señor*, and never have I said it since. And every night I pose."

"You are ill, *señorita*," I said gently.

"The portrait needs so much of me," she answered. And then some thought or memory that her words did not reveal made her shudder again. "I am ill, *señor*, as you say. Very ill. And that, too, makes the *maestro* very angry. I am not so beautiful now for the portrait. And soon I shall die—and then I can pose no longer."

I leaned toward her. "You can trust me, *señorita*," I said. "You are ill-treated here—he treats you badly?"

She looked searchingly into my eyes; then she swiftly drew back her loose sleeve. The white flesh of her upper arm was scarred with many scars.

"The portrait, *señor*—it is life he paints there. And one cannot paint life without using life to paint with. That he says, *señor*—and he takes what there is in me to give."

She spoke softly, tremulously, half in terror at her temerity at talking thus of the dreaded *maestro*, half with an air of wan appeal.

And with her words, in a sudden flood of horror, the meaning of all that I had seen came clear to my mind. I realized

now how this miserable madman, painting formless daubs upon his canvas, was using the life-blood of his victim. With revulsion in my heart, I understood at last the meaning of those ugly brown smears that mingled and predominated among the pigments on the canvas—the dried and faded stains of human blood. And here, sitting close beside me, was the victim of this insane necromancy—the shell of what had once been womanhood—this body of a girl being drained of its life drop by drop.

The girl's voice brought me back to myself with a start.

"He takes the blood that I have to give, *señor*—and each day the painting grows more beautiful. He says I am mad that I cannot see its beauty—that the brown I see is not brown, but red—vivid, beautiful red—the red of life itself.

"But you, *señor*"—she put her hand upon mine; its touch hardly held the warmth of the living—"you, a stranger who, why I know not, comes here to this room—you see, too, the way it looks to me, do you not, *señor?* Ah, then, indeed I am not mad—and it is he who sees upon the canvas what is not there."

I was about to answer when dragging footsteps sounded on the stairs; the front door of the room opened and the little old man stood upon the threshold. A look of incredulous astonishment came over his seared yellow face, supplanted in an instant by rage. His lips parted in a snarl.

"Thou, Malella—thou art here in the presence of a stranger?" He spoke in Spanish, his voice vibrating tense with the fierceness of his passion.

The girl turned slowly around on the hassock; the lute slipped from her lap to the floor.

The little old man was coming forward, and the malevolent gleam in his eyes made me leap to my feet.

"Go thou to thy room, Malella—to thy room—at once."

The girl rose slowly and stood drooping beside me, as a flower droops for long lack of the water that gives it life.

"*Sí, maestro,*" she answered. "I go."

I saw the old man hold her gaze with his glittering eyes. I realized there was about those snakelike little eyes of his an hypnotic power. The girl seemed to follow and to obey, involuntarily, almost his unspoken commands.

She laid the lute on the mantel above the fireplace, and, turning slowly back, faced the old man as he stood close beside me.

"Say good night to the gentleman," he commanded, speaking this time in English. He spoke less harshly than before, as though by using my own language he unconsciously recognized the restraint my presence put upon him.

Then he added to me, and again the miserable, groveling whine came back to his voice:

"A foolish child, *señor.* You will excuse, of course."

"Good night, *señor,*" said the girl.

I found myself very near to her, staring straight down into the clear, empty depths of her blue eyes. And there again I saw that look of appeal—like the patient look of a dog in pain—whispering to me, asking for my aid. As if to answer it, all the pent-up torrent of emotion within me burst forth. I swept the girl behind me with my arm and fronted the old man.

"I am going now," I said; and with surprise I heard my voice come quiet and repressed. "I thank you, sir, for showing me your painting. The *señorita* here is ill. I am going to take her with me—to-night—to a hospital."

The old man seemed unable at first to grasp my meaning. He stood quavering before me, his lower jaw hanging slack, his eyes widening with surprise, a look of confusion on his face.

"She is going with me now," I repeated firmly. I turned around to her.

"Get some long wrap, Malella, that will cover you. Hasten—I will wait for you here."

The girl stood irresolute. Confusion and fear were written on her face; her glance swung from one to the other of us, undecided.

"At once, Malella, do you hear?" I added sharply. "Get your wrap—I will wait for you."

I pushed her away from me, and she

stumbled forward toward the door through which she had entered the room.

Her movement seemed to awaken the little old man into sudden action. He flung himself on me with a snarl, his shaking, shriveled fingers clutching at my throat. I shook him off, but he came back instantly, throwing himself at me fearlessly, with a shrill, maniacal, blood-curdling cry.

Reason left me; for an instant the room swam red before my eyes. I tore his fingers again from my throat, and seizing him around the waist, hurled his frail body violently to the floor. His head struck a corner of the model stand; his body quivered a moment and they lay still.

The girl, with livid, terror-stricken face, was shrinking against the side wall of the room, with one hand pressed tightly over her mouth. I hurried to her.

" Never mind the wrap, Malella—we will go without it."

She looked at me numbly.

" Come," I added, and, putting my arm about her shoulders, dragged her unresisting from the room.

It took us but a moment to descend the rickety stairs to the darkened shop. I stopped in the shop and snatched up my overcoat and hat. When we got to the street I found it had stopped snowing; across the square I could see the glistening white of Washington Arch.

A jolly crowd of young people came hurrying by, and seeing us standing there in the doorway—a girl in Moorish costume, and me with my overcoat on my arm—laughed and waved in friendly greeting. An alert taxi-driver—thinking doubtless we were going to some masquerade—drove his car to the curb and stopped.

" You are safe now, Malella," I said, after a moment, when we were in the taxi and had started toward the hospital uptown.

Her slim little body swayed toward me; her arms stole up around my neck like the arms of a tired, frightened child who seeks protection.

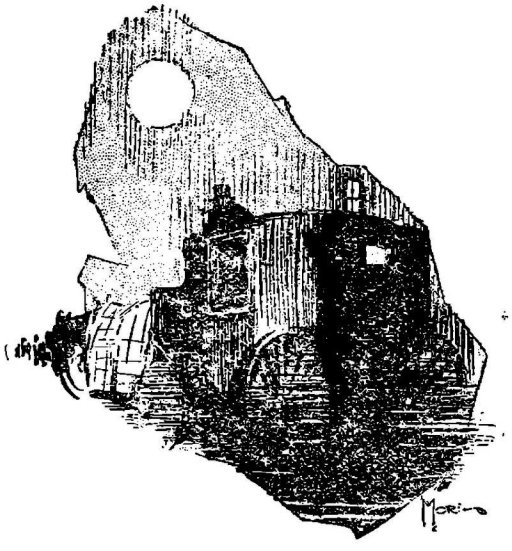
" You need not be frightened," I said. " You are never going back." And then I added aloud, but softly, very softly to myself: " For when they make you well again at the hospital you are going to be with me—always."

For I was in my twenties then, as I have said, and the decisions of youth are very quickly reached.

"Cab."

by

Ralph Ellison de Castro



"AND once," said Jack, as he blew the chalk-dust from the tip of his cue, " I tried my hand at horse-racing."

He drew a careful bead on the nine-ball, then shot it into the corner pocket with the precision born of long experience. He rested the cue on the floor, and looked around for encouragement.

" All right, Jake," some one said, " get it off your chest; come on, spill it."

"It was quite a few years ago," he continued, "long before you fellers could tell the four-ball from the three without lifting them up and looking at the numbers. In fact, you was just at the age where you was playing hooky from school for the first time. Wait until I hang up my cue."

He walked over to the cue-rack, placed his cue in it, and, returning to the table, placed himself on top of it, his feet swinging underneath. Inquiring casually if some one had a stray cigar, he gravely selected the best of the several that were offered, lit it deliberately, and faced his audience.

"What I don't know about horses," he began, "would fill all the books in a big library. And what I *thought* I knew would cram the same library tighter than the Wall Street subway-station at five thirty in the evening.

"My trouble was that my knowledge of horse-flesh was confined to but one kind—the cab, or hack-horse. If I had let that knowledge of the peculiarities of the cab-horse rest right where it was, I never would have got mixed up in the horse-racing game. But it was the old story of ambition. My father started it.

"My father, as perhaps you don't know, was Schenectady's most famous cab-driver. That doesn't seem to be much of a job, but my father has driven in—and been driven from—a lot of the largest cities in New York State. He was the best cab-driver that ever short-changed a drunken actor. He could get more mileage out of a cab-horse with plain words than an advertising man could get out of an automobile tire with a gallon of ink. Which, I may remark, is some considerable distance.

"He had it down to a science. Now take Schenectady, for instance.

"In Schenectady, in the old days, there was but one hotel worth calling by the name. True, there was a few others, but they was all of the give-and-take, go-as-you-please variety. You *give* the proprietor anything he asks for a room, you *take* what he offers you, and go as you please—which was generally after the first night.

"The best—that is, the *only*—hotel in Schenectady was right smack up against the railroad station. That's what made my father's game so awful good. His game was this: All the travelers that was in Schenectady was there for the first time, and—"

"How do you get that way, Jake," some one said. "They couldn't be *all* there for the first time. What do you mean?"

"Have you ever been in Schenectady?" Jake replied.

"No."

"Then you don't understand. What I said *goes*. Anybody that was in Schenectady was there for the first—and only time. Do you get it?"

He continued the thread of his story.

"My father met only the trains that hit the town late at night—after dark. He specialized on three trains, the 9.45, the 11.15, and the 1.03, waiting like a hawk for the poor suckers that came to town hoping to make at least their expenses. He could generally count on at least five uninitiated drummers hitting the burg on each train.

"He would approach the weakest-looking of the lot, and inquire in a good, friendly-like tone, if he could be of any service to the gentlemen who seemed to be in Schenectady for the first time. This poor duck would admit with pride that it was his first time in town, and state that he wished to be recommended to a hotel. Could the cab-man take him to one?

"The cab-man replied that he was sorry, but the only hotel that was open now was six miles from the station, and that his horse was entirely too tired to walk that terrible distance so late at night. At this the bribing would commence. The travelers, banding together in a mutual forlorn hope of getting some place to sleep for the night, would start to raise the ante.

"When, between the five of them, they had reached the figure of seven dollars, my father would call all bidding off and accept the nomination.

"The five of them would shake his hand in gratitude, after which the rest was easy. They would get into the cab, my father would slam the door, chirp to the horse, and start off. After driving around the block for an hour or so, he would draw up in front of the hotel, collect his seven bucks, and make tracks.

"The next morning the travelers would be woke up by the pleasant odor of soft coal, would look out the windows and would see the railway station, from which they had emerged, so full of hope and coal-dust right plumb against the back door of the hotel.

"They would immediately call together an indignation meeting, and would organize a still hunt for the old man, who, by this time, had run the seven up to fifty with the bones in a back room at Troy.

"The old duck was a terrible gambler; would gamble or bet on anything. Yet with all his love for horses he never bet a nickle on a horse-race of any kind or description. I could never understand this, and often wondered why the old man didn't lay a few bucks on a race once in a while at the county fair, which took place near Albany. I asked him once.

"'My son,' he said, as he had a full house on the table against a pat straight, "'you ask me why I never bet on the horses, even though I would risk the family jewels on a game of poker?'

"'Yes,' I answered back to him.

"'My boy,' the old man said, 'when you are as old as I am you will know enough to stick to one form of gambling. And,' he continued, as he dealt himself a pat flush, 'I will tell you why I don't play the races. Lean over—it's a secret.'

"I leaned over toward him.

"'*I can't shuffle the horses,*' he remarked, as he pushed in a big stack of chips.

"That may have explained the old boy's luck at cards, but I didn't pursue the question any further, in view of the circumstances.

"One day I went over to the Troy fair with my father. While browsing around the grounds he set his eyes on a wonderful young horse, who, at that moment, was earnestly endeavoring to kick all the slats out of his stall.

"My father hadn't been a hack-driver for twenty-five years without knowing something about horses. He casually inquired as to the price the owner set on the horse, which was named Trojan. After considerable haggling my father led the colt out of the grounds and left a hundred and eighty dollars with his former owner.

Little as I know about horses, that horse seemed to me to be the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. He was as black as the inside of a derby hat on a dark night. And life! You could see life and gameness written on every feature of his map.

I didn't get the big idea that laid behind the buying of the horse, and couldn't understand why my father would want a horse like that, such a wonderful animal, just to drive around hitched to a dilapidated hack. I told him so. He just smiled.

"'Jake, my boy,' he said, 'Do I look green?'

"I told him I didn't think so, but I was no judge.

"'Well,' he returned, 'you just don't get too excited over this animal. I bought him to lend tone to my establishment. You see that there horse? That animal is going to make my name known all over the Hudson Valley, as the owner of the most expensive cab-horse in the State of New York. Put your money down on your old father, my boy; he ain't as green as he looks."

"'I hope not,' I returned, and dodged a punch he aimed at me.

"Now, this was the point: Being such a beautiful horse, and probably the fastest thing on hoofs this side of the Yonkers Fair, he sure would be a great, free advertisement for the old man. He could be used for ordinary hacking when necessary, but my father planned to keep him as a special horse on hire out on Sundays. You see, the automobile wasn't very popular with the young men at the time, as it cost too much, and, besides, when they went out with their girls they wanted to be alone. Get me?

"Trojan was the most expensive horse to hire in the whole town of Schenectady; more than double the price of any other horse in the place. This at once made him exclusive, and it was a sporting proposition to be able to hire him for an afternoon. And the young feller that drove Trojan down the main street could do it with a feeling of great pride. He had the *best*, although he would be broke for the next two weeks. They also liked him because he would take them further into the country with their girls than any horse in the county.

"It got so bad that each Sunday there was a regular auction sale for the services of Trojan. The proud winner could canter down Union Street with his head high in the air, proclaiming to all the town that he, Gustave Wimple, had enough money—and the courage to spend it—to hire absolutely the finest animal that ever hit those parts. The other courting young men in the town could only retaliate by being suddenly called out of town.

"They gathered in Kelley's poolroom, bewailing their fate, and hanging their heads in disgust. As there wasn't any other *real* horses in town, all they could do was stay at home—or, as they did, shoot pool.

"The old man began to lay away money faster than I could spend it for him. I saw his bank-book one day—just a glance of it I got. There was a couple of fives in front of the figure, which ended in a row of zeros longer than the score of the big league tailenders.

"Then one day the old feller goes and gets ran over by a railroad-train. It was his own fault, through carelessness, so I couldn't collect any damages from the company.

"After mourning for a considerable period—the old man was as good as they come—a real pal to me, even though he wouldn't let me mix in his poker games—after I had mourned for a respectable period I meandered down to the bank, to find out the exact figure my father had deposited. The cashier looks at me in surprise.

"'Sorry, Jake,' he remarks, 'the old gent drew it all out the week before he was run over.'

"I staggered from the bank all in a daze. Drew it all out! What could he have did with it? Lord knows *I* didn't spend it. I looked through everything in his trunk, then I came to the nigger in the rock-pile. I found eight hundred shares of some mining stock that wasn't worth the paper it was written on. With it was a letter of the old man.

"'Dear Jake,' he said, 'here is some mining stock which, should I pass out, should leave you high and dry with money when the dividends begin to roll in. From what I understand they are now digging gold out of this mine with a shovel. I bought it from a nice fellow I took from the railroad station. It cost me eight thousand bucks—all I had in the world, but this guy tells me it will be worth eighty thousand before the year is out.'"

Jake sighed.

"I beat it down to the Albany stock market," he said; "that is, to a broker that had offices in Albany. I walks in and places my stock on the table.

"'How much?' I says.

"'Ah,' he comes back, 'so you have some of that wall-paper?'

"'Where did you get that stuff, "wall-paper"?' I requests.

"'Listen, young man,' he says, 'when I said wall-paper I was just uttering a compliment to the bonds. I'll tell you what I'll do. The stuff isn't worth the ink it's printed with, if you went out and tried to sell it. In fact, if you tried to sell that to any one he could have you put in jail for fraud, burglary, arson—or anything else. As stock, that stuff simply doesn't exist. I'll make you a proposition. Where do you live?'

"'Schenectady,' I told him.

"'Ah,' he says, now, I understand why you bought it; go no further, I'll give you fifty cents for it, and submit it to the Museum of Ancient History.'

"I beat it from the office and left the stock there with him.

"Well, there I was with a horse, a cab, and not a nickle in my jeans. I might remark right here that Trojan had an appetite just a fifth of a second behind his record for a mile. I didn't have the money to buy him a sack of oats!

"Of course I could of taken him down to the railroad station and used him as a hack-horse, but I had too much respect for him to do that. It would have broken his pride, and he never would have got over it.

"So I decides to follow the old man's course with him, and rents him out for the day to a couple of old ladies, which I knew would be kind and gentle with him. The money I got from this bought him some feed and me some food.

" Then came a sort of climax. I was trying him out along Union Street—the Riverside Drive of Schenectady—and the speed that horse showed astonished me. He went so fast I couldn't get my breath. I notices a rather sporty-looking individual standing by the curb, holding a watch in his hand, and looking in a kind of a queer, surprised attitude as I pulled Trojan in for a rest.

" He walks up to me and looks Trojan over with care and interest. Then he looks at me.

" ' My card,' he says.

" I looks at it.

" ' Warren Jay Hoolihan,' it says, ' Promoter.'

" ' Sorry, Mr. Hooligan,' I says, ' but I can't use your services. I left school seven years ago.'

" ' My friend,' he comes back in the tone of a prize-fight announcer—grandlike—' I am not connected with the department of education in any way, form, degree or manner. The word *promoter,* which doubtlessly confused you, means that I am a promoter of equine contests for speed and endurance. In other words, my friend, I manage horse-racers. How much do you want for that animal?'

" ' How much have you got?' I asks.

" ' I'll give you a hundred and fifty dollars—*cash,*' he says, and pulls out a roll of bills that would have plugged up the Johnstown flood.

" ' What are you trying to do? Trying to kid me?' I asks. ' A hundred and fifty dollars for this remarkable horse, which can trace his ancestry back three degrees further than I can? Don't make me laugh!'

" ' Two hundred,' he says.

" ' Come again.'

" ' Two twenty-five, my last word,' he expurgates.

" ' Listen, Mr. Hanrahan,' I says decisively, ' if you ain't accustomed to larger figures than those you are quoting, both of us is wasting our time standing here and arguing. Honest, I hate to have the horse listen to such small money in connection with him; it's a shame.'

" ' So you won't sell him?'

" ' Right the first guess.'

" ' My friend, I make my departure with the following solemn words to you. That animal will cause you more trouble, worry and pain than the Irish cause King George XII.'

" ' Advice is free, Mr. Harrigan, but I don't need it.'

" ' All right then; good day, sir.'

" ' Good day, Mr. Heffernan, best of luck.'

" He walks off sadly, after taking one last look at the horse. I decided that I would have to look this horse of mine over very carefully, so as to find out what made him so valued in the eyes of a horse-racer, like this bird claimed he was.

" I went out on the roads, and watched other horses hurrying along. I found out this much: The ordinary horse, when driven fast, didn't have any regular, specified motion to his legs. He just flung them out in front, with a sort of go-as-you-please motion; somewhat similar to a new-fangled egg-beater in action. They seemed to get all tangled up.

" Then I had some one drive Trojan by while I watched. I seen what this guy Harrison meant. Trojan seemed to know just the right way to move his legs. First the two on the right side, quickly followed by the two on the left side—sort of a piston-rod action. He swayed from side to side; but, good night, how that animal did move!

" I seen right there that I had a natural-born racing-horse, and that with some good care and a little luck I might be able to make some coin out of him.

" I was desperate for money, though, and didn't have the idea where I could raise the dough to buy him one of these racing buggies, so as to enter him in the pacing races that come off in two weeks at the fair just outside of Albany. I then devolved the following plan, after considerable thinking.

" In the first place I would have to work."

Jake paused so that the crowd could get the full effect of his extraordinary announcement.

" Trojan would have to work, too; pull the hack for two weeks. I figured I could

scrape together enough money this way to buy him his racing outfit. I could let a few of my friends on the inside of the thing, and borrow enough money to place a respectable bet on the race.

"In addition, I figures that if he got used to pulling a heavy hack around the town, why, when I hitched him to the racing gig, he would be so pleasantly surprised that he'd break all records for the distance. My only trouble would be in getting him to stop.

"So each night for a week and a half I took him out of the stable, slammed the door of the hack, and away we went. I never held a watch on him, because I didn't want him to know he was going to be a professional racer. He was just smart enough to know it, if he ever saw a watch. Anyways, I didn't have no watch.

"He stood up great under the strain of hacking all day long, and then going out on the open road to show his paces at night. It was only a horse with a real heart that could of done that.

"The race was such a sure thing that I decided to let the whole town in on it, advising them to bet every cent they raise that Trojan would leave the rest of the plugs behind.

"I took them out with me to see Trojan work out. They takes one glance at him and goes out and hocks the family organ, the music-box, and the atlas of the world. I then decided that I ought to pick up a little money to bet on the race, to add to the money I was saving—and the other people's that was foolish enough to play cards with me.

"The intelligence of that animal was marvelous. He didn't even wait for me to shout 'Giddap' at him; all he needed to hear was the slam of the door, when he would be off like a shot.

"Trojan got to be the most famous horse for miles around. Any one considered it a pleasure to ride with him, and if they could have shook his hand on getting out of the cab they would of did it. The outcome of the matter was that every one went down on Trojan for the big race—hook, line and sinker. The whole town drew out its long year's earnings to bet on Trojan."

The crowd was now clustered around Jake, seeing that he was coming to the climax of the story. They didn't want to miss anything.

"The day before the race came off," Jake continued, "I went out and bought the racing-buggy, which set me back eighty dollars. I went over to the race-track, and bet four hundred dollars—got three to one for my money—on Trojan to win.

"I didn't try him out with his buggy, as I wanted to keep that for the last moment, knowing that he surprise of dragging such a light thing would make him faster than ever.

"The whole town flocked to Albany with me on the day of the race. I had drove Trojan over—a little run of twelve miles—the day before, so as to let him have a good night's sleep before the race.

"There was eight horses entered in the race, and the distance was a mile and a quarter.

"Of course all the Albany people gave us the merry ha-ha when we spoke of our horse winning the race—they couldn't see him for dust. The odds on him went up to eight to one, and I kicked myself for being so previous with my money as to lay it the day before at a measly three to one.

"I manages to borrow a few more bucks from some friends that was opposed to gambling, and couldn't bring themselves to bet, even on such a sure thing as Trojan was.

"It was a grand and glorious sight, that fair. I harnessed Trojan to his new rig, and, holding the bridle-reins, I walked him over to the starting-line. Those was the days before they had begun the flying-start system, and all the horse was lined up at the start, the race beginning when the starter waved his flag.

"It was funny to look at Trojan as I led him to the line, with this little racing-gig behind him. At first he didn't know what to make of it. Then he looked around, and, seeing this thingamagig behind him, I swear that animal smiled with joy.

"There we was at the line, waiting for the starter to wave the flag. Twice around the track was the distance we had to go. I was all nervous and excited—twelve hun-

dred bucks I would pick up after Trojan had won the race, not to speak of the money I could win at the various county fairs around after winning this race. I was so excited my hands trembled on the reins.

"Then—the starter waved his flag, and the horses sprang forward on the track—all but one horse—Trojan! He stood stock still in his tracks, looked back at me with a superior air, a sort of smile."

"But, Jake," cried a listener, "what was the matter—was he tied?"

"Nope," said Jake. "The confounded plug wouldn't move unless he heard a door slam! It was the two weeks on the hack that spoiled him."

Disappointed at this seemingly unfortunate end, the listeners got up and started for the door, looking at Jake with disgust.

"Wait a minute, I ain't through," said Jake, and all settled back in their chairs again. Jake slid down from the pool-table, assuming the attitude of a driver of a pacing horse.

"I fetched over," he said tensely; "I fetched over, and hit him a terrible wallop with my whip—the first time I had ever laid a whip on him. Trojan gave a snort of indignation, looked back at me with disgust, pain and surprise, and then lit out.

"That horse went away from that line so fast that my hat flew off and landed exactly on the starting-line.

"The other horses by this time was two hundred yards down the track. Trojan set sail for them and fairly ate up the track. The wind whistled past my ears as Trojan tore around the first turn. As we rounded the first bend I could see the others, now but an hundred and seventy yards ahead, and going like the Twentieth Century Limited on the way to Chicago.

"'Go on, Trojan!' I shouted. 'Go get 'em, boy! Go get 'em, boy! You can do it! Eat 'em alive, old feller! You get him!'

"Down the back-stretch we went, Trojan's feet moving so fast you couldn't see them, his sides heaving, and his head held forward, straining on the bit. All the time he was snorting—telling the other horses, I suppose, that he would get them before the race was over.

"Then we came down the home-stretch on the finishing of the first lap, only about a hundred yards behind the leader, and passing one or two of the other horses in the race. The crowd was crazy for my horse to win, and set up a yell that I could hear as I passed the grand stand.

"Then we shot around the first turn again, and into the back stretch. There was now only three horses in front of us, and going like mad. We passed one of them on the far turn as we entered the straightaway for the home stretch.

"We had three hundred yards to go to reach the wire. It looked hopeless to everyone in the place but me. The crowd was now so excited that they was just gasping; they couldn't utter another yell.

"There wasn't a sound in the whole place as Trojan crept up foot by foot on the two horses in front of him. One of them gave up the ghost in the next fifty yards, and Trojan swept by him, setting sail for the one horse which now remained in front of him.

"That horse was game as they make them. He tore along the track, but slowly and surely Trojan drew up on him. A hundred and fifty yards to go and Trojan was at his heels—a hundred and twenty-five Trojan was on his flank—twenty-five more and he was at his shoulder. Seventy-five yards to go and they were racing neck and neck.

"Then a man's voice came from the edge of the track, clear and distinct.

"'*Cab!*' he shouted! '*Cab!*'

"Trojan reared both front feet in the air, came to a dead stop and walked over to where the voice had come from. The other nag raced clear to the wire, winning hands down. Can you beat that?"

Jake picked up his hat sadly and sat down in a chair.

"Can you beat that?" he muttered slowly.

A man spoke to him.

"And you, you poor fat-head, you lost every nickle you had in the world?"

"Every cent I had earned and borrowed; that horse was too damn intelligent!"

"Good night, boys."

"'Night, Jake."

Jake walked slowly toward the door. He

paused on the threshold. "I'm a fat-head, am I?" he asked. "A fat-head? Let me tell you something which I forgot to mention just now. You know Jake ain't such a thick-skull after all."

"Why? What's the big idea?"

A whimsical smile played across Jakes features.

"Remember this guy Harrington—or Harrigan—some name like that? The guy I mentioned a short while ago?"

"Warren Jay Hoolihan, you mean?"

"Yep, that's the bird! He bought Trojan after the race for three thousand bucks! Not bad, eh?

"Yeh, I'm an awful fat-head!"

Survival of the Fittest

by Elwyn W. Chambers

"IN the long run the fittest man will survive," Thompson stated positively at the end of a long argument on natural selection. His three companions pulled silently on their pipes and said nothing. The guide leaned forward and threw a few pieces of wood on the camp-fire about which they sat. Then he asked suddenly:

"Do you mean physically fit, when you say fittest?" The guide was a little man and the lights and shadows of the fire playing over his reclining body seemed even to accentuate his small stature.

Thompson straightened up suddenly. "Yes, certainly I mean physically fit," he answered. "But I include, of course, an average intelligence to go with it."

The guide puffed quietly at his pipe for several moments. "You maintain, then," he said at last, "that given a group of men, let's say, seven of them, and having put them off some place with only food enough for one man, the strongest of the seven will dispose of the others and will be the ultimate survivor?"

"Exactly; that's it exactly," Thompson affirmed warmly.

"I'm afraid I disagree with you, Mr. Thompson," the guide went on. "Take that group of seven men. Suppose they start to fight for the food. Who will be the one man the other six will confine their attention to? The weakest man? No, the strongest. The strongest man of the seven will be the first to be eliminated. Then the next strongest will go, and so on. In the end, one of the two weakest men will be the lone survivor of the seven."

Thompson shook his head dubiously, but said nothing.

"Possibly if I illustrated this theory with a true story you'd be able to see it better," the guide continued. He shook the ashes from his pipe, refilled and carefully lighted it, then settled back comfortably on the ground.

"One morning, about ten years ago, the tropic sun rose on a calm and oily sea in the South Pacific. The night before had been

foggy, but when morning came the fog had entirely disappeared, leaving a huge inverted bowl of blue sky about a single life-raft. Except for a few scraps of wreckage, a life-preserver, a woman's hat, its feather dirty and bedraggled, a capsized life-boat, nothing else but the raft could be seen in all that wide expanse of sea.

"There were seven men on the raft, sitting or reclining in various postures, each alone, busy with his thoughts. In the center of the craft was a cask holding a few gallons of water and a small box of provisions. Every now and then one or another of the men would raise his head and look fixedly at the box and cask, then at his companions. Nothing was said, however, nothing needed to be said.

"The same thought was in the minds of all. The water and scanty provisions on the raft would sustain the lives of seven men for three or four days, of one man for probably two weeks. Who was to be that one man? Each had decided that he would never let another touch the food or water.

"And so they sat, hour after hour, while the tropic sun rose slowly to the zenith and began its slow decline. Still no word was spoken; still no man dared to touch the food or water. The afternoon was well advanced when the mate of the wrecked vessel stood up and walked to the water cask at the center of the raft. He was a huge fellow, tall and well built, easily the strongest man of the seven.

"'I don't care what you men are going to do about it,' he declared aggressively, 'but I'm going to have a drink. I've sat around here doing nothing long enough.' He reached down and grasped the breaker of water. Instantly two of the other men arose—one a burly negro deck-hand, the other a small, blue-eyed missionary.

"'Put dat water down,' the negro ordered. The mate raised the cask as if he had not heard. Suddenly there was a crack, a crash, and the mate floundered spluttering in the sea. He treaded water a moment, casting a baleful glare at the negro, who stood aggressively on the raft, and at the little, meek-eyed missionary, who stood beside him. Then the mate reached out and grasped the edge of the raft. The missionary kicked his fingers until he withdrew them and swam back a distance, cursing as he swam.

"There he waited for some time before making a second attempt to board the raft. But the second attempt ended in failure, for the missionary kicked him full in the face. It was a stunning blow and the mate sank, tingeing the water with red.

"In a moment he rose, with a splashing of water and a spluttering mouthful of curses. But he was tiring fast and in another moment he had sunk again. When he rose for the second time he was gasping for breath, his face a personification of despair and fear. Then with a last half-audible 'Help!' he ceased struggling and disappeared.

"The men on the raft said no word. The missionary resumed his seat. The negro remained standing for a moment, gazing at the spot where the mate had disappeared. Then he, too, sat down.

"It was close to sunset when the black man stood up suddenly, a determined look in his eye, a scowl on his coarse-featured face. He stepped to the water breaker and squared off menacingly, his fists raised. Then, as though by a prearranged plan, the other five men stood up slowly, cautiously eying the negro. No word was spoken, but suddenly they rushed the man at the cask. He went overboard with a crash and with him went another.

"The two men struggled for a moment in the water, fighting, gasping for breath, then the white man sank. But as he went down he fixed a death grip on the negro's leg. The black man fought for his life but was unable to loosen the hold. He sank struggling and threshing the water into foam with his huge arms.

"The four remaining men on the raft resumed their seats, glaring hatefully at each other, forgetting that they had fought side by side the moment before. The copper sun slowly sank below the western horizon, tinting the sky with orange and gold. The night followed quickly, settling down somberly over the four men on the raft. The stars came out one by one, and in the west a crescent moon followed the sun into the distant sea. Not a breath of air stirred. Ex-

cept for the soft lapping of tiny waves against the side of the raft, not a sound disturbed the deathless silence of the darkness.

"The night passed slowly for the men on the raft. At length the deep blue of the sky began to pale, the stars twinkled slowly out, the red sun emerged from the ocean and gazed down upon the same smooth and peaceful sea and the same four silent men.

"The sun was hardly above the horizon when one of them stood up suddenly. He was a dapper little person, a salesman bound for Japan. The other men must have been drowsing a little, for he had up-ended the cask and gulped several mouthfuls before they realized it. Then with a savage bound they were up and at him. But the genial little salesman was too quick for them. He dropped the cask and with a smile on his face dove into the sea. He never rose.

"Of the three men left on the raft, one was the missionary, the other a millionaire tourist, the last a nondescript stowaway, dirty, ragged, and unshaven. The millionaire did not sit down again, but stood gazing at the dark waters for some time. Then, seeming suddenly to go mad, he rushed at the other two men, kicking at them, biting, scratching. But their combined strength was too much for him. In a moment he was struggling in the water; in another he had sunk, unable to swim.

"The two remaining men were the smallest and least fit of the seven that had been alive the day before. They stood eying each other, panting from their recent exertions, each weighing the other's strength. The stowaway was the first to speak.

"'I can see this raft is only big enough for one man,' he said slowly. 'I don't suppose you'd care to share it with me?' The missionary did not answer. 'Well, you may be strong enough to throw me off, but I won't give you the trouble. I won't force you to kick me to eternity like you did the mate yesterday. And I'm not the man to attempt to murder you. No, I'll leave you here to drink the water that you killed for. And you'll have plenty of time to do it, for your chances of getting picked up are about a million to one in this part of the sea.'

"The missionary began to mutter something to himself. The stowaway thought that he was trying to pray.

"'It wouldn't be a bad idea to do a little praying,' the stowaway went on, 'although the salvation of a good man like you is assured. With me it's different. I'm booked in the devil's free-for-all and I'm sure to finish in the money.

"'You can have the food and water,' he continued. 'But—damn you—I wouldn't give a plugged nickel for your soul two weeks from now.' And without another word he dove smoothly into the water. He came up quickly and started off, swimming with a slow and even stroke.

"And so the missionary was left, the weakest of the seven, to drink the water and eat the food he had fought for. And he was happy, he was jubilant, for he had won against the greatest of odds.

"An hour or two after the stowaway had passed out of sight, a ship hove into the view of the little man on the raft. He hailed its coming with joy. At last! An answer to his prayers! He watched it steadily, then he began to be afraid. It was not coming directly toward him, but would pass some miles to one side of the raft. He signaled frantically.

"But it was useless. The ship passed him, clearly visible, but too far to hail. It was almost out of sight before he gave up his feeble attempts to signal it. Then he sat down exhausted, a little shaken, certainly frightened a bit.

"And so he lived, for several days, maybe a week or two, who knows? But in the end he died, slowly, surely, inevitably."

The little guide finished his tale. The four men sat silently about the fire. Finally Thompson spoke.

"You say this is a true story?" he asked. The guide nodded. "Well, how did you get the tale, if all the men died?"

"No," the guide answered him, "all the men did not die. The stowaway was picked up by the ship that passed near the raft."

"But didn't he tell them about the missionary who was left on the raft?"

The little guide's voice came out of the darkness. "No," he answered calmly, "I didn't!"

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

LOVE as a driving-force has been much written about—which is quite as it should be. For love makes the world go round. But—too often perhaps—hate, too, has its power. Spurred by this ungentle passion men have risked all and won to their objective. One of our most popular writers has written a great and grim tale of hate—a novelette which you will find in next week's issue:

HATE LAUGHS AT LOCKSMITHS

BY CAPTAIN DINGLE

Author of "Measure for Measure," "The Clean-Up," "No Fear," etc.

It isn't necessary to make an elaborate announcement of a Captain Dingle yarn. In this case we'll just say that the hero is a sea captain; the woman possessed of the sort of beauty that blackens men's souls; the setting the East. And back of it all is the terrible power of hate. A grim tale—but one well worth reading.

In the next issue of ALL-STORY WEEKLY you also will find the third story of the "TEACH: PIRATE DE LUXE" series, by C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne. In it *Captain Teach* solves a problem that has troubled many another business man—the distribution of the products of his business. Don't miss "AGRIPPA AND THE BANK."

GEORGE J. BRENN has another corking telephone-detective story in next week's magazine—"NO GUESS-WORK." Our old and clever friend, *Charlie Fenwick*, again proves his smartness by helping a government agent in an important case—helping him in a way that is startlingly original.

THE TEN-FOOT CHAIN

WHEN we published the symposium by Abdullah, Brand, Means, and Sheehan in the March 13, 1920, ALL-STORY WEEKLY, we fully expected that it would arouse considerable interest and cause a certain amount of comment, but we were far from prepared for the veritable avalanch of letters that, beginning the very day of publication, have poured in upon us—and are still coming strong. It is gratifying, of course, especially as ninety-eight per cent of them are cordially eulogistic, but it puts a decided veto on our original plan to publish all the letters received in full. To do so would mean devoting an entire magazine to them. So we have been reduced to the expedient of selecting thirty odd of the more generally interesting ones, and even these we have been obliged to cut down to the limit. The others we will try to get in from time to time in the regular Heart to Heart letters. We greatly regret this, for many of the letters were of unusual interest, but exigencies of space make it imperative.

I have just finished reading "The Ten-Foot Chain," by Achmed Abdullah, Max Brand, E. K. Means, and P. P. Sheehan, which, in my opinion, is a great symposium on a great problem. Truly, the tales were superb in themselves, veritable masterpieces of short-story fiction. I believe that the success, either way, would largely depend upon the participants in the experiment, and the quality and quantity of love which the participants bear each other. There are always several sides to a problem or question, and a problem like the one under debate has several sides, and its treatment depends upon the kind of love the author has in mind. Some adhere to the Brand and Abdullah theory, and others follow the Means and Sheehan theory, and both are right in their premises. The tales were in themselves masterpieces, and I shall take good care of the issue in which they were published, carry it with me to Italy, and read them often. Furthermore, I shall translate them into Italian so that a number of my friends over there shall have the advantage of reading such absorbing stories—such an unequaled collection of tales on a great problem by four famous authors.

N. C. MACARI.

Morgan Street, Clinton, Indiana.

Having been married more than once; traveled—with my eyes and my mind open—and also being of philosophic turn of mind, I feel competent to state that as far as the woman is concerned, the majority would take the ten-foot chain as a matter of course, and would go so far as to support the weight of the slack—and there would be slack—so that the other captive may not realize his captivity. Is not that what countless thou-

sands of patient, loving couples are accomplishing in an endless succession? Those whose affection is abiding, and who, at the forge—the marriage altar—simply reserve one key to the shackles, and that is the key of death. But speaking literally, I do believe that the number who could endure an actual ten-foot chain, connecting them with a person of the opposite sex for seventy-two consecutive hours, is greatly in the majority—of course, granting that love is present. Not the passive yielding to fate, but the true love which glories in the shackles and would not have them loose. I think, as regards the four stories, that the gifted authors are all quite right each in his respective portrayal of human nature. It is so complex that no rule will measure all, but I believe Abdullah and Max Brand will poll a majority vote. A BUCKEYE WIDOW.

Lisbon, Ohio.

I have read with peculiar interest your symposium, "The Ten-Foot Chain," partly from genuine enjoyment of the workmanship in the four stories, but more particularly noting that the underlying principle of the problem has been completely overlooked, or at least not emphasized as it should be. The principle I speak of is this: That love, genuine love, will be equal to any test, however applied, but passion withers at a touch. To chain together two people who genuinely love each other, whose sympathies are akin, whose minds and hearts are in tune, is but to weld the bond of true companionship closer. At the end of three days, or three years, they would be more truly one than before the test was applied. The great cause of unhappiness between men and women to-day is not that love died after marriage, but that it was never born. Both mistook passion for love, and found only bitterness where they expected paradise. In the first *Vasantasena* really loved *Madusadan* because her spirit and his were akin, and they could therefore laugh at the three days' imprisonment ordered by the angry king. In the next *Bertha* recognized, even through the darkness, the exquisite tenderness of the man to whom she was chained. Because their physical sight was useless, both found in the other the love so long denied them. Their spirits were in perfect accord, and as *Bertha* said, God made up the difference. In the last two, the couples, though young, healthy and passionate animals, had nothing in common except a feeling for each other, which they termed love, but as each story conclusively proves, this was not love but passion, and died early under the corroding test of "The Ten-Foot Chain." Thanking you and the authors for the presentation of a very interesting and far-reaching problem,

San Antonio, Texas. MRS. WM. A. BLACK.

As you invite the opinion of the people on the story, "The Ten-Foot Chain," in this week's issue which I've just finished and liked very much, I'll say: The choosing of the different nationalities in each story was a grand idea, and the nationalities chosen were each a tiptop subject for demonstration. E. K. Means's story was amusing; in fact it was a side splitter and a pretty good demonstration of his side of the argument. Max Brand's story was beautiful. It was deep, intense and a thing glorified by love. There are not many who will understand the fineness of that story, and there is no word to express the story more sincerely than beautiful. Achmed Abdullah's story was also fine, true and sincere. Of all the four nationalities chosen, I think his was the best subject; for I think the Hindus, Arabians, and most all the Oriental races are more intense, more sincere and more loyal in their love than other races. As for P. P. Sheehan, I think he just wanted to argue, and he got on the wrong side of the argument—so he made an absolute failure; where, had he been on the other side of the fence, P. P. is there with the goods. I was kind of fretted with him for taking the side he did, for he and Max Brand are my favorite writers of love. Now, I suppose your object is to get a vote on whether love can or cannot stand the test of three days bound together with a ten-foot chain? Count my vote yes. True love, the love of one soul for another, certainly can stand any test. P. P. Sheehan has a beautiful love story running now, "The House with a Bad Name." That story expresses my belief in love; that's why I say Mr. Sheehan just wanted to argue; anybody that can write as fine a love story as he can, then turn around and say "love cannot stand the test of a ten-foot chain"—well, like E. K. Means's negro girl was with *Plaster Sickety*—"I'm just plum nauseated." But as far as the stories were concerned, each was good, but the argument won't stand. Love will conquer and win Mr. Sheehan back, too. Luck to our editor, authors and printers of our ALL-STORY WEEKLY magazine.

Denison, Texas. NELLIE HAVNIER.

I agree with Captain Abdullah, he has the question decided. He is right, absolutely. Had I been *Madusadan,* captain of horse, my emotions and passions would have been the same as his. Max Brand, I am inclined to believe, has the correct slant on this question. I know, had I been in the socks of the painter, it would have been the golden-haired, blue-eyed beauty, at the other end of the chain—that is, if I had nerve enough for imagination left after learning the conditions that went with the chain. Dr. Means certainly hit the nail on the head in *Plaster Sickety* and *Pearline Flunder.* They could not have done otherwise. I very much doubt if *Skeeter* and *Scootie* would have come out any better. Now I am down to Mr. Sheehan's tale and, strange to say, I must tell you that he is right also. Had I been *Gaspard,* the smith, I would have done as he.

I have paid a just tribute to each of these writers; they have caused their respective characters to act true to life. All four are right on the question of "The Ten-Foot Chain." Love I believe to be stable and unchanging, but not so human nature.

Mr. Sheehan has the best of the argument, to my mind, though I claim each of the other writers as a favorite. I believe there are some natures that would stand the test. The majority could not. Personally, I would not like to buck up against it. The ALL-STORY WEEKLY is great; keep 'em coming. I have been reading it since 1915, and it has never failed to satisfy my reading appetite.

Beattyville, Kentucky. R. S. S.

I've just completed reading with great pleasure the symposium on the problem of "The Ten-Foot Chain." Mr. Abdullah and Mr. Brand are right when they say that love can stand the shackles. I'm quite sure in my own mind that Mr. Sheehan and Dr. Means are either insincere or poor things. Lor' love 'em; I'm sorry for 'em if the latter is true. One who has experienced the flame of true love would laugh, as did *Vasantasena*, at the idea of its being extinguished by the sordidness of everyday life's close contacts and disillusionments; real love is too strong to die so easily. The writers who stood pro and con in the argument have chosen two distinct types to represent their theory. The men who believe in love have chosen the higher type of man and woman; the men who believe love but a flitting, ephemeral emotion have selected the lower types of human beings. Mr. Abdullah, apart from the apt representation of his theme, has produced one of the sweetest, tenderest love stories it has been my good fortune to read for years. And when I finish writing this note I'm going to cut that story out of the magazine, with Mr. Brand's, too—which is a beautiful thing, also—and file it away, with Mr. Abdullah's picture attached. That story carries one right out of modern life and into the dreaming East.

Brooklyn, New York. GREYE LA SPINO.

In the tale, "An Indian Jataka," by Achmed Abdullah, the chain could not gall the captain of horse or the slave girl, because they were already bound by a stronger chain—love, honor and respect—made doubly strong by the jealousy and opposition of the king. In the tale, "Out of the Dark," by Max Brand, when the girl, *Bertha*, was chained to a strange man whom she did not know and could not see, she gave free rein to her imagination and pictured him as her dream man, endowing him with all the virtues she most admired, and as he did not disillusion her, how could she help but continue to love her own idea of what her lover should be? The painter on his side, did not know *Bertha*, and could not see her, so he also pictured his ideal woman, and, not being disillusioned by her, he also was in love with his own dream girl. What man or woman could ever grow discontented or tired of the materialization of their own dreams? In "Plumb Nauseated," by E. K. Means, the two negroes chosen are represented as shiftless, thoughtless, selfish and ignorant. It is impossible to tie two such people together and expect them to be satisfied. In the fourth story, "Prince or Percheron," by P. P. Sheehan, the *Princess Gabrielle* is a fickle creature, who was infatuated with the appearance of the smith and not with the man himself. The smith was right in choosing one of his own class for marriage, and their trials would have been a success if *Susette* would have been more considerate and tolerant of the work of the smith. The smith on his part could not forget the princess, and the thoughts of what might have been continually came between him and *Susette*, thereby causing friction, which resulted in their separation. MAX DAVIDSON.

Box 628, Patchogue, Long Island.

I, like the majority of ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers, am deeply interested in "The Ten-Foot Chain" and the problem from which it has risen. I have just completed the various opinions of your best writers, and I think Mr. Achmed Abdullah is the nearest to the point. I feel as if there can be no chain welded close enough for those who really love. Mr. Means and Mr. Sheehan can never have loved, or I am sure they would have written their stories differently. If I loved a man—really, really loved him—I would be willing to have a *two*-foot chain for the rest of my life and follow him, no matter where he led. I would not wish for anything else—it would be my greatest opportunity of proving my love. I think Mr. Means's story a little too far fetched. As for Mr. Sheehan, in a certain way what he says is true. But in the case of the smith he was not really in love with *Susette*, or he would not have tired so easily. As for *Susette*, if she had loved the smith she could manage to tolerate his work without a murmur. In regard to Mr. Brand, to a certain extent he is correct, but I think the circumstances that caused *Bertha* and her sweetheart to meet most extraordinary. True love exists forever, on to eternity. Yes, now and forever more.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. PEGGY.

Why in the name of good horse-sense did your four writers all take slaves for their hero and heroines? Max Brand knows the West, so why not write about real facts? I judge life by what I know. I am a widow, thirty-two years old. For three years I held a government position in the far north of Canada. While there I married the army doctor, who was sent to my relief during a typhoid fever epidemic. When winter came we were weeks where we saw no one and were shut up together in a log-hut twelve by twelve. Did we learn to hate each other? No, because we had something more in common than the physical. Youth is not everything, pleasure is not everything, and happiness is an attitude of mind.

From Canada we were sent to Australia, far in the bush, weeks alone together. We spent our time getting ready lectures, model sanitary devices, *et cetera*. There is no monotony if one has imagination, and there is no love in the purely physical. In 1917 doctor felt he must go to Europe. He now rests in France. My own case

is only one in millions. I would love to take your two doubters up to the wilds of Canada and show them real people: one hundred and sixty-five miles from a train, forty miles from the post-office, twenty miles from the nearest neighbor, yet loving and happy. Among them I'll produce an English writer and his wife, a former grand opera star, who, when I first met her, had not seen one of her own sex in three years; one artist with twenty gold medals and a wife he calls "Darling Sally"; one former British consulate and his wife, and hundreds—yes, tens of hundreds—just like these; for in real love there are no shackles.

NURSE, NORTH OF FIFTY-THREE.

Portland, Oregon.

As to "The Ten-Foot Chain," I think it would depend entirely upon the nationality of the couple, their physical condition at the time, and more than all their dispositions. I agree with Dr. E. K. Means, that few men and women would come through the test with their love untarnished and pure. Achmed Abdullah has a very true version of the question, in the fact that the people of his story are of a very different nationality to ours, as their loves and passions are more violent and much more lasting than ours. Max Brand's story I also like, but I think if *Bertha* had been the beautiful woman the artist imagined her, the story would have had a very different ending. As for Dr. Means's story of *Plaster Sickety* and *Pearline Flunder,* what could you expect of the uncivilized, uneducated, unrefined negro but fighting and scratching, like two cats tied together across a line, as the *Rev. Vinegar Atts* remarked. Perley Poore Sheehan was writing truth when he wrote his story of the "Princess or Percheron," for to-day the average man and woman hardly get the vows of marriage over until they have found some one else they want worse than they ever wanted the one they have.

MRS. CECIL V. PHILLIPS.

Chattanooga, Tennessee.

I have read the four "Ten-Foot Chain" stories, and find them interesting. Means and Sheehan have not very much love or romance in their make-up, or perhaps both have been disappointed in women and love. Brand and Abdullah are right as to true, honest love. From experience will say a woman's true, honest love for man will stand any test—even a ten-foot chain. A woman can, and does, endure more for the sake of her love than a man does. Knowing men's natures, will say that I really do believe that man cannot stand the test of your ten-foot chain longer than twelve hours. A woman—say at the age of thirty-five—to my belief, can stand the three days and nights' test with the ten-foot chain better than a young girl. Has it ever been tried in real life? Who can really say what the emotions and feelings of both are under the test? Your writers can imagine, yes; but they do not really know. The course of true love never did run smooth. Hoping to read interesting answers to "The Ten-Foot Chain,"

MARGUERITE CLARE STARR.

Susawville, California.

To my way of thinking the four authors are right. Mr. Brand and Mr. Abdullah are believers in soul love; the soul mates can endure any hardships, or even death. The average so-called love doesn't mean much to-day, and you are right as for a worldly opinion. Mr. Means and Mr. Sheehan's idea of love and marriage is the kind the vast multitude calls love, which is of the flesh. As love is mistaken for passion, infatuation, and they believe in it themselves, they think they could endure anything until the test comes, as these two authors have shown. Mr. Brand and Mr. Abdullah have found soul mates, or are looking for them. It is a wonderful thing to know soul love from that of the flesh, for the flesh cannot endure pain. Here's to the great success of the four authors of "The Ten-Foot Chain," of which all are very good writers. ANNA ISABEL CALLAHAN.

Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I have just finished reading "The Ten-Foot Chain." It did not fully come up to my expectation. But it seems to me that you must not only consider love, but also jealousy. In both Mr. Means's and Mr. Sheehan's stories the cause of the disagreement was jealousy. *Pearline* was not only jealous of her husband's friends, but also of his habits and associates. In Mr. Sheehan's story, *Susette* was jealous both of her husband's work and his thoughts of the princess. In some cases you may see a couple who, whether separated by the Pacific or joined by a ten-foot chain, would remain constant and devoted. But however that may be, I think Mr. Brand has written the best story of the four. It has a spark of something, I suppose I can hardly call it divinity, in it, which is characteristic of all of his stories.

Browning, Illinois. J. STERLING MCCORD.

"The Ten-Foot Chain" was good, but I do not agree with Dr. Means and Mr. Sheehan, as I believe that the problem as presented by them would not prove correct in the majority of cases, if all conditions and classes of people were considered before final judgment was passed.

Box 387, Laramie, Wyoming. F. F. DENTON.

Have read with interest the stories on the "Ten-Foot Chain." Captain Abdullah is right. Dr. Means, while right in a few particulars, is wrong fundamentally. I and my wife are willing to prove it. We would show the gentlemen just what would happen by letting them try us as their heroes and heroines were tried in the stories. Max Brand is nearer right than the doctor, though I certainly agree with Mr. Sheehan that any man can, and would, overcome the petty temptation placed in his path. MARION GOSS.

Avoca, Arkansas.

I have just finished your entertaining symposium, "The Ten-Foot Chain," and venture to enter a protest. In the first place, I believe these gentlemen were not sufficiently sure in their individual beliefs, or they would not have used the various racial and economic differences and backgrounds to make more plausible their conclusions. Why did they not take as their environment and characters the twentieth century United States and the great American family? Surely they have played with our emotions and imaginations too frequently not to know that the all-engrossing subject to the American people is—themselves. In the second place, you have permitted the subject to be settled exclusively by members of the sterner sex—who, after all, you must admit, know little or nothing about love; so, in conclusion, Mr. Editor, I ask of you, give us another symposium written by women. The subject intrigues our fancy and cannot help but interest your readers.

Paterson, New Jersey. L. C. B.

You have asked that the readers express their opinion of "The Ten-Foot Chain." I am going to do so in spite of the fact that my opinion will probably not even be considered. I liked it as I have liked none of the stories that have come out in your magazine, and some of them, I think, are quite wonderful. I am on the affirmative side, because it has come nearer to love, real love as God meant it to be. The negative side has pictured love as mere desire. That is not love. Love is the recognition of one soul, of the fine, beautiful qualities in another soul. Take Captain Abdullah's story. There is a hint of desire in it, but it comes closer to real love than the others. It is my opinion that Mr. Brand strikes the keynote of love. He brings the man and woman together in utter darkness. Both are ugly, as far as physical charms are concerned, but in each body dwells a soul beautiful. They are attracted by soul, not body. Therefore, they loved with their whole souls, and took that love with them to another world. What I know is that love is a mating of souls. Miss Jessie L. Hughes.

Dayton, Ohio.

I read with intense interest the symposium by Messrs. Abdullah, Brand, Means, and Sheehan. In so far as the time limit set, three days and three nights, all four authors are right. Some personalities could endure the ten-foot chain for that length of time; others could not. Personally, I doubt that true love could endure the ten-foot chain for any considerable period of time. The length of time, naturally, would depend upon the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual abilities of the individuals concerned. To my mind the result of the ten-foot chain is obvious. No two individuals could long endure or withstand the physical impact. Thus driven as well as drawn into closest continual contact with each other, they are put through an ordeal that might well cause the stoutest heart and greatest affection to quail. All outside personal interests are debarred. Even a true and intense affection is satiated by the continual and unrelieved impingment of the two personalities on each other, the boredom resulting is frightful to contemplate. All the more so because the genuine affection behind it contemplates with horror its own suicide. The ten-foot chain would inevitably lead to the narrowing down of their lives and the blunting of general human interests, to intense mutual ennui. So, in fine, my conclusions coincide with both Dr. Means and Mr. Sheehan. Articles of this kind, as well as all your out-of-the-ordinary stories, are good. Keep up the good work. William Blummer.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

You requested opinions on "The Ten-Foot Chain." I think that none of the four authors knows much of pure, steadfast love. I have reference to love, not vulgar passion. There is but one true, all-mastering, all-encompassing love in each person. Some never experience it. Some never chance to come in contact with their affinity. With me, one foot, ten feet or a hundred feet would be the same, or would have been for the last forty-five years, and although the clasps have been around each of the separated wrists, all that time the chain has never been welded.

Grand Rapids, Michigan. George R. Kert.

The stories dealing with the subject of "The Ten-Foot Chain" were well written, and from a literary standpoint up to the standard of the four well-known authors. Of the four stories I consider E. K. Means's the best. Love exists only in the minds of abnormal persons and writers of sentimental stories. A New York judge recently classified love and insanity as the same thing, and I believe he is right. I do not believe any normal person, especially if they are married, or have been, believe that there is any such thing. The plutocracy of the world admit this fact by mating their progeny only to members of their class. H. B. Reed.

Owosso, Michigan.

I have read the All-Story Weekly for five years, but have never been aroused to action of writing about anything until I was through reading "The Ten-Foot Chain," and I would surely like to give Mr. Max Brand a good pat on the back, with my best wishes, to last a lifetime. If there were more men like him, or what his story leads one to believe him like, this world would be a better place to live in. "An Indian Jataka," by Achmed Abdullah, was very good, but a little too deep for young girls not yet in high school.

Maggie Muse.

Washington, District of Columbia.

Achmed Abdullah is a man after my own heart. Real love is eternal, knowing no love but the real love. Max Brand would have to mate with the right woman, but she could make him see the light and brightness of real love. Perley Poore Sheehan is a man who loves his work above women, and only thinks of them as something to love. E. B. Q.

Brooklyn, New York.

I have just finished reading "The Ten-Foot Chain." It is good. I agree with Brand and Abdullah. Honest-to-goodness love can stand anything. MAUDE L. CHAPPELL.

Micanopy, Florida.

As to "The Ten-Foot Chain," I am sure both sides of the question are correct. I have been married twice. The first time I loved truly and dearly. No ten-foot chain could have killed that love. The second marriage—well, a ten-foot chain would have produced a hatred and disgust too deep for words. Real, true love endures anything, but so often we mistake a friendly liking for love. Then close association brings hate. MRS. E. P.

Detroit, Michigan.

I am a constant reader of ALL-STORY WEEKLY magazine, and like most of the stories, but for the love of Mike do not give us any more "The Ten-Foot Chain" stuff, as it was the most veritable rot. If a man and woman really loved each other, being chained together for three days would make their love stronger if anything, and any man who has ever loved a woman knows that much. T. J. MCLAUGHLIN.

McComb, Mississippi.

Tell Max Brand for me that he should be put on a ten-foot chain for three days if he does not soon write a sequel to "The Untamed," although I heartily agree with him and Achmed Abdullah about "The Ten-Foot Chain," and disagree with E. K. Means and P. P. Sheehan. Love, I mean, could stand the shackles for three days. "The Ten-Foot Chain" was fine, because it was something out of the ordinary. It could be called a "different" story. JAMES RINUS.

Plymouth, Pennsylvania.

Sure liked the four stories of "The Ten-Foot Chain." I agree with Max Brand and Achmed Abdullah most emphatically. A woman can endure anything for the man she really loves. A woman who couldn't stand the shackles of a ten-foot chain is a quitter, and I would consider her faithless. MARIE KATHLEEN BORG.

St. Louis, Missouri.

I have just finished reading "The Ten-Foot Chain" in the March 13th issue of ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Mr. Perley Poore Sheehan, in my opinion, has given the best all-round report on the question under discussion. As a whole, his view-point is excellent. Man, if he wishes to accomplish big things in life, must not let love occupy more than forty per cent of his make-up. True, the love of a woman for her mate can inspire man to bigger things—but it can only inspire. It cannot help him reach success. When love sweeps a man off his feet it also at the same time sends him down, down, down to financial destruction. And what is this world—and what is love—and what is woman—without *money!*

VERNON LESLIE CLEMENS.

Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

I did not care so much for "The Ten-Foot Chain." Achmed Abdullah is one of my favorite writers, and was rather disappointed to know that he agreed it was possible for a man and a woman to be chained for three days and still have love for each other, but *quien sabe?* Well, at any rate I must hand it to E. K. Means in handling the situation. BERTHA CAMERON.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

"The Ten-Foot Chain" was a unique presentation, and I agreed with Max Brand and Achmed Abdullah that love can stand the shackles. Give us more of such works. RALPH BROUGHMAN.

Indianapolis, Indiana.

I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for nine years, and for the first time in the whole nine years I feel disappointed enough to make a kick, but to take up space in the most wonderful book in the world with a tiresome story such as "The Ten-Foot Chain" almost makes me shed tears. The idea of a woman and man growing tired of one another in three days! Even if there is no love, don't you know—*three* days! If it was three weeks or three months, why, it would seem more reasonable, don't you think? I have been married three years, and what would I feel like if I let a ten-foot chain kill my love for my husband in three days? Please don't take up space in our dear magazine to print such silly things. I think Achmed Abdullah's stories are wonderful, also Max Brand's, but if they ever do such things again, well, good night for me! M. A. D.

Gahagan, Louisiana.

My thanks to Max Brand. I agree with him that love can withstand the shackles; ten feet, or any amount of it. In the story by Mr. Perley Poore Sheehan, I think that *Susette* did not really love *Gaspard*. If she did, she would have let him work at his forge. Hers was an idle love; she loved his face too much. *Gaspard* could not have loved *Susette*, or he would not have come back for the *Princess Gabrielle*.

Holyoke, Massachusetts. JOHN L. SOUTHERS.