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by Perley Poore
Sheehan

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With a Bad Name,"
"Upstairs," etc.





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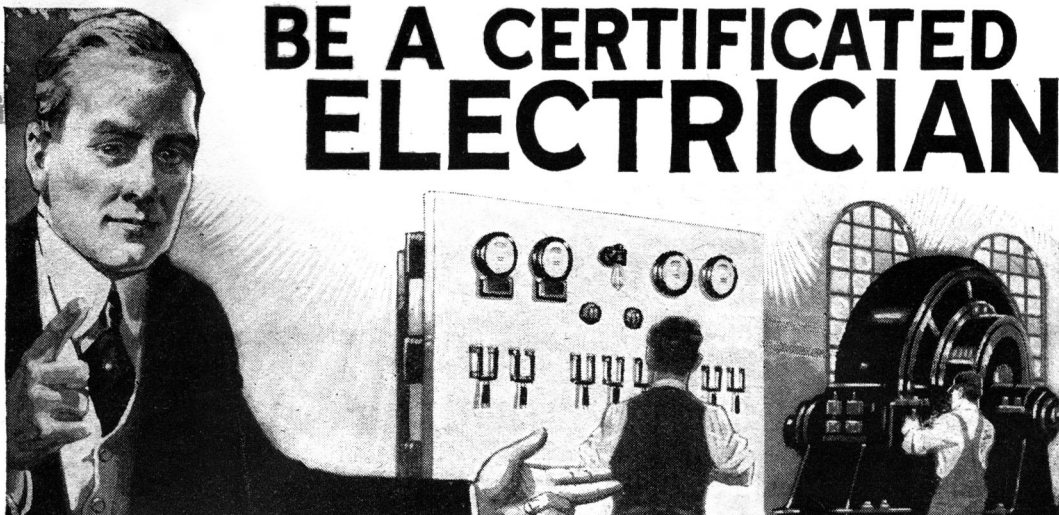
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CXII

NUMBER 1



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

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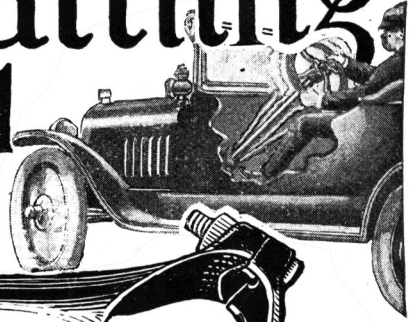
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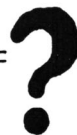
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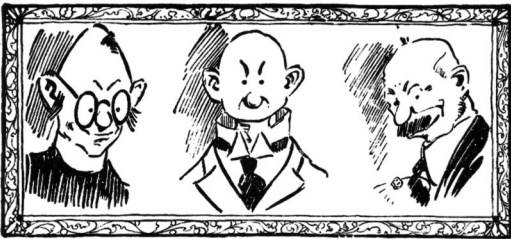
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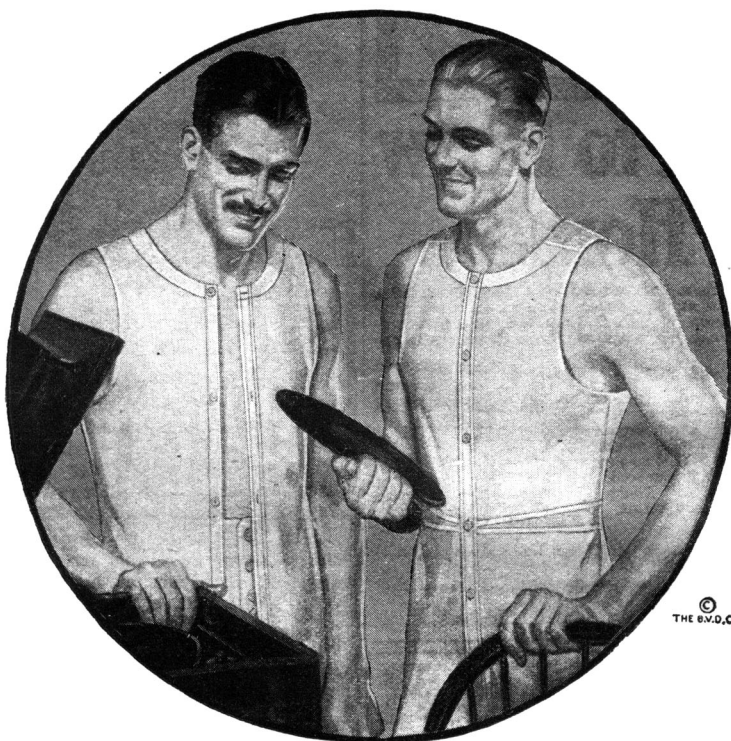
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THE B·V·D· COMPANY,
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXII

NUMBER 1



SATURDAY, JULY 3, 1920



The One Gift

by Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "The House with a Bad Name," "Up-stairs," "If You Believe It, It's So," etc.

CHAPTER I.

WILD HOGS.

IT was in the last quarter of the moon. It was in the last hour of the night. And one would have said that it was in the last phase of the life of the earth—that all men were dead, and that the planet itself was bound for the void it had come from.

North, south, and east, the Everglades stretched away in a shadowy level. There was just enough light to make the sense of desolation complete. Most of the time the moon was hidden under the ragged, fleeting clouds. The moon itself looked ragged when it appeared—high up, dim and misshapen. Then the wide plain went faintly silver, like the face of a leper. At other times, when the moon was hidden, the pale swamp-lights quavered here and there, danced and disappeared—like the lanterns of ghouls, robbing the dead, after Armageddon.

For a while there was perfect silence. Even the billion frogs and crickets had entered one of their curious quiet spells. No fish jumped in the stretches of open water. There was no movement in the grass where the moccasins and alligators lay. The swift otters crouched wherever they happened to be. The turtles stretched their

necks and looked contentedly up at the moon.

Then an owl hooted, softly and far away.

It was the cockcrow of the wilderness. Another owl had replied, and then another.

But almost before the second of those infinitely soft, warbling, human notes had spread for so much as a mile around through the dark and the silence, all the wild thing were stirring again. It was as if a Niagara of sound had been let loose—a Niagara made up of a myriad sparkling drops of sound, which were the notes of the smaller creatures, and with a lulling undertone, which was the booming of the bullfrogs and the bull gators, a drubbing murmur from the swine.

For the most part, the wild hogs moved in comparative silence.

The slaving of their lips, their gruntings, the clicking of their tusks, were but a part of the general chorus. Every now and then, though, some individual would rock and squeal—when an older pig slashed him, or a moccasin struck, or a wampee-root began to burn the insides of him like a dose of red pepper.

They traveled in small and widely scattered bands. They went slowly except when the scent of an alligator thrilled them

all into a brief, swift panic. Then they ran like the gray shadows of the moon. Generally their course was erratic—shaped by water-trails, sink-holes, and bogs. But their general drift was west.

Over there lay the swamps called the Big Cypress, and the Big Cypress had been calling to them for days. Every time the west wind blew, tepid and languid, it brought them news of the great annual event. The feast of the palmetto-berries was spread. It was a lure that no pig, however wild, could resist.

The pigs wouldn't be the only guests summoned to this feast of the woods. Squirrels and 'possums, 'coon and bear, would be on hand. So would all the birds, from lark to turkey. This meant that the big rattlesnakes would be present (death-angels at the banquet); and those other death-angels, the wildcats and the panthers.

But the pigs had a contempt for these other guests. They, the wild swine, came first. They could stand up to almost anything. For these were no barn-yard porkers; they were the élite of the razor-backs. They were built like cup-defenders, tall, narrow, and swift.

They were so like the pigs God had made in the beginning that the elders were all a slaty gray, and the young ones striped. Not even a panther would care to try his luck with meat like that unless his chances for a getaway were good.

There was only one thing in all the woods that the pigs really feared, apart from the lurking 'gators, and that thing was man.

There were men in the Big Cypress, both red and white. But even where there was fear, greed was greater. Of the wild hogs drifting in now from the wampee-beds, of the 'Glades, many would never return.

Some would be baited with white man's corn and led into pens whence they would emerge only on the road to market. Others would be run down by Indian women and boys, bound, and carried off to distant camps.

At the head of one of the scattered bands, though, there was an old boar that had

learned something about the ways of man. That had been when he was very young. But it had sufficed him ever since. His band was big—there must have been twenty in it—for he could both fight and forage. Out in the 'Glades, he knew where the wampee and the snails were thickest, where the birds, the snakes, the turtles and the 'gators nested. And in the Cypress he used that higher sagacity. He had found a place where no man, red or white, ever came.

Perhaps the old boar knew the reason for this.

As for why the white people don't come here, that was easy. There were no trails that led in this direction. On three sides of it lay that waveless sea of the Everglades. Only on the fourth, or western side, could one have reached it without a canoe. But even to the west there were bogs and sloughs, cypress-strands, sink-holes and saw-grass ponds that transformed this projecting cape of the Big Cypress Swamp into something of an island.

—And as for the red people—the reason they didn't come here was equally clear, to anyone familiar with this part of the world and the people thereof. The reason was this: an abandoned camp, where someone had died, and hence a place that was haunted.

It was still dark, but there was a grayness in the air, when the old boar and his family herd came up out of the grass-water country of the 'Glades into the lush thickness of the jungly shore. The trees were dripping—myrtle and bay, liveoak and guava, gumbolimbo and palm. The moist forest-air was as if saturated with a thousand smells. There were billows of perfume, luxurious and soft—from the wild orange and rough lemon chiefly—but these run through with the taint of forest-dwellers, faintly acrid, musky, faunal. But the only scent that spelled interest for the old boar and his kin was the scent that had brought them here—the smell of the ripe palmetto-fruit.

There was palmetto everywhere, low-growing, heavily fruited, the berries hanging in clusters, like the fruit of a date-tree in bearing. But the hogs were not deceived. Much of the fruit would still be

green. They knew by experience, though, where the palmetto ripened first. That was up around the old clearing where the camp had stood. There was a rush in that direction, then a squeal, a halt, and silence.

Standing there in the center of the clearing was a figure that appeared to be the figure of a ghost. It appeared to be the ghost of a woman. And the woman was white.

CHAPTER II.

CIRCE.

THERE was still a number of ruined *chukos*, or Seminole lodges, in the midst of the clearing, the cypress posts and platforms of these standing solidly, but the thatched roofs fallen in or missing. Against the platform of one of these lodges the woman leaned. For a long time she did not move at all—nor the hogs, that stood there and watched her—while the trees dripped and the darkness faded still more. Over there beyond the eastern edge of the Everglades the sun was rising. The owls were still hooting, but now there was an occasional tinkle and chirp of music that meant that other birds were beginning to stir.

The woman took a low step. The hogs wheeled as if they were on pivots and sped for ten or twenty paces through the brush. But here they pivoted and faced the camp again.

The woman had half-collapsed on the cypress platform of the *chuko*, once more was motionless.

It was as if the surrounding jungle itself looked on. In the dawning light, each tree emerged as an individual silhouette—like friendly but wondering and silent giants. They wept their tears of heavy dew. And well they might.

As the light strengthened, it was revealed that the woman was very young, not much more than a girl. She had an abundance of light and wavy hair. This was in great disorder, as if long neglected. But nothing could destroy the beauty of it. You would have said that the same was true of her face. Her face was pinched. There were

hollows about her eyes. But this merely served to bring out the fine configuration of it—the underlying grace and strength of cheek and chin.

She was dressed in what might have been a riding-suit—breeches and boots and a long coat—but the outfit was sogged and muddied almost past recognition, scratched and torn. Nor had the saw-grass and thorns spared her delicate flesh. There was a scratch across one of her milk-white temples. There were many scratches on her small left hand. So there may have been on her right hand, or a more serious hurt, for this was bound up in a rag of a cambric handkerchief.

What had brought her here?

There was no telling, unless a clue was furnished by the faded orchid that still garnished the lapel of her coat. It was easy to lose yourself in the Big Cypress Swamp, when lured away from the trail by flowers or butterflies. For most of the Big Cypress, during much of the year—during this part of the year, especially—was not so much like a wilderness as it was like a garden—a rich man's garden, of countless acres, laid out by the master of all landscape-gardeners.

There were smiling prairies of level grass, these dotted with ornamental groups of palm and palmetto, with toy islands of oak and flowering shrubs, and these prairies shored like lakes with receding headlands where the cypress stood solid, in all the shades of purple and silver, green and blue. The whole Big Cypress was like a haunted garden, fit to turn the head of anyone.

But the girl kept her mystery to herself.

She seemed to be past the power of calling for help, past the power of anything except that last clinging grip on life and consciousness as she leaned there against the platform of the ruined Seminole lodge. Her face was down. But she stared up and away into the distance. She did not see the wild hogs that stood there alert on the edge of the clearing.

The hogs stood in a wide half-circle, snouts uplifted, staring at her with their intelligent, malicious little eyes, ready to flee again at her slightest threat, but possibly feeling within themselves the growth

of a confidence that she was not as others—not like those people the old boar had known. The old boar himself stood a little in advance of the others, in an attitude of strained attention, with no movement in all his gaunt tall body except the occasional twitch of an ear.

It would have reminded one of the legend of Circe, the daughter of Helios, who changed men into swine—to see the girl and the wild hogs standing there like that. The old boar might have been Odysseus himself, minus the moly herb.

The old boar let out a *whoof!*

Even if this intruder did belong to the human breed, she was perhaps nothing to be afraid of. She was evidently alone. She was evidently unarmed. There was every sign of weakness about her. What was she to keep him and his people from the spread banquet?

Besides, the old boar had a memory. There was a fierce red-hot coal of a grudge in the back of his primitive brain. Some of the sows and youngsters were getting restless. They were expecting him to do something. He flicked an ear. The bristles on the high arched back of him now came to a stand, shivered down, came to a stand again.

The girl never heeded.

It was this that gave the old boar pause. Maybe she wasn't human after all. Maybe she was a ghost. There was none of the dreaded scent of the two-legged creatures. There was scarcely any breeze, but such as there was came from the 'Glades.

Whoof!

This couldn't go on forever.

A bowlegged skunk ambled out of an adjacent thicket and began to help himself to the best of the berries.

There was red in the hog-captain's eye. When he charged, if he did charge, it would be as swift as lightning. Few things in the woods could avoid a charge like that, or save itself afterward. His mouth slavered. He showed his white-and-yellow tusks in a grin. The sows and the youngsters tightened up. If he charged they would follow him and they were telling him so.

With the cunning effrontery of his kind, the skunk profited by the crisis to go ahead

with his feeding. A big gopher-turtle had dug a cave not three feet away—a safe retreat for any skunk where no pig could follow him.

By this time a pinkness had come through the gray of the atmosphere. The forest mists were dissolving, and the trees were no longer giants, but just trees, as wild as the trees of Eden, and as beautiful—heavily leaved or fronded, hung with vines and tree-ferns, air-plants and orchids. A mocking bird appeared as if by magic, out of nowhere, on the tip of a haw and began to sing, as indifferent to tragedy as the reddening sunbeams. A fox-squirrel (as big as a fox) swayed the branch of a wild-tamarind with its long leap from a sugarberry-tree.

If the girl had continued to stand perfectly still, perhaps the old boar might yet have hesitated. Few things in the wild will attack the perfectly motionless, when that motionless thing is unfamiliar. They may draw near and sniff and study. But it was as if the song of the mocking-bird and the movement of the squirrel had brought the girl to a present recollection. She started. She turned. She reeled slightly and sunk a little lower against the platform of the ruined lodge.

Just then, her eyes lit on the boar, and flashed out a message of utter fear and helplessness. She tried to scream as the boar lunged to the charge.

CHAPTER III.

TWO SORTS OF GHOSTS.

THE old boar knew it. He had known it all along. He had carried the knowledge all along in some group of cells in the back of his brain—an instinctive knowledge—an experience inherited from his ancestors: the knowledge that it was not good for any of his kind to attack the children of man. But now the knowledge had come up to the surface of his brain too late.

He had scarcely started his dash at the girl before the woods to the right of him let out a flash of fire—a gust of smoke and thunder. Something smote him through.

He kept on traveling, but it was no longer on his feet. The bolt that had hit him was an explosion that seemed to lift him as wind whirls a leaf. He whirled ahead. This was a recollection from his youth—that time he had been captured by men. It was a crazy spell all fire and pain. In a last fierce spasm for freedom and life he gnashed and kicked.

There for a moment he believed that he would yet win out. But a red blindness, then a swift suffocation, was upon him.

A quiver shook him, and he was dead.

The dead boar lay with his big head stretched out across the girl's feet. She also was down. She seemed to be as lifeless as he was. The boar bled.

The ancient trees that crowded around this haunted Seminole camp must have seen some queer and tragic sights in their day, but they could never have looked down upon a thing like this. There for a long period it seemed as if here was all that there had been of animate life here in the woods or anywhere. Primitive Brute and the Woman; Hog and a Soul.

The mocking-bird and the squirrel were gone. The skunk had disappeared into the gopher-cave. The followers of the dead boar had fled like fantoms. A deadly silence had fallen. Only the red sunbeams, of all the things that suggested life and movement, seemed to have the courage to draw nearer, take a closer look. But the sun was up over the flat rim of the Everglades, and a shaft of reddish-golden light came through the underbrush, swift and deft, to finger the hair of the girl, try to revive her wilted orchid, caress her cheek and chin, then scrutinize the beast at her feet.

The girl never moved.

There had been no movement, so far as a white man could have observed, even when another actor stood on this sylvan stage. The newcomer was an Indian. Many a white man, busy with his thoughts and his affairs in some Big Cypress camp—even with his hounds about him—has raised his eyes to find an Indian standing near him.

This Indian had appeared like that, as suddenly and silently as a specter.

He was a youth possibly of twenty-two or twenty-three, tawny rather than red, slender, not very tall, but exquisitely formed. He wore nothing but a kilted shirt, belted at the waist and coming to his knees. There was a rifle in his hands. There was a pack on his back. At his belt there was a shot-pouch and a foot-long hunting-knife in a buckskin sheath.

There are moments like the moments of a dream, the contents of which have nothing to do whatsoever with the lapse of time. This was such a moment now. There had been a number of them for the Indian, perhaps—all the time he had stood hidden at the edge of the clearing and watched, then when he had fired the shot that had killed the boar, and now as he looked again.

For he was not only a full-blooded Seminole of the woods. It might have been noticed that he wore the hair of the top and back of his head in two small, tight plaits, or queues, or scalp-locks, showing that he was a priest of the tribe, a medicine-man, a lawgiver. And what could he have been doing here in this realm of ghosts?

On his face was the look of the ghost-seer. His face was inexpressibly fine and thoughtful, so smooth and delicately chiseled that it was almost feminine. He had very fine eyes, large and wide apart, liquid and almost black. Most of his expression was in his eyes. The rest of his face was expressive—expressive of many things, including patience and strength—but it was expressive as the face of a bronze statue is expressive, without movement.

The time seemed long since the shot was fired, and yet there could have been no appreciable delay.

Up there in the dome formed by the over-arching trees a butterfly encountered the drift of smoke from the rifle and fluttered away from it. Beyond the camp the trampled brush and herbs were righting themselves with little rustling snaps.

Then with a deft speed that still seemed leisurely, the Seminole was kneeling at the side of the girl. Without apparent effort he had thrown the dead boar aside with a single movement of his hand. His hands, like his bare feet, were slender. His waist

was slender. Only his shoulders were broad. With a quick and graceful movement he lifted the girl from the ground and placed her on the platform of the ruined *chuko*.

Whatever his color, race, or costume, he was the doctor now.

He seemed to have forgotten all else—what had brought him here, what might have brought the girl here, who she might be, the solitude around them, the mystery of the fate that had thus brought them together.

CHAPTER IV.

LOST.

IT was a mystery that had its other aspects in the world this girl had come from.

Where was she? What had happened to her? Was she alive or dead? Newspapers in faraway Oregon and Texas had carried the story. Some of them had printed her picture:

MURIEL SANGREE, MISSING HEIRESS, LOST IN THE EVERGLADES

In Florida, where the season was on, it was the only thing they talked about, tourists and natives. Talk of the girl's disappearance wafted through the big hotels like a cold breeze. It reminded the idlers that if here, at hand, was palatial luxury, just over there—within the rim of the horizon always—was a wilderness unchanged since the days of Columbus.

"It makes me shiver," said a dowager on the porch of the Royal Magnolia. "I saw her at a dance here less than a fortnight ago."

"Tell me about it," said the other. "We've been fly-by-nights—motoring ever since we left Aikland—"

"They tell the most dreadful stories. It appears that the whole country back from the coast is full of all sorts of wild creatures from panthers to pirates."

"Pirates!"

"So Henry was telling me—outlaws—escaped convicts—Indians. The girl may have fallen into their hands. They may be holding her for ransom—or worse."

"How did it all come about?"

"Her father is president of some new land company, or other—a million acres of swamp, or something like that. Although I can't see, for the life of me, what any one would want it for, when there is so much good land in the country lying about still undeveloped. Enoch Sangree! You've heard of him. His wife was a Miltoon, of Washington and Newport. The daughter's like her—a girl to make the men stare."

"I know the sort. I detest them."

"Muriel wasn't so bad. They say that she was devoted to her father, and her father to her. He's distracted. He's offered five thousand dollars reward for any news concerning her."

"But these bandits—"

"They may be waiting until the reward is increased. The Governor has warned him of that danger. But there have been persons lost in those horrid swamps before—many of them, it appears. And at least some of them have never been heard from again."

"But how in the world—"

"It seems that her father had organized quite a party to visit his new holdings. They left on the Semiramis III—that's the Sangree house-boat—a gorgeous affair—five or six days ago. They went around to the west coast—up among the Ten Thousand Islands—there's never been a map made of the place—and up one of those lost rivers running back toward the Everglades. We made a trip like that two years ago, and I shall never forget it, nor go again. Jungle! You would have thought it was in the heart of Africa—jungle and water, orchids, snakes, alligators."

"Horrors!"

"'Horrors,' describes it, unless you have nerves for that sort of thing. And all within a day or two of all this."

The dowager waved a hand that glittered with jewels to indicate the broad porch, the lawns and tropic gardens, a spangling patch of white beach and blue ocean. Somewhere near an orchestra panted softly through the latest dance, lazy, lulling, sensuous. There was the usual drift of people about. Most of these were like caged birds—overfed and richly plumaged, but bored, and with no morals to speak of.

"Wasn't she engaged to Prince Shuiski?"

"She could have been if she was not."

"They say that he is but little better than an adventurer. We saw him in Nas-sau."

"He was with the party when Muriel was lost. They say that he was the last to see her. They say—" And the dowager raised her eyebrows and breathed a sigh.

"No!"

"*Oui, ma chère!*" There are things that can be said more easily in French than in English. And the dowager now continued to speak French for a spell. "A scandal!" she resumed her English. "The old story!—an ancient name and not a cent. Quite impossible for him to work, of course! An atrocious reputation! He had quite exhausted all his former friends. No one would lend him anything, anymore. They say that the hotel management was even threatening to have him arrested. You may imagine what a Godsend it would have been for him to find a bride like Muriel Sangree."

"And Muriel didn't fancy him?"

The dowager shrugged her shoulders. "There were a dozen after her. She kept them all dangling. The only one I felt sorry for was a young aviator I used to see over here."

"An American?"

"An American; a charming boy—Lieutenant Lathrop."

"He must be heartbroken."

"He was that, just about, when Muriel went off on this trip with Prince Shuiski in her train. I got this from my son. He and Lieutenant Lathrop were chums in college and again in France. He says that the lieutenant was mad enough to kill Shuiski—and may kill him yet—as soon as the fate of poor Muriel is settled, one way or the other, if it ever is."

"Did Lieutenant Lathrop know—"

"—about the rumors concerning the prince and Muriel?"

"About this story of the prince having made love to Muriel in the swamps—how primitive it all is! Can you imagine such a thing!—and that this was the reason why she ran away and was lost?"

"He knows what sort of a reputation the

prince has. And that ought to be sufficient, I should think. He knows that the prince and Miss Sangree were practically alone together out in the woods when the girl disappeared. They had remained in camp together while the other members of the party had gone off to visit this new land. All that the prince could tell them when they returned was that Muriel had wandered off alone."

"What could her father have been thinking?"

"Making money! Making money, for others to waste! The great American pastime! He'll be wasting plenty of it himself now, poor man. He's mobilized the State, just about. He has a score of search-parties out. And he's mobilized the nation. He's got all the aviators from Miami and Arcadia out skimming the Everglades."

"And no trace of her?"

"No trace of her as yet—not the slightest."

"How can that be?"

"The whole country, it appears, is wild and utterly trackless."

"How long is it now since she was lost?"

"Four days—or five. And I know that I should be dead were I lost—one day!—in those dreadful swamps. Don't go, dear! I was just about to order tea."

CHAPTER V.

A CHANGE OF CLOTHES.

THE lurking scandal—and even the sense of tragedy, perhaps—would have been as great had the dowager and her sort been permitted a glimpse of Muriel Sangree now. She lay there on the platform of the ruined lodge where the young Indian had placed her. Her fair head was supported on one of his arms. With his free hand he held a wooden spoon to her lips. He spoke to her softly in Seminole—a mere flutter of speech, as soft as the interchange of sleepy pigeons. There was a liquid fire in his dark eyes.

That was a *sofkay* spoon he held to her lips—hand-carved and cumbersome—the sort of spoon with which the Indians stir and eat their cornmeal soup and porridge.

But that was not *sofkay* in the small copper kettle at the side of the patient.

Over there on a wild guava-tree at the edge of the clearing the wild boar hung high by a hind foot. His throat had been cut.

"Hesukatemeesee—the Great Spirit—who had sent the final catastrophe," so the Seminole medicine-man would have said, "had also sent the means of cure—had furnished the best of food for this starving white child of his."

Thus the daughter of Enoch Sangree—and of the late aristocratic Mrs. Sangree, of Washington and Newport—lay in the heart of a wilderness, with her head on the arm of a wilderness-dweller, and drew nourishment from the blood of a slaughtered boar. But the girl still fluttered between complete oblivion and fragments of delirium. At times she whispered:

"Daddie! Daddie! I'm afraid—"

And again:

"A sea-plane! I love flying, To-Tone-Tony!"

The Indian listened. Every accent that fell from her lips made an impression on his mind as if his mind had been wax. He had that sort of a brain. The great silences amid which he had lived had served, no doubt, to keep his mind impressionable to these strange syllables. He did his best to understand. He recalled all that he knew of English. Long ago, when he was a very little boy, his mother had taken him, every moon or so, to see the wife of the trader who then lived at the boat landing, not so many miles from here.

A vision of the trader's wife returned to him now—patient, long-suffering, the only white person the Seminoles had ever fully trusted. Perhaps this girl would be like the trader's wife.

"You well," said the Indian. He spoke English softly, but with a tremendous effort, as if drawing those two words from some bottomless well of memory.

"Who speaks?"

"Me—Blue Otter."

That was what the trader's wife had called him, years ago—the translation in her speech of the Seminole name: *Osinnee-okholattee*.

"I thought it was To-Tone-Tony."

"You well, me think so," said Blue Otter speculatively.

But the girl's consciousness was again flickering down to a mere little blue flame of life, like the flame of a backward candle. And Blue Otter decided that she had had enough to eat for a time. There were other matters almost equally pressing. He shuddered at the thought that she might die.

He pillowed her head on the pack he had shaken open when he went after spoon and kettle. He gave his attention to her feet. To his skilful and sympathetic eyes it looked as if her boots alone were squeezing the life out of her. Nor was he very wrong. The patient groaned a little as he started to undo the yard of boot-laces. Without hesitation he drew his knife and slit the laces from top to bottom. He had the boots off with the deft energy of a surgeon, regardless, this time, of the girl's sharp cry of pain. He himself uttered an exclamation of pain, inspired by sympathy, when her stockings were off. Her feet were scalded and blistered in a way which alone would have been sufficient to give her a killing fever.

Blue Otter appeared to be taking his time. But he worked with an economy of movement that gave him speed. Perhaps he was aware that he was in need of help. All the time that he went about what he had to do his lips moved. There was a look in his eyes that made him like a priest in a temple.

There were matches in his shot-pouch. He first made a fire. The dry fronds of the palmetto burned like paper. The quick flame caught at a pitchpine-root and by the time this was going he had added the butts of a number of cypress posts he had thrown down from one of the ruined *chukos*. Over this fire he stood straight for a moment or so with his face in the direction of the rising sun and murmured a chant—a prayer that may have been a continuation of what he had said in silence.

Next he carried the kettle to the edge of a slough and there, without so much as a glance, apparently, at a moccasin that lay coiled and furtive on a stump, he washed the kettle carefully, then filled it and

brought it back to the fire where he set it on the flame.

The girl stirred uneasily.

He kept his eyes on her pretty constantly all the time that he pulled down streamers of the gray Spanish moss that hung from the trees nearest the slough. With the moss and green palmetto-fronds he made a bed and a pillow on the platform at the side of where the girl lay and shifted her to this as easily as a mother would have shifted the position of a sleeping infant.

"Lost! Lost! Lost!" cried the girl softly. "I am lost! I am lost!"

"You well," lulled Blue Otter softly.

"I am dying! Daddie! Daddie!"

"Me think so—you help," said Blue Otter.

Still at the girl's side he had shaken apart what else his pack had contained—the three things most Seminoles carry with them on a tour that is to keep them away from home-camps for many nights: a quilt, a mosquito-bar, and an extra shirt. The shirt, perfectly clean, was like the one that Blue Otter wore, only longer—for the shirt he wore was a hunting-shirt, and this other was his dress-suit, so to speak. But both shirts were made in a sort of rainbow pattern, of many stripes, sewn together horizontally, and of many colors.

Gently, patiently, and still with no loss of time, he roused the girl to the necessity of getting out of the wet and muddy clothing she wore and into this other garment. The task wasn't so hard. It might even have satisfied the code of a Mrs. Grundy had there been any such there to see. The change was as easy and modest as getting into an old-fashioned nightgown and undressing afterward—a trick which any woman may perform, even in delirium.

Blue Otter tucked the quilt about her. With a few palmetto-stems he had rigged the mosquito-bar about her as only one could who had been born and reared in a mosquito country.

"*Hinthlo!*" he muttered; or, as we should say. "It is well."

The water was almost at a boil. He disappeared into the forest. When he came back he bore various things of the Indian pharmacy—flowers and green leaves, most-

ly of the white-flowered *Jacquemontia*, and these he cast into the kettle. But he had also brought numerous fleshy pads of the prickly pear from which he had trimmed the spines. These he now split, and with them he poulticed the girl's legs and feet.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GREAT SERPENT.

THERE was a double flow of thought through the mind of Blue Otter as he sat beside his medicine-fire and stirred the contents of the kettle. One flow of thought was represented by the flow of his medicine-song—the ancient chant for the sick and the dying that Blind Heron, the head medicine-man, had taught him. It was a song to the Great Serpent:

"Great Serpent,
Ruler of the earth,
Thy child is sick.
Thy medicine is good."

The other flow of thought had to do with less spiritual matters. Blind Heron was old. Soon, Blind Heron would die. Then he, Blue Otter, would have to take Blind Heron's place. But was he fitted for this? His people were poor. Their troubles were many. It was as if the whole tribe—what was left of it here in the Big Cypress—was like this girl lying there—on the verge of the big sleep. Would he be able to heal her? Would he be able to heal his tribe?

"Great Serpent,
Who sendeth water,
Who taketh the water away."

He stirred and chanted and thought—while the girl slept restlessly, while the sun came up toward noon.

Twice now he had heard the distant drone of airplanes. He knew what they were. In his thought he called them "flying-irons" and associated them with other factors in the white man's magic—guns and motor-boats, matches and automobiles. He may even have associated these present movements of the flying-iron with the presence of the girl here in this remote camp. But he did not leave his fire to look. He did

not stop his chant. The medicine was all-important.

He was crouched at the side of his fire with his back to the girl, the better to concentrate his mind on the mysteries of his craft, but it was as if he could see her through the back of his head.

"Great Serpent,
We the branches are
Of a single tree."

If these words meant anything, didn't they mean that he and this *entygee-hotkee*—this maiden-white—were of a single race? And what even though they were not!

At this point he was troubled by an omen.

He saw a cock-robin fluster up from a thicket of myrtle, then fluster back again—chattering, calling. After that, the robin flew to the top of a tree and called again. At that, another bird appeared—demure, amused and tolerant—a lady bird this time. Not a hen-robin, though. The lady was a red bird, a dame of the cardinal tribe. She paused in the myrtle just long enough to tease the robin, then followed.

Blue Otter smote his breast to drive out impurity. He sang his medicine song. He stirred and stirred the boiling herbs in the kettle. He was unmarried. As yet, he had looked on no maiden of his people with special favor. He tried not to think of the slender grace and whiteness of this girl's arms as he aided her to get out of her queer and sodden raiment.

The steam from the kettle was delicately perfumed. The scented heat of it was like this girl's breath.

But he continued to pour into the boiling liquid the ancient petition that had been taught to him by old Blind Heron—he who knew everything and was possessed of great gifts—he who could wander through the wilderness without the aid of eyes.

When he considered that the medicine was strong enough he lifted the kettle from the fire with a loop of palmetto stem and carried it to the slough where he cooled it. When it was cooled, he brought it back to where the girl lay and laved her arms, her face, and her feet with it. The medicine he had already applied to these latter—

the split cactus-pads—had already begun to function. The swelling and much of the fever was gone.

But, studying her, he saw that it might be a long time still before he would be able to leave her; if at all—before the big sleep claimed her. What shadows under her long eyelashes!

She was as like as not to die. Not the wisest could ever tell. In all the time that he and his people had lived in contact with death—the big sleep—no way had been found in which to ward it off. It came to young and old, to good and bad, to the weak and to the strong.

Tommy Tigertail had been as strong as a steer, and yet hadn't the lightning killed him here, in this camp, while he was finishing his canoe? There in the slough, a little beyond where he, Blue Otter, had gone for water, the canoe still lay, almost as good as new, carved out of the all-but-imperishable cypress, but haunted—haunted as this camp was haunted.

And what even was the white man's magic—

His thoughts came to an automatic stop as he heard a sound from the direction of the slough. He started, held his breath. He had heard the dip of a ghostly push-pole—the sort of pole that the Seminoles used to propel their cypress canoes through these unmapped waters. But who could be canoeing in this forbidden bit of the world? Was it the ghost—the *solopathee*—of Tommy Tigertail come back for that property of his?

Then some slighter sound—the groping touch of the pole against tree or shore, some hint of momentary uncertainty about the still invisible boatman—gave Blue Otter the flash of illumination he was praying for; and he knew who the newcomer must be.

Even so, there was but a slight decrease of the ghostliness of the visitor. At least, so a stranger or a white man would have found it during the few minutes that followed.

Silently, the canoe came gliding to what had once been the landing-place of the haunted camp. A groping pole had touched the shore. The canoe sidled close, and he who had come in it stepped ashore. And

there he stood for a long five or six seconds with his face upraised.

The newcomer also was an Indian, dressed much as Blue Otter was, in a kilted shirt that reached his knees. But he was very, very old. The white hair that fell about his face was still abundant, but almost white. His face was deeply seamed. Especially when he had stood there with his face upraised it would have been seen that his eyes were sightless.

Even while he stood there with his old face up and his blind eyes staring away he seemed to know that there was a moccasin coiled there where he would have put his foot at the next step. He touched a spot a little to one side of where the moccasin was with his bare foot. The poisonous snake slid away.

Blue Otter breathed a name in Seminole. The old man was still twenty or thirty yards away, and Blue Otter's voice came in but little more than a fluttering whisper. But the old man heard him, and saluted him in turn.

Blue Otter said: "Blind Heron, I am here."

The chief medicine-man replied: "Blue Otter speaks twice."

Which was both a jest and a rebuke. For hadn't Blue Otter already spoken otherwise? He had fired his rifle. He had filled the breeze with a smell of medicine.

Nothing more was said after that, until Blind Heron had rested and refreshed himself.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET WISDOM.

BLIND HERON, with a touch here and there of his staff, had found a comfortable place for himself on one of the cypress-logs which his pupil and adopted son had brought to the fire. On the old man's face there continued that look of smiling peace which was habitual to him—always as if those sightless eyes of his contemplated some pleasant and beguiling spectacle.

But there was nothing to be learned from this, as the younger man knew. The same

expression was on Blind Heron's face in moments—and hours—of torture, moments of wrath, moments of grave judgment; as, for example, that time he had condemned his own son to death for an infraction of the Seminole's high code of morals.

"Tommy Tigertail, his camp," said Blind Heron, as if speaking to himself. "The sacred lightning, it struck him. Thus he went West with none of his powers diminished."

"I reverence his spirit," said Blue Otter simply.

"It was he who saw the blue otter run thrice around your mother's bearing-lodge the night you were born," said Blind Heron. "The old men named you. We knew then that Hesukatemeesee, the Great Spirit, and Chitto-Rakkee, the Great Serpent, had given us a medicine sign."

He said this with the air of gentle reminiscence that any old doctor of the white tribe would have recalled the birth incidents and circumstances of some favorite young man.

"I am silent," said Blue Otter.

"But your thoughts make a sound like shouting," smiled the blind man. "They hoot like a hundred owls in the night, all hooting at once."

"Like them that mourn!" Blue Otter confessed. He stole a furtive glance in the direction of the girl.

When they talked their voices still maintained musical murmur—a sound that wouldn't have alarmed a grazing deer fifty yards away. There on the platform of the ruined lodge the white girl lay and dreamed under her mosquito-bar undisturbed; and if Blind Heron knew of this other presence he had thus far given no hint of it. He had eaten the meat the younger man gave him. There was ever that smiling calm on his old face as he meditated.

"In coming to this camp," said Blind Heron at last, "you defied the teaching of your ancestors."

"The people were hungry," Blue Otter replied. "I knew that a drove of wild hogs came here. I walked for three days alone and made medicine with the Great Serpent. I heard his voice."

"We have been hungry before."

"Times change. Hitherto, when the people were hungry, they could travel far, where hunger was not. Now, the white man is putting his fences everywhere. Last moon came the notice that this camp and all the land about for a day's travel had been sold to a white man and that he will be followed by many white men so that we shall no longer be permitted to hunt over it or live on it."

There was still that look of smiling peace on the elder man's face when he next spoke, after a long silence:

"This white man you speak about had a daughter."

Blue Otter scarcely breathed or stirred. He also was silent for a long time. Did Blind Heron know of the girl's presence here? There was no telling. He sought to bring the talk back into a safer channel. He said:

"The Great Serpent spoke to me. He said to fear nothing—nor ghosts nor white men."

"Nor the daughters of the white men," murmured Blind Heron. "The Great Serpent is strong. He can do with earthly things what he will. He knows the secrets of the underground rivers. He can fill the Everglades to the brim or dry them up, as we have seen. He is our friend. He has kept Florida wild. He said to the white man: 'Thus far and no farther.'"

"You speak truly."

"So truly that now the Great Serpent has answered my prayers. He has brought misfortune on this white man who would have despoiled us further. The white man had a daughter. He has her no longer."

Blue Otter sat in silence. So did old Blind Heron. The silence was intense—for now the sun was at noon when all the wild things of the woods were silent, even the birds and the little tree-frogs. In Blue Otter's mind there was no longer any uncertainty on one point: Blind Heron knew that the girl was here in this camp. The guess would not have been a difficult one for the blind medicine-man. The old Heron must have recognized the nature of the medicine that had been made, even if his fine ears had brought him no hint of the girl's quiet breathing.

"She is here," Blue Otter confessed.

"She is a more dangerous ghost than the ghost of him who died here," said Blind Heron, placidly.

"When I found her she was ready to become a ghost in truth," said the Otter.

"If you let her die, then her father would look on this land as cursed. He would go away and never come back."

"We cannot let her die."

"Has not the Great Serpent sent her to us as a hostage?"

"He also gave us knowledge to save the sick."

"Would you save her to the end that your people be robbed? I tell you that—*if she die this white man will go away and never return.*"

There was nothing hasty about this interview. Each man was taking time for thought each interval before he spoke. After each murmured sentence the great silence fell. The moss hung straight from the trees. No leaf fluttered. Only a small blue reed of smoke went up from the fire, as diaphanous as a sunbeam, shook and faded.

"Another would come," said Blue Otter.

"And would not disaster befall him, too? We have the gift." A touch of poetry—of possession—came into the blind man's bearing when he mentioned "the gift." He repeated the statement, and then added to it in a sort of lulling chant: "Yea, we have the gift. It is so. To each one of us it is granted. Our ancestors began to pray when the sun was still in the womb of the moon. More ancestors there were than all the leaves that have ever fallen from all the trees. And the amount of their prayers filled space. And the Great Spirit reduced this ocean of prayer to the one gift, which he hath and holdeth for each child of the Medicine Lodge. Have you forgotten?"

"I have not forgotten," Blue Otter answered gravely. "When the time comes, I may ask of the Serpent, the Great Spirit, His Master, one gift, and I may say what this gift shall be, and it will be granted me."

"Yea, the one gift."

"And on each of us the responsibility."

"To be answered for at the council in the West."

"And if—if," murmured Blue Otter, "I used this gift on behalf—of the foreign girl."

"You may need it to save your own life," replied Blind Heron, with his ghostly smile. "Suppose that, when the council meets at the Green Corn Dance, this, my other child, Blue Otter, be condemned to die. But if the *entygee-hotkee*, the white daughter of our enemy, should die—if she die—" Blind Heron did not complete his sentence. He slowly arose. He left the camp as he had come.

CHAPTER VIII.

NATURE HOLDS HER BREATH.

BLUE OTTER made no mistake about the nature of the blind chief's visit. Blind Heron loved him. In his own way, Blind Heron had perceived that he, Blue Otter, had set his foot in perilous ways and had come to warn him. It was even possible that Blind Otter had set in motion that machinery which now accounted for the presence of this girl here in the haunted camp where none might find her. Blue Otter believed this to be possible. He knew it to be possible. In his own method of expression, he would have said:

We the branches are
Of a single tree.

The tree was the Almighty.

It was only when the branches broke from the parent stem that they died, so to speak, and were cast into the fire.

It was to save him from some such catastrophe that Blind Heron had now followed him. Blind Heron had guessed his destination. Blind Heron, most likely, had sat with his face in the smoke and had been able to see all things.

Blue Otter followed with his keen hearing the leisurely retreat of Blind Heron to the water's edge. He heard a swishing ripple in the slough. That was some alligator that had crawled out on the bank for a noon-tide siesta getting out of the red prophet's way. All animals were like that when Blind Heron was on the trail—turkey or deer even would watch him pass close

to them without alarm, the snakes would allow him to tramp upon them, almost, as if favoring his contact; the wildcats and panthers for him were as rabbits. And now Blind Heron poled his canoe away, calmly, through the labyrinthine swamps.

Blue Otter, so soon as the receding sounds of the canoe had altogether ceased, left his place by the fire and went out to the place where the girl lay. He tossed back the mosquito-bar and looked at her. There was an expression of both tenderness and awe on his face.

It brought a riot of emotion to his heart when he thought of "the one gift" of which the chief medicine-man had just reminded him, and then associated this reminder with the presence of this strange white girl. It cast, somehow, a hue of holiness about her, linked her up with eternity and the infinite, with the great serpent, and with Hesukatemeesee, the Great Spirit.

There are white teachers who would have their followers believe that they have this power of "the one gift"—that the thing they most desire in their hearts, that thing will be granted them. But these white pupils are apt to regard the teaching rather as a theory than a fact. So among the red pupils of Blind Heron—among most of them, that is. But not so with Blue Otter.

He was of the breed of prophets. He knew. When it came time for him to demand "the one gift," it would be granted him. He had the faith. It was a faith that would have stopped the sun.

This faith was in him now as he looked down at the girl.

Her tumbled hair was outspread on the pillow of moss. There was a glow under the white skin of her throat that had not been there before—"like a grass-fire"—the mysterious fire of life. But would this fire also go out, like a grass-fire? Or would it kindle into a new day, like the dawn-fire, when the holy sun came up? There was a color in her lips. Her lips were parted. Her teeth gleamed through. The doctor part of Blue Otter took note of the teeth—small and perfect, white but not too white. Back of the girl's present helplessness there must have been an all but unbroken record of perfect health.

He was about to turn away—fearful, one would have said, lest too long a contemplation of the stranger upset his perception of the truth—when the girl whimpered in her sleep and turned slightly.

Blue Otter crooned the lullaby of Seminole mothers over a restless child:

"No-wut tsa-a-a, No-wut tsa!"

Again she appeared to sleep peacefully. He turned to leave.

But this time the girl uttered a stifled cry and began to struggle. She started up, wide-eyed.

"No!" she panted. "No! I tell you! Never! Never!"

There was a look of terror now on her face. She was staring off ahead of her, but blindly.

He consoled her softly in Seminole: "*Chinny-hinthlo! Ahny amachamee!*" (You're all right! I'm your friend.)" He took one of her hands in his, but he made no effort to constrain her in any other way. "You're all right. Nothing will hurt you. There, there, now, go to sleep!"

And without having looked at the author of these words at all Muriel Sangree lost something of her fear. She sobbed a little, but it was still all part of her evil dream. She dropped back again to her bed of palm fronds and moss.

Once more Blue Otter took up the old lullaby:

*"No-wut tsa-a-a-a, No-wut tsa!
(Sleep, little one, sleep!)"*

She slept.

But throughout the whole of that age-long afternoon, Blue Otter sat there at her side and now left her not again. After all, this was a haunted camp. What was the haunt that had come to molest her? Would it come again? Not so long as he had the power to shield her from it. And a wakeful man need never fear a ghost—so the teaching ran—so long as that man's heart was pure. He kept his own heart pure by not thinking of himself at all. Instead, he thought of her.

"My son thinks of the white girl," said Blind Heron, the chief medicine-man, as he

ghosted along the canoe-trail like a man with eyes.

At times when the trail twisted and passed through an open space the sun was direct in his eyes, but he did not shift his gaze. He knew it when the sun was in his eyes, and he was grateful. Then he prayed. And it was like having his lips to the ear of the Great Spirit.

"And lo," said Blind Heron, "I have it in my power to bring death upon the maiden ere it be too late. But am I to be a foolish woman, to wince when her child is tested with a red-hot ember?"

He kept his course as well as any member of the tribe could have done it, although the canoe-trail forked in many places and was at times broad and at other times narrow. He was like one of those old mariners who could sail the North Atlantic with no other navigating instrument than a dead-line. With his push-pole he touched the bank and knew where he was. Or he touched the bottom and knew whether to bear to the right or the left.

But most of all he soared above such gross dependence and appeared to be guided by the spirit solely.

Or was it the animals he passed that guided him. The turtles appeared to gossip as he passed. The squat snakes stared. Even the lethargic and indifferent alligators smiled. So one would have said. There was a quality in Blind Heron's own smile to remind all creatures of the smile of the sun.

The sun smiled when there was tragedy afoot.

"Yea, now," smiled Blind Heron, "should the maiden die—and I have the power—yea, now! If she die—"

CHAPTER IX.

"IF SHE DIE."

THERE was as much, and more, in those three words of the old red medicine-man, "If she die," as Blind Heron himself had seen, with those sightless eyes of his.

First, consider Enoch Sangree. He was a type of the strong man, not physically,

but mentally. Physically, he was rather under the average—not very tall, slender, soft-spoken; he wore glasses; he had a dread of firearms, of noise and violence in any form. But mentally, an intelligent brute.

The dowager on the porch was mistaken when she hinted that his main inspiration in life was money. The thing that moved Enoch Sangree was a talent and a thirst for battle. He had to fight, and win, and organize his victory. No matter who suffered, he would have his way. It was that way in this Florida project. Into this waste place of the country he would move his colonists. These first colonists would be ruined. Their women would go crazy. Their children would die. But others would follow. When the first line dies, move up your reserves. Gradually, as in other waste places of the world, the battle would be won—scent-laden gardens and cultivated fields would wipe out the graves of the pioneers.

But that Muriel, his only child, should be a victim! He had never thought of that. It filled him with a wordless horror. The horror was all the greater in that he was incapable of giving it outward expression. She had been the only person in whom he confided. Now she was gone. He was all alone.

He was all alone, although there were people about him. He was the sort of man who is always the center of human activity. Put one such in the center of the Sahara and he will soon have a crowd about him. It was that now.

When the Semiramis III came to the head of this uncharted and unnamed river less than a week ago, the wilderness about it appeared to be empty. It was an emptiness that spread to the wide horizons of cypress swamp and everglade, under a sky all blue and blinding gold. It had been a loneliness like that of midocean—only, here the ocean had gone absolutely still, the surface of it had been spread with a coverlet of grass and wild-flowers, and there had been an emergence of tropic islands, near and remote, widely scattered, like a promised land still void of people.

Now the people came.

"In a way other than I looked for," said Enoch Sangree to himself.

He stood on the deck of his house-boat and looked away hungrily. Far out in the direction of the Everglades he could see two reeling specks which he knew to be airplanes. They were like gnats in that vast expanse of empty landscape and sky.

"And as useful as gnats," he said in his heart.

Even from the comparatively slight elevation of the house-boat's upper deck he could see half a dozen camps scattered about the country. At two places on the horizon there were faint pillars of smoke showing the location of other searching-parties. He seized a pair of field-glasses that hung about his neck and examined the camps and the smoke pillars again.

"My tragedy makes sport for them," said Enoch Sangree.

And it may have occurred to him that these others were as indifferent to the possible death of Muriel as he would have been to the death of some first-line colonist. The searchers could find an abundance of turkey and deer at any rate, while Enoch Sangree, who was rich, paid all expenses, offered bigger, then bigger rewards.

A faint confusion of sound and movement from a clump of blue-flag on the river's edge near the house-boat's stern caused him to turn his glass on the spot. The lenses showed him a coiling snake with a fluttering bird in its mouth. He looked at this minor tragedy with a degree of satisfaction that bespoke his personal interest in the spectacle. To his imagination the bird was Muriel; the snake was this wilderness—perfect, beautiful, deadly.

But while the snake, with leisurely grace and strength, was still trying to improve its hold on its victim, the tragedy took a wholly unexpected turn.

There was a stir and a swift commotion.

Then it was the bird that was free and the snake that was caught.

Sangree had seen the whole thing—the head of an alligator suddenly emerging from the secretive water, the snap of the alligator's wide mouth as it closed on a coil of the snake, the snake's swift spasm of defense. Then, there were the muddy rip-

ples in the water; there was the bird in flight, dropping one—two—three feathers, but saved!

Sangree shook. His nerves were failing.

But it seemed to him more than ever as if he had seen Muriel in the grip of a deadly peril, had seen her hopeless struggles, had then seen her flutter away. Was she saved? Was she maimed? Or had intervention come too late? Was she dead? Would her fate ever be known? Had this placid wilderness closed over her, like the waters of a secretive river, to keep the secret of her end a secret forever?

"Prince Shuiski, sir," said the steward of the Semiramis III, from the head of the companionway.

"What does he want?"

"To see you, sir."

Sangree permitted himself a gesture of savage dismay.

"No news!"

But before he could develop his thought, a smooth voice replied: "Tell him it may mean news." And Prince Shuiski himself appeared.

He was a handsome creature, large and well made; and, in spite of a certain fawning attention he immediately gave to Enoch Sangree, an observer would have said that the prince could not hide the contempt that most big men have for the man less generously endowed.

"Well?" said Sangree.

He himself certainly had the contempt of the man with brains for the less intelligent. He had always allowed Muriel free reign in the matter of acquaintances and guests. But it struck him with an added tinge of horror now that he had ever contemplated Prince Shuiski as a possible mate for Muriel. The prince was as well groomed as if he had just left Palm Beach. He looked well nourished. There was an oiliness of his body as well as in his speech. He stepped forward, crouched and soft, big but graceful.

"I heard a rumor," said the prince. "I couldn't do otherwise than hasten back to tell you about it."

There, for a fleeting second or two, Enoch Sangree's glasses furnished him with a

mirage. As he looked at the prince, it seemed as if he were seeing that thick but graceful snake again with the bird in its mouth. The prince was the snake. The bird was Muriel.

"What was the rumor?" Sangree demanded coldly.

"That Muriel is being held for ransom."

"Where did you hear the rumor?"

"Back in the woods—a good thirty miles north of here. There we found a camp where a couple of outlaws are hiding away from the law. It was not without personal risk. They suggested—"

"That she is held by other outlaws?"

"No; by Indians."

"Indians!"

"Yes."

"I—I don't believe it."

The prince looked hurt, but patient. "I was inclined to disbelief myself."

"What proof did they offer?"

"Their proof was largely negative—that no trace of Miss Sangree had been discovered despite the wide search."

"That's no proof. The whole country is filled with traps and hiding-places. Every fool knows that. Sink-holes! Bogs! Underground rivers! Fifty people could disappear without a trace on those open prairies!"

"Still, her body—"

"It isn't her body," panted Sangree softly. "If she is dead—should she die—"

He checked himself, ashamed that he should let emotion get the better of him in the presence of this man he had come to loathe and distrust.

"I quite appreciate the strain you are under," said Prince Shuiski. "I also suffer from it. I have not forgotten—nor shall I ever forget—that in a measure I am responsible—that I was the last to see Miss Sangree before—she disappeared."

"What is your suggestion?" Sangree bit in.

"To increase the offer of a reward," said Shuiski.

"What good would that do? I've already raised it to ten thousand. It's not a matter of money."

"It may be," said the prince sadly "There are many wild men scattered

through this country, both red and white. They are all beyond the pale of the law, except such laws as they make for themselves. None would care to act unless seconded by his mates. Any reward would have to be divided many times."

"Blackmail!"

"Alas!"

"Blood money!"

CHAPTER X,

RIVALS.

THE conversation came to a sort of surging pause—no words, but the ground-swell of emotion running strong—as the air about the two men was shaken by the thud of a motor. They both looked up—Etoch Sangree with a new gust of hope, Prince Shuiski with a grimace of hate. One of those reeling atoms on the horizon had long since disappeared—to the hangars of Arcadia or Miami, doubtless; but the other had drawn nearer, nearer, and now revealed itself as a flying-boat.

Both Sangree and Shuiski could read the number of the craft as it swung low on a long curve. A moment later, with a rush of spray, and yet with the lightness and perfect control of a duck, the flyer had taken the water where the river spread in a wide lagoon.

"Lieutenant Lathrop," said Sangree.

"I hope he brings news—better than mine," droned the prince, with a look that belied the meaning of his words.

The look and the words passed unnoticed. Sangree had stepped to the rail. The skipper of the Semiramis had not been taken by surprise, however. The house-boat's dingey was already headed for the aerial visitor.

Sangree remained at the rail with his back to the prince until he could get a glimpse of Lieutenant Lathrop's face—a boyish face, meager but strong, lively though calm. But there was no message here of the sort that Sangree was looking for.

"I've put in for gas and a bite to eat," said the lieutenant, as he appeared on the upper deck.

He hadn't waited to be announced. He wasted no time in greetings of any sort. He had given Prince Shuiski an unsmiling nod. His clear blue eyes rested on those of Enoch Sangree with sober sympathy.

"I'll give orders," said Sangree.

"I took the liberty," said the lieutenant. "I wished to save time. I shall be off again immediately. No news?"

He stood compact and strong, silent and thoughtful, as he listened to the report the prince had brought in.

"Where were these men?" he asked.

"On an island near the coast."

"Did they give the basis for their rumor?"

"Not precisely, but they suggested that an Indian had talked to them."

"If the Indians did have a hand in this," said Lathrop, "I believe no Indian would talk about it—to white men. No Indian would interfere with a white person anyway,—and then tell about it—not here in Florida."

"The fellows may have been merely covering their own trail," said the prince. "I have been told that the Indians have more than once in the past have been charged with the crimes of others."

"What makes you think there has been a crime?"

"Because Miss Sangree could never have been lost—wouldn't have ventured very far alone."

"It wouldn't have been necessary for her to venture far," the lieutenant replied quietly. "These islands and cypress-heads all look alike. They make a maze to fool any one but a native. The interlying prairies are like lawns. No one would guess the dangers of them even when warned."

"It is a pity that you weren't here," the prince breathed—"here before Miss Sangree disappeared."

Lathrop must have caught the veiled sarcasm of the jibe, and also felt the barb of it. The prince had reminded him that it was the prince and not the lieutenant whom Muriel had invited to be among her father's guests. For a moment there was a glint of blue fire in the lieutenant's clear eyes. Then the fire disappeared. His voice was steady and unruffled. It was to

Muriel's father that he addressed himself, however.

"I should advise you, sir," he said, "to try to get some rest—and continue to hope. Muriel was strong. All this country is filled with wild food of sorts, enough to sustain life indefinitely. The palmetto berries are ripe. There are a good many old guava and orange plantations about, some bananas. There are custard-apples and papaws in the woods." He smiled in spite of the melancholy of the only grounds for hope. "And she is her father's daughter."

Enoch Sangree thrust out his hand with one of his rare impulses to emotion, and the lieutenant clasped it.

"Prince Shuiski," said the older man, "has advised me to increase the offer of reward."

"You have already increased it."

"Doubled it."

"I think it was wrong."

"The official attitude," said Sangree.

"The right one, I believe," said Lieutenant Lathrop. "The coasts of Florida are covered with rich men and their families every year. Where they go, the blood-suckers follow—always. There are enough of them here now without offering a prize for kidnapers and blackmailers."

"But the prince tells me that these woods are filled with outlaws. I have heard as much."

"There may be bad men in these woods," said Lathrop, "but they are not the sort who prey on women. They are men who have run away from justice; robbed banks, killed other men, even. But I'll tell you, sir, that they are men. Miss Sangree will be safer in their hands than she would be in the keeping of some of the manicured crooks who hang out at Miami and Palm Beach. If there has been a crime, as Prince Shuiski seems to believe, it will be the crime of some such rotters as that."

"Do you mean to imply—" the prince broke in.

"What?"

"Do you mean to imply—that I was not sincere?"

"I was merely telling Mr. Sangree what I thought. I was trying to make my

thought clear to him. I implied what I said. The moonshiners and other outlaws hereabouts would disdain a reward for saving a lady. But if Miss Sangree has fallen into the hands of any of that East Coast gang, the first sign of it will be a suggestion—from some quarter—that Mr. Sangree increase the—reward—so-called."

Perhaps the lieutenant hadn't intended to say so much. But the blue fire was in his eyes again, and this time his eyes never left those of the prince. Under the prince's skin there came a tinge of blackish red. His own eyes narrowed.

"What are you trying to do?" he droned. "Attack my reputation?"

Lathrop did not answer. He slowly turned his back. He bowed to Mr. Sangree. He went below.

The flying-boat again took the air half an hour later—with a rush of wings and a ripping loose from the clinging water like the rise of a wild duck. Then it curved to the north, flying low, and was hidden by the first of the cypress-heads.

But a little later Prince Shuiski also left. He went by motor-boat, down the river, in the direction of the gulf and the unmapped water-tangle of the Ten Thousand Islands. There, at a certain place, he would find another motor-boat; and this would carry him to a place where a friend would meet him with a light automobile—a car that could travel far over such swamp-trails as traversed the big cypress.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EMPTY CAGE.

THE swamp-trails followed by Shuiski and his chauffeur led northeast up through the lower reaches of the big cypress country and over toward the everglades.

"No news?" asked Shuiski.

"None," the chauffeur replied.

The chauffeur was a small, dark man. One would have said that he was a mixture of all the races that had fought and bled over this still-empty empire—empty still, although it was already old in the chron-

icles of man before New York, or Chicago, or California, were dreamed of.

"I carried the girl to the camp," said the chauffeur. "I turned her over to Carlo. I beat it back to wait for you."

"Did she fight?"

"*Ojus!*"

The chauffeur used the Seminole word meaning "much."

"You didn't hurt her?"

"Naw!"

"How did you manage?"

"We found her where you had steered her—and lost her—and told her you was worried about her."

"What did she say?"

"She seemed to be mad you left her. We told her you had got lost yourself, and was over to Professor Studebaker's camp—just the way you told us to—and that Professor Studebaker was down from the New York Museum collecting wild-flowers."

"And she fell for it?"

"Like a ripe coconut. So we get her over to camp and turn her over to the professor—Carlo, that is—and he offers to take her back to her papa's house-boat in his car. And she falls for that, too. She was not suspicious, but by the time she begins to get wise I've got her 'way over in the Bad Hole country."

"Then what?"

"Carlo slips a bag around her head."

"If that ginny spoiled her looks, I'll—"

"He didn't spoil her looks," said the chauffeur laughing. "She fights and hollers, *ojus!* And finally she jumps out of the car and starts to run."

"And you caught her again!"

"Not right away. It would have killed you laughing. Carlo says to me in Spanish to let her run. We just sort of trailed her—in the car—just enough to keep her running until she was out of breath. Savvy? All-same you catch-em wild hog!"

Shuiski himself had to smile at the chauffeur's humor, but he softly cursed Carlo's sense of fun.

"Damn such rough work," he said. "She might have gone into a sink-hole. She might have kicked a snake. And what good would she have been to us then?"

"It was better than hitting her over the head with a club," the chauffeur retorted thoughtfully. "That girl sure can fight, and the other side of that! *Holowaugus! Holowaugus to hell!*" He indicated a scratch on the side of his face. "She give me that just when we thought she was all in."

There is an unexplained mystery in the reactions of man to his surroundings. There where nature is most beautiful man so often is most cruel. Where the flying-fishes play over blue waters, there look for the wrecker and the black ensign. Or yonder bit of paradise may prove to be a cannibal isle.

There was a reminder of this now in the country through which the so-called Prince Shuiski and his dark-skinned chauffeur rolled. No country could have been more beautiful. There was a succession of level meadows, turfed to an emerald green and spangled with a million flowers; these meadows shading away into parklike groves of scattered, slender, lofty pines—each pine a picture in itself—or glades of palm that shone like silver; and ever the background of forest—the dry forests of hammock, or broad-leaved growth, and the dense strands or rivers of cypress, those in the distance looking like far mountains.

Once or twice, or oftener, every year, this whole country was under water except for the scattered pine and hammock islands. But these annual inundations kept it incredibly sweet and clean, lush, and unspoiled.

All this, said the Indians, was in the design of the Great Serpent. Whenever need be, the Great Serpent would spew out the waters of the underworld and cause the white man to flee. How otherwise explain the absence of white man still—when the white man had fought for years over this very land to take it away from the Seminole—had spent other millions and other lives to make it a place where the white men could live?

The Seminoles had a secret. Among their number was always one man—one medicine-man—who could summon the Great Serpent at will—cause the waters to come gushing up from the underground

rivers—flood out the white man and all his works.

It looked that way. The country was empty. The tragedy that always stalks beauty in nature was there.

It was there in more tangible form at times. This was when the automobile left some bit of meadow for a plunge through a shadowy slough—where the water still stood deep, where the ghostly cypress pressed close, where the sun never shone, where the moccasins and the alligators lurked, where strange birds flitted like shadows, where the quivering deer came to hide themselves when hunters were about.

Shuiski and his chauffeur had just traversed a place like that—and something of the spell of it was on both of them, perhaps, to judge by their silence—when the chauffeur broke the silence with a sharp cry:

“Carlo!”

Carlo, who had been hiding behind a clump of palmetto, emerged into fuller view—a gaunt and swarthy young man, dressed like a swamper and carrying a gun, but looking as one might upon whom the swamp had put the seal of death.

“Carlo!” echoed Shuiski. And then: “What has happened?”

The car had stopped and Carlo came stumbling forward. As yet he had not spoken.

Shuiski jumped from the car and took a couple of steps to meet him:

“What’s the matter?”

Carlo gave a despairing glance in the direction of a small hammock-island across the plain.

“The girl—”

On the edge of the distant island a camp was visible. It was a camp that had been established there years ago by some enthusiastic cowman (long since dead and buried) who had sought to make this wet wilderness his cattle range.

Shuiski droned a curse. He suspected the worst, but he did not dare come out with it.

“She killed herself?”

“Escaped! Ran off! Got away!”

“You damned—”

“*Basta!*” Carlo hissed savagely, as he

swung his gun around. “I’ve been through hell. But I’ve found her again. I know where she is.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE LONG NIGHTMARE.

THERE must have been elements of all this in the delirium of Muriel Sangree as she lay there in Tommy Tigertail’s ruined camp on the edge of the Everglades.

First there had been that drift with her father—from St. Augustine to Palm Beach, from Palm Beach to Miami; aimless, so far as she was concerned, and a trifle bore-some, with the round of gaieties that were all alike; dinners, dances, flirtations, mornings on the beach, afternoons of laziness and tea, more dances, more flirtations. But just as the late John Muir pointed out that there is an intelligence back of the drift of every snowflake sent down to carve a mountain, so evidently there must have been an intelligence back of this seemingly idle drift of hers.

Not until Miami had this purpose appeared, however; and that was when Anthony Lathrop had taken her aloft for a flight in his sea-plane.

A winding ribbon of white beach with a fringe of forest and a few red specks that were roofs; and all this set between the three infinities of sky, ocean and Everglade. There had been two other infinities in the girl’s thought that day—the infinite past and the infinite future. Out of the infinite past she and Anthony Lathrop had wandered, preordained, to this, their meeting-place. Henceforward and forever together now they would follow the aerial path into the infinite future.

A mere fleeting thought that had come to her as the sea-plane coasted into the depths of the blue!

Why hadn’t she told him of this thought that second night he had called on her? He must have guessed it. There was a good deal of the seer about him. There must have been. He was not like any other youth she had ever met. Least of all was he like the male flirts and idlers, the gamblers and social pirates who swarmed

the Florida hotels while the season was at its height. And yet that second night he had told her that he loved her.

In the same breath she was telling herself that she loved him. They were on the hotel porch. The air was heavy with perfume. The breeze was as mild as the moonlight. They were as if lifted and carried away on a flood of soft music.

It was as if they were flying again, but this time in a magical machine; and that fleeting thought that had first come to her while they were taking that other flight was possessing her more strongly than ever. Here was the predestined. She knew now why she had remained aloof and unscathed through all those other courtships that had raged about her—up North, in England, in France and Italy, and, most of all, down here in Florida.

But that perversity which keeps men—and women—from acting like angels, had made her hesitate, had made her put him off; had made her smile at Prince Shuiski (so-called) who had followed her so assiduously from St. Augustine and was now asking her for a dance.

"I have hurt him!" Muriel Sangree had told herself that night as she undressed for bed.

And she was thinking of Lieutenant Lathrop, even while she knew that in hurting him she had hurt herself the more.

Then, when they had seen each other the next time, it was he who had shown himself to be perverse. This time, to make amends, she had encouraged him. She had even called him by his first name: "Anthony!" She had teased him: "Tony!" But Lathrop now was standing on his young dignity. He would have crushed her in his arms. Instead of that, he was showing himself to be reserved. He had even pretended to be devoted to another girl.

So, to punish him—and do this in the cruelest possible way—she had invited the fellow Shuiski to go along with her and her father's party on the trip to the Ten Thousand Islands and beyond.

If the course of true love never does run smooth, it is generally the fault of the pilots and of no one else.

What followed was nightmare.

The whole episode, dating from her first encounter with Lieutenant Anthony Lathrop, was nightmare in the light of those subsequent events. She had tolerated Prince Shuiski. She had amused herself with him, as she had amused herself with many men. She had continued to tolerate him and amuse herself with him even after she had begun to suspect that he was dangerous. She loved danger—loved it for its own sake, as certain men love it. And this was the only form in which real danger conveniently presented itself—to go gunning for this clawed Bengal tiger in human shape, trap him, defy him, get rid of him at last in any way that suited her.

The sense of danger was never so keen as that day Shuiski had invited her to come and see an orchard-garden he had discovered. The sense of danger was so keen that inwardly she trembled a little, wanted to draw back, but would not, because that would be cowardly.

But how different it might have been if she had invited the lieutenant and not the prince to come along! How wonderful it would have been had Anthony been here in that savage hot-house! There was a bit of forest where every tree was a hanging-garden. There were orchids that were brilliant, orchids that appeared to be in mourning, orchids that were odorless, and some with a perfume that called to the remotest cells of her being—that stirred her as Anthony had stirred her!

Then the madness of finding herself in the power of unfriendly strangers—a frenzy of battle and flight—exhaustion—other struggles—oblivion—all this under a sky of a perfect purity, in the midst of a perfect beauty—a jumble of fiendish faces and shreds of paradise—as if the whole world had become a nightmare!

"You well!"

"Where am I?"

"No 'flaid. You well."

Muriel Sangree was conscious of a strong arm under her head. There was a smell of broth, fragrant of meat and aromatic herbs, and she opened her lips as instinctively as a hungry babe would have done. The broth was delicious, but it was strange that they

should have served it to her in a wooden spoon.

The fact was as strange as that voice she had heard. Then she began to recollect. This was Florida. She must have been ill. She raised her eyes. She gazed with wonder at the face above her own—all eyes, at first, but the eyes were kind; strange eyes, as strange as the eyes of a Russian wolfhound she had once owned, with the same sort of speechless mystery looking out from the depths of them, but not eyes to make her afraid.

"You're a Seminole," she announced.

"Yes, Miss Sangree." The answer came slowly, but perfectly pronounced.

"Where did you hear my name?"

"Blind Heron—him tell me."

The words meant nothing to her, except as a sort of added assurance that her experience was rational, that her nightmare was past.

"Where is my father?"

There was a long pause. "Me think so—him come."

"What is your name?"

She could see the thought flickering in the dark eyes. It was almost as if she could follow the process of thought in the brain back of the eyes—first the thought in a foreign speech, then this slowly and laboriously translated.

"Blue Otter," the owner of the eyes replied.

"Thank you, Blue Otter. You are very—you are very—kind."

And sleep had once more stolen over Muriel Sangree, but this time with no nightmare in it.

CHAPTER XIII.

THESE TWAIN.

WHEN she awoke the next time it was dark. It was night, but there was a whiteness about her, and beyond this whiteness there was a flicker of flame. She put out her hand and found that the whiteness was a mosquito-bar. She raised this and saw a camp-fire. Seated at the side of the fire, gazing into it, was the Indian whom she knew to be Blue Otter.

The sight of him gave her an assurance of safety.

She felt weak. She was still under the spell of a lethargy. But apart from this she experienced a marvelous sense of well-being. She was free from pain. She felt a gust of gratitude for the silence, for the shadowy forest, for that motionless red thinker over there.

What had happened?

Little by little she reconstructed the fragments of her recent history until she saw it whole, up to the time of her escape from the camp where the men in the automobile had taken her, and for a little while after that. By this time she was sitting up, a little giddy, but silent. She examined the strange dress she wore, the strange bed upon which she lay. She lifted the muslin bar on the other side. About this bed of hers the forest and the night hung their scented purple curtains with a perfect privacy.

What had happened to the world?—the old world she had known? It was as if this world had died—or she had died—and that a new order of creation had come into being. She swam in silence. Here was a peace such as she had never known. She rested for a while, satisfied with the soft darkness and silence as with something she had always craved but had never known before. Not even thought of her father disturbed her very much. He had been a man always absorbed in his own affairs. And who was Lieutenant Lathrop? He was a mere fading figment of the world that was gone.

But she felt that primal need of all newly created things.

"Blue Otter," she called softly.

He was almost instantly at her side. His face was grave and kind. His wide eyes glowed down at her as mysterious and tolerant as stars.

"I am here."

"I am hungry," she said.

She saw a smile that was rather of the eyes than the lips.

"*Hinthler-ka!*"—and she needed no interpreter to tell her that it was an exclamation of satisfaction.

He was back from the fire with his kettle

and his spoon. He put the kettle on the puncheons at her side. Once more his lithe arm was supporting her head. It was evident that he had been waiting for just this.

Arrowroot, or comptie, turkey-breast, the juice of wild limes—all these had gone into that magic mess of pottage. It was as wild, as strange, and as satisfying as the night.

"Me think so," he said at last, "you have enough. You sleep some more. The sun come up. You well."

But his eyes sought hers to see whether she would agree.

"Did you cook that?"

"Yes."

"You are a very wonderful cook."

He neither thanked her nor showed any special pleasure in her compliment. Perhaps he was thinking of other things. Perhaps he was conscious only of the soft, warm pressure on his arm where her head still rested.

"You sleep?" he asked.

"All right."

He lowered her head without shock or friction to the pillow of moss. But she wasn't ready yet to let him go.

"Where is every one?"

"You—me—all alone."

"But where did I get this?" and she indicated the barbaric splendid shirt she wore.

"Mine," he answered. "You take 'em." With a deft pantomime he indicated how she had changed. He showed her the clothing she had worn at the outset of the adventure.

There was a mystery here. It was a mystery that ordinarily would have called her to blush red. But no blush came. It was as if in the presence of this shadowy nurse all things were limpid and natural. She wondered why she was not afraid, why she wasn't homesick. Instead, she felt as if she had never known home before, nor confidence. She had never known a mother. She had an odd and uplifting sensation that, after all, nature was the mother—as the poets had always claimed—and that she was cuddled in nature's breast.

"I am very grateful to you," she said.

She touched her hand to his, then left it there, as the lulling night deepened, and deepened, into a dreamless sleep.

Blue Otter did not stir for a long time.

For a long time he sat at the side of the girl and looked down at her. The fire was low. It went lower yet. It became so dark that he could not have seen as men see ordinarily at all. Rather he was seeing as the wild things see at night—the deer that plunge through the dark and tangled woods at high speed and never have an accident, with the eyes of the cats and the owls, the raccoons and the foxes; and then perhaps with a finer vision still.

The sleeping white girl shone palely. She was luminous. He could see the wide drift of her hair, the delicate contour of her cheek and chin, the chaste curve of her throat and shoulder.

And always, always there was that touch of her hand against his own.

The intensity of his contemplation was such that he could still see her—see her entirely and otherwise—as he raised his face. He had been without food or sleep since now he could scarcely remember when. For he had fasted long, as he had informed Blind Heron, long before he had ever found the girl. He had fasted for immunity against a ghost. He had faced the possibility of encountering the ghost of Tommy Tigertail in this haunted camp. This was the ghost that the Great Spirit had vouchsafed him instead.

As he raised his face toward the crowd of forest that overhung the camp there opened to his vision—or his inner vision, at any rate—an image of himself and the girl hand in hand, wandering through a mild and magical wilderness—westward, to where the Big Sleep began—and then on and on, forever and ever.

Perhaps it was an image like this that presented itself to Blind Heron's sightless eyes this night. Neither was he asleep. He sat cross-legged—like a Buddha—like a mystic of whatever race—in his distant lodge and thought. His lodge was like any *chuko* of the Seminoles—a palm-thatched roof with a platform of cypress puncheons under it raised two or three feet from the

ground—but Blind Heron's presence made of this lodge a rustic temple.

They always said—and there was reason to believe it—that when he sat like that, cross-legged and motionless in contemplation, he could see things far or near, things visible to man and things invisible to man, and without budging could travel where he would.

The rest of the camp slept. There were perhaps a half-dozen other lodges scattered about the clearing. Under each thatched roof the muslin mosquito-bars shone dimly. In the center of the camp, under a thatch of its own, the fire burned faintly. About this, from time to time, there ghosted the shadow of a hungry dog.

A rooster crowed—the shrill falsetto of a cockerel gone small and wild. The forest answered with the distant hooting of an owl. A baby whimpered, soothed instantly by the murmur of a woman's voice.

Then silence again.

Blind Heron raised his face with a tragic smile.

"And is it then," he demanded of the silence, "that Blue Otter likewise must die?"

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN TREES CONSPIRE.

BUT in that other camp, a dozen miles away as an owl might fly, Blue Otter himself had those visions which had to do neither with life nor death, as these terms are generally understood.

"I have the power of the one gift," he whispered as he looked at the girl again. "Do you hear me? I am of the ancient people. Our people in the beginning were as gods. As gods we may live again. It would be as the life of a god to live with you. Do you hear me, *Eeti-Okholattee*?"

That would be her name: Eyes-Blue. A name similar to his own. He was Blue Otter. She was Eyes-Blue. And in his exalted mood there seemed to be some sort of a mystic significance in this.

He closed his eyes. The manifold fragrance of the forest were never so strong as they were this night. There was an

aroma for every romantic aspiration of his life, every ambition, every solemn petition to fairies, to spirit, to the Father of these—bay and rough lemon and orange, the grass of the Glades and the prairies, bark of the live-oaks, wood smoke and pine, and through all these the fine strands of scent from the wild creatures—scales, feather and fur.

But once or twice on these silent messages of the night there came to Blue Otter another scent. It came to him on the fitful breeze from the southwest. It was a taint of another sort of fire, and he recognized the menace of it as readily as any other native of the woods would have so classified it.

Somewhere over in that quarter the tribesmen of this girl were astir. They were on her trail, perhaps. But would they find her? Hadn't they sacrificed all claim to her? Wasn't it as if she had died so far as they were concerned?

"The one gift will be granted me," he said.

But he was disquieted as he went about such other work as he had planned to do on the girl's behalf. He did this work. Completely exhausted, he at last stretched himself out on one of the cypress-posts near the fire, and there he slept.

"Lo, I also had the power of the One Gift," said the spirit of Blind Heron, coming and leaning over him, "and my wish was this: That you be granted wisdom."

Starting up, Blue Otter said: "I dreamed of a ghost."

In the dawn, when the trees were just beginning to emerge from the mists that saturated them, Muriel Sangree also awoke with the thought that she had dreamed of a ghost—a ghost with dark eyes. Then she saw Blue Otter, and knew that the eyes were his.

He helped her to her feet. He showed her a well he had dug for her on one side of the clearing.

"For you," he said, and left her there.

The place was a boudoir of the wilderness, screened with the shiny, fragrant leaves of bay and myrtle, hung with the heavy streamers of gray moss that would serve as towels. The well—or basin, or

bath—had a bottom of sand as clean, and almost as white, as marble. So close is the inherited knowledge of the wild to the surface of brains, even the most degenerate and civilized, that all this struck Muriel Sangree as strangely familiar. She went about her bath as placidly as if she had been in her suite at the Royal Magnolia. She carpeted her bare feet on the dry, gray moss. She plaited her hair.

She was ravenously hungry when she came back to the fire. Her weakness continued; but, possibly for the first or second time in her life, she took cognizance of the fact that food was for strength. Blue Otter was at the fire grilling meat. The fire flamed clean and bright. Over this flame several strips of meat hung from pointed palmetto-stems planted in the ground. To the hungry girl, the perfume of that cooking meat was sweeter than the smell of orange-blossoms; the sight of it more lovely than orchids.

"*Humpit-tsa!*" said Blue Otter, over his shoulder; and he passed her a brown tenderloin wrapped in a bay-leaf. "Come and eat."

From this time on, and increasingly so, it was as if they spoke a common language. It would be impossible to give the nature of all their words—a futile and silly waste of effort to try. Words, both Seminole and English, now halting, now running free; gestures and looks, mute understandings, like the language of other creatures of the woods. To represent all this, a plain transcription into simple English will have to suffice:

"How long have I been here?"

"Two days and two nights."

"And you cared for me all this time?"

"Yes."

"My father will pay you well."

No answer to that, but a look almost like a look of pain in Blue Otter's wolfhound eyes.

"Eat," he said.

And this time he had split open a small roasted pumpkin. There were many of these about the old camp. The vines of them clambered high over the trees like gourds. But when Muriel Sangree tasted this odd fruit she gave a little cry of delight.

Sweet and hot and exotically flavored, not the chef of the Royal Magnolia could have produced a pastry like that.

"You said that my father was coming."

"He will come when he knows where you are. He looks everywhere. Your friends look."

"But why haven't they found me?"

"They are far away."

"We shall go to them."

"When you are strong."

"In the mean time, you can send word by your people."

"I am shut off from my people."

"Why?"

"I do wrong. Blind Heron told me to do something. I no do it. Blind Heron is the medicine-man and the chief. He is the same as my father. But when he says do this and you do otherwise, then, maybe, you die."

Muriel Sangree was intuitional. Also, she had heard some true stories of the Seminoles since her first coming to Florida, a number of years ago. She thought. She asked:

"This wrong that you did—it was on account of me?"

Blue Otter had the precise honesty of his kind. He did not seek to evade answering the question, as a white man would have done.

"Yes."

"And they may kill you on account of it?"

"I don't think so. But maybe."

"And knowing this, still you stood by me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

For a moment he let his dark eyes dwell on hers, and she felt a slight creep of shame. But he had merely been trying to get his answer right.

"The Great Spirit," he replied; "he told me what to do."

"But why—why should your people want to treat you so harshly for merely doing what the Great Spirit told you to do?"

"Because—you are white."

"But I'm only a girl."

"Because you *are* a girl."

There fell a brief period of thought between them.

It was as if the spirit of the woods had stepped out to confront them, and it was as if this spirit were a figure of naked, gleaming Truth. The Truth spoke:

"You are man and woman, alone in the world, as the world was in the beginning. Even as Adam and Eve were, so are you."

A little while ago, when Muriel Sangree looked at this man, she had thought of him only as a savage. She had remarked his savage dress. She had remarked the barbarous plaits of his long hair. But suddenly she was asking herself:

"Am I any less savage than he is?"

She was clad in the long shirt he had given her. She had girdled this about her waist with a strand of bark rope she had found on the platform of the lodge. Her feet were bare. She had just feasted on wild meat and wild fruit and found them good.

Whispers!—nothing but whispers yet to the souls of either of them. But even then the tall woods were plotting to make these whispers a command.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BLIND TRAIL.

SHE thought she could walk, and Blue Otter was willing to have her try. She arose from the log at the side of the fire where she had eaten her savage breakfast.

"Now we will go," she said.

"*Hinthlo!*"

"Little by little," she elaborated, for already she saw how feeble she still was.

"Little by little," he agreed.

She started across the clearing. She told herself that she would overcome this weakness and drowsiness that was pressing upon her. But when one has been through days of starvation and exhausting effort, as she had been, this coupled to nightmare and fever, the recovery is apt to be slow. As she reached the edge of the clearing she swayed.

"I am afraid," she smiled, "I'll have to rest again—so soon—after eating."

She offered no word or movement of protest as Blue Otter stooped a little and opened his arm. She put her arm about his neck and he lifted her lightly, seriously. He carried her back to the lodge.

Now she realized how dependent she was on him!

There was no smile on Blue Otter's face—nothing but expression of brooding thoughtfulness, the look of a man who has problems to solve—as he placed her again on her couch.

What these problems were he was beginning in greater and greater detail to perceive. All of them had not been stated by Blind Heron. Blind Heron had merely spoken from the standpoint of the red people. And what about the white? That there were white people in the neighborhood, Blue Otter had now been aware for upward of twenty-four hours—even before he scented that taint in the breeze. Yet he hesitated to mention this to the girl. From what she had said in her delirium he knew that there were certain of her people whom she feared.

This couch of moss and palmetto on its framework of split cypress-logs was luxury to Muriel Sangree. She was pervaded by the luxury of convalescence. She had just eaten. Now she could rest. She was clean and warm. Not only that animal selfishness which is as of the breath of the jungle. She subsided with her eyes half-closed and looked at the strange youth who had been sent to her aid by the spirit of the jungle, and she was forgetful of all else.

He was clean. He was efficient. He was possessed of a primitive beauty. He possessed superb physical vigor. He fitted in perfectly with the rest of the picture.

Here was the glistening and yet shadowy jungle, clean but strong-scented; cool but tropic, like the interior of a hot-house; a place of luxury, and yet haunted by the lurking known and unknown forms of sudden death. What else mattered but safety, comfort, and then the continuance of the race?

"I almost wish," she said, "that I had been born an Indian."

His sober smile said: "I almost wish that I had been born a white man."

"This I have always loved," she went on, and she indicated her surroundings. "It would be wonderful to live this way always."

What she said disconcerted him. He lacked an immediate response. He turned his head for a time and looked away—while she studied the strength and delicacy of his profile. He was no darker than many a white man of her acquaintance who spent much of his time in the open air—the golfers, fishermen, the men of motors, dogs, and horses.

Without a word, Blue Otter arose from his place at her feet. He went over to the thicket on the edge of the slough. There was a cluster of orchids growing there, on a cypress trunk. The flowers were pinkish-white, finely fragrant. He brought the cluster back and laid them on her breast. She smiled up at him. She brought the flowers close to her face and smelled them.

But this answer of his brought a tremor to her breast. The tremor quickened when he spoke:

"You would like—to live here—always?"

"Like this," she said—meaning, perhaps, to play at life, to live like children.

It is more than likely that Blue Otter divined her thought, whatever it was. Muriel Sangree felt that this was so. Each time he looked at her she felt as if she stood revealed, utterly, to the very soul of her. It was only he who remained inscrutable.

"You are *Eeti-Okholattee*," he said, softly.

"*Eeti-Okholattee*?"

"Eyes Blue! I have given you a name."

"How romantic! Then I am a Seminole almost already."

"The color of your eyes is the color of the sky. The sound of your voice is like the breathing of the wind and the song of birds. Your presence is of a fragrance and a beauty like that of these flowers."

"You are a poet, Blue Otter. But you should not say these things. You will make me vain."

She was pervaded by a slight feeling of panic. And yet the panic was delicious. It brought a wave of added warmth to

her cheeks and throat. It brought a mist to her eyes. It was a perfect constraint of Blue Otter that affected her as much as the meaning he made so perfectly clear. His voice was a melancholy, musical murmur. Most of his meaning glowed in his eyes. But he held his distance. His dignity was perfect.

"I have had a vision," he announced, "and it was a vision of you and me—Blue Otter and Eyes Blue—going westward—toward the Big Country—living ever in surroundings such as these."

"But—but—this cannot be."

"It could be."

"No. How—"

"Hesukatemeesee—the Great Spirit—he has granted it."

"Blue Otter! I do not understand."

But she understood, all right.

"I have the power."

"Of course, you have the power—" She faltered again. She felt as if the scent of the orchids were mounting to her head.

"The power of the one gift."

"The one gift?"

"The one thing that I most yearn—for I am of the line of the medicine people of my race, and this has been granted to them—the one thing that I most yearn and demand of the Father-Ghost—that gift will I receive from His hands."

There, for a time, it seemed almost—to Muriel Sangree herself it seemed almost—as if Blue Otter had already demanded this one boon of his Creator and that the boon had been granted to him. The fragrance, the warmth, the food, and the shelter—all these things that the swamp had given her were as orators appealing to her physical self. The mystery of the jungle and the mystery of this man, and the beauty of both of these, were making a yet subtler but more powerful appeal to her imagination.

Deeper than all this was the appeal that was atavistic. How many millions of generations of her ancestors had lived in surroundings such as these—in steamy fens, warm islets newly born, tropic jungles?

Why not? Why not?

The whisper was persistent.

Then, through the brooding silence that

had been spread about them by their talk—as if everything was listening—there came the thudding croon of a distant airplane. The sound was faint. The machine must have been very, very far away, for sounds traveled to great distances over this level country. But it was enough.

The debate had been taken up by another voice.

It was a voice that told her: "Your old life calls you. Over there is Miami and Palm Beach—New York and Paris. This is your world. Come back!—come back!—come back!"

CHAPTER XVI.

TRAIL OF THE FOE.

"DO you hear?" she cried, starting up. And in the question there was not so much a query as an answer to many things. For the time being so it seemed.

"You want to see?"

"Yes."

She scrambled from her place in the lodge. She took his hand. He sped her as much as possible to an opening in the forest where they could look for miles out over the Everglades.

"There!" he said. The machine was small but distinct, low down.

"A flying-boat!"—and there was a contraction at her throat, suggesting some memory of a ride she had taken with Lieutenant Lathrop in a machine like that. This one was growing smaller.

"You would go—like that?" asked Blue Otter.

She did not look at him. "I—I do not know. I was never happy—" She might have added: "Except once."

"I—I could make you happy."

"Can any one make some one else really happy?"

"I can do what God can do—once," breathed Blue Otter with a mere murmur of concentrated passion. "Every man can."

"If I could only believe like you—have faith like you!" She was beginning to recover her poise. The sense of desolation that touched her as she watched the reced-

ing plane had again brought her the need of human support. She caught his arm. He looked away.

"See where the white birds rise from the cypress-head," said Blue Otter pointing at a distant cape. "If I were to ask as the one gift that these birds fall, they would fall. So—also—would fall the rider of the flying-iron!"

They were silent as they returned to the lodge in the clearing. The drowsy weakness was back upon Muriel again. She could have had no gentler nurse. Blue Otter had gone impersonal. He had drawn about him once again what was like a curtain (almost palpable) of reserve. Thoughts concealed, emotions concealed, as if these had never existed.

"Have I hurt him?" Muriel asked herself. She kissed the orchids by way of amends as he lowered the mosquito-bar about her.

Blue Otter watched her until she had dozed off again with the easy sleep of the convalescent, and then he picked up his rifle from the end of the lodge-platform and glided off into the woods as silently as a king-snake might have done. He did not pause until he had come to the edge of the woods, in a southwesterly direction, perhaps a mile away from the camp where he had left the girl. But there he stood for a long time with every sense alert. He was like a wild animal in the matter of his senses—hearing, sight, and scent.

For a long time he could neither see nor hear anything amiss.

As far as he could see, the landscape lay empty; and there were open stretches, or bits of glade, that ran off to the wet prairies and across these to the flat horizon. But he knew that the scattered bits of woodland, and even the scattered low islands of scrub palmetto, might be the hiding-place of many things—foxes or wildcats, or men who resembled these.

To his hearing, there came nothing but the fine, indefinitely soft surf of sound that would have been an absolute silence for most men. This was the traffic-roar of the wilderness—of insect and reptile, of the small creatures feathered or furred.

For a time he watched the caracara tha

beat oddly up into the still sunshine. So the bird would have acted had it seen a man. No, it must have been surprised at some gluttonous repast by a roaming alligator. Almost a mile away there was an odd movement at the edge of a saw-grass pond. There was a smile in his eyes as he made out the nature of the movement. Two sandhill cranes were dancing for each other there—leaping, pirouetting, casting sticks into the air and catching them again.

Sun and shadow, grass and woods, a solitude of earth and sky.

But he suddenly cast his head upward and breathed deeply through expanded nostrils. There again was that taint in the air he had noticed in the night—extremely faint, yet acrid, like nothing native to this place. It was a scent that had often filled his people with the same sort of distrust and desire to get away. The deer and the other wild creatures knew when that scent reached them—the scent of burning gasoline—the scent of a fire-wagon, an automobile.

The scent came. It was gone.

As far as he could see, the grass stood still. It was an hour of the day when the breeze—when there was any breeze at all—was apt to be fitful, changing its direction at almost every puff. But his knowledge of the lay of the land told him about where it was that he would find these interlopers—find their automobile, at any rate. Perhaps they had left their machine. He would do well to be on the lookout for them.

He started across the grassy levels, swiftly, and yet ever with this watchfulness in his mind. The watchfulness increased, the further he went, many signs warning him of danger.

He came to a place where the caracara had been frightened, and saw that it was as he had guessed. The bird had been at work on the remnants of a panther's kill of the night before—a tumbled mass of fur and bones that had once been a fawn. A half-grown alligator raised its head and hissed like a goose in defense of the prize as Blue Otter passed. But he gave no heed. Even the dancing cranes failed to reassure him. The birds were notoriously

contemptuous of man, or notoriously over-trustful, in certain of their moods.

Blue Otter had seen signs where a flock of turkeys had been feeding, and then had started to run, swiftly. Quail were scattered as if recently frightened. Thrice now he had cut the trail of wildly-jumping deer, and he knew that it was no mere panther, nor yet the scent of that distant fire-wagon of the white men, that could have caused all this panic in the neighborhood.

There were white men near.

Yet these white men made neither smoke nor noise.

Had they been white men hunting in the usual way—hunting the girl especially—they would have talked loud, fired their guns, made a smoke that could have been seen twenty or thirty miles.

Were these white men hunting the girl?

And, if so, why should they be stalking her in silence?

He had covered perhaps a dozen miles when he stopped, breathless. He had quartered often, like a trained bird-dog, in quest of further sign. But it was a difficult country for trailing—ponds with hard sand bottoms, wide stretches of almost level limerock, these as incapable of holding a trail as a granite street; acres of scub-palmetto that would scarcely have registered the passage of an elephant. Yet here was the thing he had been looking for.

In a hollow of rock there was a drift of sand; in the drift of sand there was half of the imprint of a foot; the foot had been shod with the sort of shoe that no wilderness dweller would ever use, pointed and narrow, and yet the footprint of a man.

So much was merely incidental.

The thing that held Blue Otter breathless was the fact that this man had been headed for the camp on the edge of the Everglades the night before, that he might be there now.

"While I was making medicine," said Blue Otter to himself, "I was thinking only of that, and of the girl I was making it for."

He glanced swiftly away. A hundred yards ahead he picked up the trail again where not one man but two had crossed a carpet of grass. He saw now that they

had been walking carefully, that they had been concealing their trail as best they could.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RETURN.

IT seemed to Muriel Sangree that she had barely closed her eyes before she opened them again to see Shuiski standing there at her side instead of Blue Otter. She sat up.

"You!" she exclaimed.

"Muriel!"

He made as if to embrace her.

"No! Stand back!" she panted.

"I have been worried to death," he said.

"We have been hunting for you day and night."

"Where are the others?"

"There are no others. I am alone."

She gazed at him. Intuitively she knew he lied. Logic as well as intuition had by this time told her that he was a party to the plot that had driven her here.

"How did you get here?" she asked. She was merely playing for time to think.

Shuiski sketched out a story. His love for her had caused him to persist after the others had given up hope, had inspired him to go further in his search. He grinned at her dress, looked about him, furtively.

"Where are the Indians?" he asked.

"There is only one."

"Where is he?"

It was a question that was sounding in Muriel's brain. In a way Shuiski's question brought her reassurance. Shuiski would scarcely have had the hardihood to ask the question had Blue Otter been killed.

"He has gone for help," she invented.

Shuiski gave a start. "He will find that he is a little late," he said. "Come. Let us be going."

"I shall wait here."

"What? When your father—and every one—is almost killed with anxiety?"

"You can get word to him more quickly if you go alone. I shall follow with the Indians."

"Muriel! Is this the way you welcome me—"

He had seated himself at her side on the platform of the lodge, sought to take her hand in his. She again drew back from him sharply.

"Don't touch me!" she cried, unable to conceal her distrust.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"If I was lost, it was on your account."

He went pathetic. "I admit that I was partly to blame. But I have been punished. It was careless of me to let you out of my sight. But I have been distracted, unable to sleep."

Muriel threw aside all pretense. She could barely master her voice and her words. Her eyes, however, she could not master at all. "You may go. I'm safe now. I'll wait."

"Wait for—your filthy Indian!"

Her face flared white. It was her only answer.

"I see," he droned. "You want to make sure that he gets the reward and the glory!" He softened his tone, sought to placate her. But he was like a hungry tiger in the presence of a long-sought quarry. "Come on! Don't be foolish! Time is precious. Hurry!"

"I'll have to dress," said Muriel.

"Come just as you are."

Muriel was fighting hard to keep back her fright. She had too brilliant a memory of what panic fear here in this wilderness meant. That was part of her old nightmare. She was afraid that the nightmare would return. Time! Time at any cost! She would have to play for time! And yet what would even this time profit her unless Blue Otter returned? And would he return? And if he did return, what then?

"I am still too weak to travel."

"I'll carry you."

"How could you—alone?"

"I'll follow the custom of the country—make signal-smokes. Come!" He tried to take her into his arms.

She struck him. She found herself standing breathless on the farther side of cypress platform of the lodge. She surveyed her chances, desperately. There was the sheltering forest. But how far could she get into it before this human brute should have her again?

Perhaps Shuiski read her thought.

"Carlo!" he barked, softly.

The man Carlo came running from the brush with the look of a hyena on his face. He owed a debt of hatred and vengeance to this girl because of the physical and mental anguish she had caused him by her escape. He was resolved that she shouldn't escape another time.

"Ha!" snarled Carlo. He had a knife in his hand.

"*Por Dios!*" exclaimed Shuiski, checking Carlo. He turned to Muriel. "I am afraid your being lost has gone to your head," he said rapidly. "Are you going to make me resort to force?"

"You said you were alone. Now I know—know—"

"Listen to me. What will people say when they hear that you have been living here in the woods with a buck Indian?"

"You dare!"

"Tut! I know everything. We traced you to this camp last night—saw what was going on."

"I was dying," she choked. "This Indian saved my life. And now you—you dare to intimate—"

"If it isn't so, come away with me—prove your good-will."

There was something grotesque in the veiled accusations of this man and something so fantastic in his talk of good-will that Muriel again felt a whiff of madness.

Blue Otter had just trailed the white men to a point where they had passed the night on a small pine-island less than a quarter of mile from his own camp when he heard a shriek, a call for help. He had already been alert for such a cry, for he knew by this time that these two were enemies—his own, if not enemies of the girl. Why, otherwise, had they been so stealthy?—passed the night without a fire?—remained here in the woods when they had been in sight of his own fire?—then crept ahead like this in the morning?

All this had made his heart heavy. He had tried to tell himself that this was because these enemies were white men; and that surely, in spite of himself, he was being drawn into a conflict with these men

when all the laws of his tribe since the last great war forbade such a conflict. But if this were the only reason for his depression, why did he not turn now, before it was too late, and leave the white girl to her fate? He had no particular reason for believing that this fate would be evil.

But at the sound of that call for help, he forgot reason, forgot the laws of his tribe. That was her voice, and he was flinging himself over the ground with the speed of a frightened deer.

He flung himself into the camp. It was just in time to see the two white strangers struggling with the girl.

Then Blue Otter struck twice with the butt of his gun.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WITH HER HELP.

HIS first blow had caught Shuiski on the back of the neck and sent that party to the struggle, stumbling forward like a blind man going down hill. Shuiski scrambled. He went to his hands and knees, got to his feet, and scrambled forward again. Shuiski used what of reason remained to him in an effort to draw a revolver he wore in a holster against his breast, but his hands groped; besides, he needed his hands to keep his balance. He finally brought up against a *chuko* post and remained there in the attitude of a man trying to look into an ant-hill.

Blue Otter's second blow, aimed a trifle too late, had glanced along Carlo's neck. It must have given Carlo a smear of pain, for he yelped, then went mad. As Muriel escaped, the white man and the Indian grappled.

Muriel staggered backward, until she found support against the platform of the lodge where she had slept. There she leaned and watched the contest, almost as if this had nothing to do with herself at all.

Blue Otter had lost his gun. Carlo had a knife. There, for a whirling moment, it required both of Blue Otter's hands and all his strength to keep Carlo from using his weapon. There was a straining interlude when the bodies of the two men were

locked together. Then Blue Otter uttered the *huh!* of a man who makes a great effort, and Carlo was flung a dozen feet through the air.

But Carlo kept his knife. Furthermore, the jolt seemed to have brought him back to his senses. He had kept his rage. But he was deadly calm. His face was white. His eyes glittered. He had fallen as a cat might have fallen. He was as quick as a cat on the recovery. Before the Indian could reach him, Carlo was crouched, ready to meet him.

By this time, though, Blue Otter himself was armed. He had slipped that foot-long hunting knife of his from his sheath. He also was crouched with his feet wide apart.

There was a lull—a lull that was tense and tight with tragedy.

It seemed long to Muriel Sangree standing there. A strand of her hair drifted across her eyes and she brushed it back. It would not remain in place. She brushed it back again. She fastened it into place. She was aware of the sunshine slanting through the trees. She was aware of a wild pineapple gleaming red through the green shadows up among the live oak branches. She heard a bird sing. She remembered the strain of a new waltz she had heard at Palm Beach.

Then she heard Blue Otter speak:

"You go 'way. I no kill."

Carlo dribbled a blasphemy.

"You go," repeated Blue Otter, almost gently. There is no oath in the Seminole speech. "You go. Him go—"

The last was a reference to Shuiski, and to this Shuiski himself replied in an unexpected way.

For a time after he had fallen he had continued to peer into his imaginary ant-hill. There may have been something of the opossum in his nature, something of that instinct for stealth and self-preservation that all essentially timorous brutes possess. He must have maintained his undignified position even after his wits came back to him. His revolver had been jerked from his holster at his last stumble, had lain there under him. He discovered this. He picked it up. He saw that Blue Otter's back was turned. He fired.

Blue Otter himself half turned. He gave a quick leap to one side. For, at the same moment, he saw that Carlo would knife him if he turned his back.

Shuiski fired a second time.

But that first shot must have been enough to rouse Muriel Sangree from her lethargy. There for a while the struggle had seemed as unreal to her as all the rest of the adventure. It had seemed like something seen on the stage, only less convincing. Now, however, she knew, as if the thing had been shouted at her, that this was an affair of men fighting for their lives.

The first shot fired by the man on the ground had gone close. She had seen that in the jerk and start that Blue Otter had given. And when Blue Otter turned it was as though his eyes had met hers, as if there had been a message interchanged. If so, it had been a message of alliance.

All this was very brief, very swift.

Then Muriel had found a weapon to her hand. It was on the platform against which she leaned, left there as if by design. It was the brass kettle in which Blue Otter had prepared her medicine and the first of her food. If it had been the instrument for the saving of her own life, it was now to become the instrument for saving his.

The kettle had a handle. It responded to the girl's frail strength as readily as the slung-shot to the hand of David. She hurled the kettle from where she stood. Whether she struck Shuiski with it or not, she was never to know. But she had spoiled his aim, had given him something else to think about. His second bullet went so wild that the bloom of the wild pineapple, up among the live-oak branches, toppled and hung askew.

Before he could fire again, Blue Otter had slid upon Shuiski like a snake and was strangling him.

Muriel heard her own voice let out a cry:

"Carlo!"

It had been a cry of warning for her ally. But Blue Otter had not needed this. With his left arm still in a strangle-hold about Shuiski's throat, he had dropped his

knife and wrenched Shuiski's revolver free. He turned and covered Carlo.

"Knife—you take 'em," said Blue Otter, speaking softly.

And Muriel, her weakness forgotten, recovered the knife that Carlo had let fall.

"You—you turn! You look other way!"

This time the order had been for Carlo, and Carlo obeyed.

"No kill," the Seminole whispered as he slackened his hold on Shuiski's throat.

Then there was a crashing scramble and Carlo had sprung away—first to the cover of a ruined *chuko*, then to the cover of the scrub palmetto, then the engulfing jungle.

In the silence that followed, both Muriel and Blue Otter heard the thing that Carlo may have heard before them. It may have been this that had given him the courage for his breakaway. Or it may have been merely Carlo's knowledge of how leath a Seminole would be to kill a white man when that white man was running away. But over the still air there came the unmistakable thud of an automobile.

"Theirs!" cried Muriel.

She would have recognized the cough of that engine anywhere. Wherever she was, whatever the circumstances, it would have brought back to her a memory and a sense of terror.

"For you—I kill," said Blue Otter, swiftly but as softly as ever.

He had crouched forward and picked up his abandoned gun. His eyes were on the forest where Carlo had disappeared.

"No, no!" she cried softly. "Come away!"

Their eyes met. So did their thought. Their thought was this: how far could they go, with her so weak, before they should be overtaken?

CHAPTER XIX.

SNAKES AND LILIES.

"NO good thing is done in vain!"—a bit of the ancient wisdom that has its expression in every tongue, even in the language of the ancient Mayas of Yucatan, even in the medicine-talk of these

shy nephews of the Mayas in southern Florida. It may have been in the thought of Tommy Tigertail himself as he labored at fashioning that canoe of his before the lightning struck him. The canoe still lay there, where the dead man had left it, untouched by the other Indians. "Still his," as they would have said.

But the more generous theology that had brought Blue Otter to this haunted camp in search of wild hogs now brought his thought to the abandoned canoe.

"No good thing is done in vain!"—and wouldn't it be a good thing to borrow this canoe of the ghostly owner? Blue Otter believed that it would be. Thus he could let his mind go to unearthly matters even when earthly problems were pressing him the hardest.

Which is, after all, the way it generally is with men, be they white or red.

Without a word he caught the girl's hand, led her toward the slough. In silence she followed him. Both of them were listening. They were like hunted creatures—curiously mated, like two deer of a different species, yet responsive to the same sympathies, capable of subtle understandings, mutually trustful. Not until she saw the canoe lying half-sunk in the water-trail did Muriel guess the Indian's purpose, yet she followed him with as perfect a trust as if she had known him always, been a blood-sister to him, or something closer.

He bade her wait, then slid into the dark water up to his waist. He emptied the canoe and righted it with easy skill. He helped her into it, then gave her a bush to hold, thus keeping the canoe in place while he returned to the camp. How she held her breath and listened all the time that he was gone! But again the silence had settled down.

The engine of the distant automobile had been stopped. The noise of it had frightened the native creatures into awed quiet. Then Blue Otter had returned. Vaguely she had guessed that he had gone back to kill the white man he had left there, and this brought nothing to her but a sort of fierce satisfaction. But she saw that she had been mistaken.

Blue Otter had returned laden. He had his pack and his gun, meat and even a number of the Indian pumpkins. He put these into the canoe.

From a tangle of driftwood he drew a stick, long and slender and bleached white, but strong enough to serve him as a push-pole. With this he drove the canoe silently into the canoe-trail by which Blind Heron had come.

This part of the canoe-trail was like a narrow river with submerged banks overgrown with jungle. It was a leafy corridor with a water floor. The water was brown but limpid. There were depths in it suggestive of bottomless caves, shallows of sand and cypress logs. Big fish shadowed through the water. Soft-shelled turtles spun and disappeared. Only the moccasins snakes held their place—coiled on roots and fallen logs, or loosely curved where they had been swimming in the water.

Blue Otter, standing upright in the stern of the canoe, continued to drive it forward in watchful silence. His eyes saw everything. He wove his canoe as deftly through the labyrinth as if this had been a loom and the canoe his shuttle.

Perhaps this was in his thought. Was there any limit to the strange designs woven by the one man and the one woman since the world began?

Some thought like this kept recurring to Muriel Sangree, in any case.

She was seated well forward in the canoe, but her back was to the prow, and her eyes came up again and again to Blue Otter's face. The face was bronze. There was a slight slant to the widely separated eyes. They were still eyes to remind her of the eyes of that Russian wolfhound she had owned.

But eyes and face had lost their strangeness to this extent: they had come to mean friendship, sympathy, understanding.

Again that feeling came over her that she and this youth were, after all, of the same race. Their souls were of the same race. It was only the bodies of them that were disguised—*en carnaval*.

Their eyes met.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Away! I will have to think!"—this

always in his murmuring voice, scarcely louder than the purling water.

"To your people?"

"I am shut off from my people."

"As I am from mine!"

They had come into a broad pool, or woodland lake, thick-set all about with the pressing jungle. Half of the surface of the pond was covered with broad leaves and glistening lilies—some white and some pink. Almost all of the pond was domed over by the far-reaching branches. These branches were like the groins of ruined arches—ruins hung with vines and matted thick with ferns and orchids.

Through the green shadows of the place two wood-ibis, like the white ghosts of birds, winged silently away.

"Here we are safe," Blue Otter conveyed in his soft but broken speech. "We are safe for a while—long enough for you to get back your strength."

"I think of the trouble that I am causing you," said Muriel, "and of the trouble that I have brought to my father."

There was always a long pause between whatever she said and the Seminole's response. He thought before he spoke, and his face was the face of a sphinx.

"By land," he said, and he indicated the region that lay about them to the north, the west, and the south, "we may again encounter the white men who are your enemies and mine. The white men are strong. They mean to do you evil. And I dare not take you to my people. They would do you no evil; but they might do nothing to save you from the hands of your enemies, these enemies being white."

"Leave me," said Muriel.

"I cannot leave you."

"Leave me. You may lose your life."

He looked at her soberly. Their eyes met. A tinge of scarlet came into her cheek.

She had read his thoughts as plainly as if he had spoken. The silence roared:

"What is my life compared with your welfare? If I die I live. And I would live happily if I died for you."

She knew that her thought was speaking through her eyes as well, not so clearly, perhaps, but as earnestly:

"You are a hero. You shall always be a hero in my life."

There was a deal of panic in this. There was none the less something final about it—as if she and he had been a new Adam and Eve, and it had been revealed to them what would befall were they cast from the Garden of the Spirit.

Without a word Blue Otter brought back the canoe to the bank where there was a dry knoll, and there he set about the work of making camp—while the jungle whispered and watched.

CHAPTER XX.

"I AM HERE—"

BY race and training, Blue Otter was a communicator with spirits. Within his experience there were two sorts of fairies—the sort that lived in the thick tops of certain pine-trees, and another sort that lived in the grass. He believed that he had spoken to both of these. And perhaps he had. Who shall say, positively, that there are no such things?

While Muriel Sangree, that complex and yet primitive thing commonly referred to as a society girl, watched him, Blue Otter cut a hundred fans of the low-growing palmetto and cast these down on the ground at the foot of a live-oak tree, thus forming a thick and elastic mattress impervious to the moisture of the ground.

"Here you are safe," he told her. "Stay here while I am gone." He understood the fear in her face. He handed her his gun.

"You come back?" she asked.

He pointed with his hand at an opening in the trees. "When the sun is there," he said.

He smiled at her gravely. She turned for a moment to the palmetto couch he had prepared for her. When she turned again he had disappeared.

Blue Otter himself did not turn to look back. He passed through the thickets of pop-ash and pond-apple, fern and fig, bay and gum, as easily and apparently with as little thought as a white man would have passed along the footpath of a village. He

kept on until he came to a grassy glade where only a few pines and tall cabbage-trees were growing. He cast his eyes about this and saw that it was unspoiled of man. In the center of this glade he knelt, sitting on his heels, and raised his face to the sun.

"O Father-Back-of-the-Sun," he said, "I am come to seek wisdom. I am Your child. I listen. I shall hear Your voice." There was a long pause—while his lips continued to move, while there came a look in his face as if he could see something through his closed eyes. Presently he said softly, but aloud: "Your messengers are as many as the needles of all Your pine-trees, as the leaves of grass in all Your prairies."

Even if there had been any one there to watch and listen, there would have been no sign, perhaps, that this petition of Blue Otter's was either heard or answered.

Here and there a lark sang. On an adjacent bit of prairie the swallows darted. Overhead there reeled a pair of swallow-tailed kites. On a bush just back of Blue Otter a mocking-bird fluttered into view, preened itself, began to sing. A rabbit hopped from a palmetto thicket and went about its feeding. Farther away, two slender, agile serpents of the sort known as blue racers chased each other and played like a pair of transmuted kittens.

But Blue Otter, patient and earnest, while the sun covered degree after degree of its wide and leisurely arc, felt at last that his faith and patience had been rewarded.

Through the gossamer weave of other sounds he heard a ghostly voice—a voice that was both large and soft, like the voice of a breeze. And this voice called him by name, in Seminole: "*Osinnee-okholattee! Osinnee-okholattee!*" Which is to say: "Blue Otter! Blue Otter!"

Blue Otter answered: "I am here!"

He waited, rapt, face up, eyes closed.

One would have said that old Blind Heron, the chief medicine-man, himself had had a vision of this praying-place of Blue Otter—had had his vision in the night, while he sat there cross-legged in his *chuko* and the rest of the camp was asleep. For,

while the camp still slept, Blind Heron slowly bestirred himself. At the side of his lodge-platform he stood—while the lurking dogs paused and looked. Twice he turned slowly. And slowly he made his way to the fire, where he stooped and almost instantly found the staff that he had left there—a slender wand some seven or eight feet long.

After that, he was as one satisfied and in possession of all his faculties. He touched this and that with the tip of his staff. Head up, he trudged away.

It was still dark, but to any wood-dweller there were signs enough that it would soon be day. There was a drip of dew, a whispered stir, a breath that was warmer than the breath of the night.

The blind man followed a trail that led out from under the dry shelter of the wild-orange grove that protected the camp, past a crude fence that enclosed a small field or garden, under a tangle of plum and grape, then onto the long bridge of a fallen tree. The tree ran straight through rods of matted growth. Half-way along its dark length Blind Heron paused a moment as a wildcat gleamed at him with yellow eyes then sprang silently into the darkness.

Beyond the further end of the tree was a slough and cypress strand with water in it from a foot to two in depth and this grown thick with trees; for the camp Blind Heron had just left was one of the secret places of the Seminoles which few if any white man would ever find. But Blind Heron walked, one would have said, through the water and among the crowded trees with a greater confidence than ever.

The strand was like a market-place. The big snakes curled. The deer, usually so silent and lightfooted, passed and repassed with a sloshing tread. A panther whistled, and it was like the whistle of a white man calling his dog. Blind Heron heard the plaintive note of a young raccoon calling its mother, then the mother's purring note of caution. So the Seminole mother had calmed her little one.

"There is a oneness," said Blind Heron. "We are all His children."

One would have said that the wild creatures themselves recognized some sort of

philosophy, so far as Blind Heron was concerned. Perhaps they thought he was a ghost—perhaps they were used to seeing ghosts go and come in this ancient land of tragedy. Blind Heron walked silently, bringing his bare feet down softly to the water-covered trail.

Twice the floating moccasin snakes had been so close as to rock in the small ripples he made. Once he could have touched with his hand the beady-eyed opossum that clung to a pond-apple tree and watched him pass. He did not shrink, nor hesitate, as the musky smell of a big bull-alligator grew strong, then stronger, stronger yet; not even when the inquisitive skin of his legs told him that here the water was still muddied by the brute.

"There is a oneness—"

Blind Heron smiled. He smiled again when he came up out of the slough and onto a broad expanse of pineland and open prairie, for now the slight breeze was setting toward the east where the warm sun was coming up. He faced the sun and saluted when it did appear.

As he did so a half-coiled rattlesnake watched him. The snake was full-sized—a good seven feet of it as to length, as large around as a strong man's leg. It lay directly in Blind Heron's path. He touched it lightly with his staff. He heard the dry rustle of its rattle as it slid aside to give him room.

Straight across the prairie Blind Heron went toward a bit of open woodland that fringed a heavy hammock. He had almost arrived at the woodland when he heard a voice. It was a voice he had recognized, the voice he had come to hear. So he answered it, with the voice of his ancient craft: "*Osinnee-okholattee—*"

"Blue Otter! Blue Otter!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"I HEARD A VOICE."

"I AM here," said Blue Otter, "and I have come to talk to you in the hour of my need."

The voice that was like the voice of a breeze replied:

"That which is in your heart is revealed. You ask, and it is answered—out of a love that is more than the love of a father."

"I love *her*. She is shut off from her people. All paths are closed to her by her enemies. I am sick with longing for her. She has been driven into my arms."

"You would commit a folly."

Blind Heron went softly, but he made no effort to be silent. He approached the place where Blue Otter knelt. His staff touched cactus and rock, the burrow of an owl, a palmetto-bed. Fifty yards from where the younger man knelt Blind Heron stood and waited. He was there when Blue Otter opened his eyes and looked at him.

"The Great Spirit, His voice," said the blind man.

He stood there in the bright sunshine of the grove, with the breeze stirring his white hair about, and the wrinkles of his old face more deeply marked than ever on account of his long vigil. He wore nothing but his ragged shirt and a few old handkerchiefs knotted about his neck; but there was something about him that would have told any man that he spoke with the voice of the Master.

Blue Otter did not change his position. He remained where he was. He looked for a long time at the old man with an expression of sorrow, fear, hope, doubt.

"Since childhood I have heard of the one gift," said Blue Otter softly, at last. "You have read my heart. You have spoken with the Voice. But if I said to you: 'Father, the one gift that I ask is the gift of this maiden—'"

He could not go on in the presence of the Great Spirit's messenger. The real mask of tragedy is the mask with a smile. Blind Heron smiled, but there was death in his words:

"Take the maiden to her own people."

"All paths—"

"All paths but one. Take the maiden to her own people out across the Ka-Hetlee (the Everglades)."

"My father knows that there is not enough water in the Ka-Hetlee."

"It is spoken."

"Most of the canoe-trails are already dry."

Blind Heron still smiled. In one aspect he looked happy. Again, his face was the face of a man with a broken heart. Even as Blue Otter gazed at him, Blind Heron began to fade—to fade away like a thing of smoke—first his legs and his staff, his fluttering shirt, then the shining white mist of hair, then the smiling, mystical, fateful mask of his face; and Blue Otter discovered that he was alone.

"I have heard a Voice," said Blue Otter simply, when he reappeared at the camp on the edge of the pond.

The sun was where he said it would be at the time of his return. Muriel did not tell him how anxiously she had kept watch on the moving fingers of light. Nor did she make any reference to the voices she herself had heard—the voices of her innermost being: "Beware! He is the member of a lower race!"

"It is I who am the member of an inferior race," she almost sobbed in her heart, at Blue Otter's announcement.

There was a perfect dignity in his bearing, a perfect kindliness in his eyes and voice—all these accentuated by some hint of a hidden torture.

"What did the voice say?" she asked.

"It said: 'To-night, when it is so dark that the bad men cannot see you crossing the grass-water, you will start back with the white girl to her own people, over and beyond the Ka-Hetlee—the 'Glades.'"

"How long will it take?" asked Muriel.

"When there is water, three days."

"But if there be not enough water?" She was not altogether unfamiliar with the traditions of the great morass.

"Still you will come back to your people, notwithstanding," he replied. "I asked. It was spoken."

All that long day it was as if they were in the presence of the Speaker of that Voice to which he had referred. For Muriel Sangree, at least, it was a sentiment which was elusive, hard to express even in the subtle language of her self-communion, yet a feeling that she knew would henceforth ever be a part of herself, an added quality, a possession she would never lose.

It was a feeling partly expressed by the jungle and the pond—these things that up to now had been haunted for her by vague terrors. These terrors were gone. She felt no terror when she saw the water-lilies slowly rock to the passage of some swimming alligator; no terror when she watched the slow and sinuous movement of some coiling or uncoiling moccasin along the pond's margin. These were all one with the flecks of blue sky, and the birds of the sky; all one with herself, and herself all one with this child of another race whom Fate had sent to her out of the unknown to be her companion.

The day was endless. It was like some remote Sabbath at the dawn of time—the first Sabbath sanctified, with all things new-made and clean.

This companion of hers was as new-made and clean as if he had been the first man on earth, straight from the hand of the Potter. There came visions to her which she could not shut out—of a world returned to the simplicity of its dawn. What palace was better than this sheltering tree, this bed of green fronds? It was all like some legend she had read, or seen pictured on a Greek urn—a legend from the Golden Age. She was the nymph; this comrade was the faun.

But twice in the profound stillness of the afternoon they heard the report of distant firearms—to remind them that the old earth had traveled far since Cain slew Abel. Again they heard the drone—now strong, now faint—of an invisible airplane. "The flying-iron," said Blue Otter softly.

He lay on the ground not far from where Muriel sat. He looked into her eyes.

"Have you ever ridden through the air?" she asked him.

"There is a bird here," he said, touching his heart, "that can fly—very high—very far."

"You are a poet, Blue Otter," she told him.

But there was a small pang in her heart—but whether on Blue Otter's account or Lieutenant Lathrop's account, she couldn't have told.

As for Blue Otter, he lay there on the

ground at the feet of the girl he had found through a species of miracle, and had nursed and named, prayed for and fought for; and he did not stir, and he spoke only when he had to. But there was such a struggle in his heart that his heart ached as the earth of a battle-field must ache.

He kept his limpid brown eyes upon her. In them was the look of a soul such as might dwell back of the eyes of a wolfhound. He could not say the things that he wanted to say, but his breast was a cavern of shouting voices:

"The touch of your hand was like the touch of a lily, but I am consumed with flame. Your head was light on my arm, but I am crushed forever. Your breath was life, and it slew me. I held you in my arms; and it was hell, it was heaven. Kill me! Cure me! Let us love, and die, and live forever. This is the one gift! This is the one gift!"

But he dared not claim this one gift yet. The fading image of Blind Heron was there. There was always over against this shouting tumult of many voices the one quiet voice he had heard—the Voice—Hesukatemeesee His Voice:

"Take the maiden to her own people!"

Muriel Sangree looked back at him and sighed. "Blue Otter, when you look at me like that, I feel frightened."

He smiled. He saw a butterfly floating near, put up his hands, and the butterfly lit there—a minor feat of Indian magic.

"Oh," she cried, "how wonderful!"

Said Blue Otter: "All things are easy but one."

Muriel gazed away into the aerial garden above the pond. Once more, as faintly as the drone of a bee, there came the drone of an airplane's motor, and her thought fled to Anthony Lathrop. Once he had said to her a thing like that.

CHAPTER XXII.

THREE ON AN ISLAND.

HER thought reverted to Lieutenant Lathrop repeatedly now. It was as if her baptism of the spirit, which was a part of this ordeal through which

she had thus far passed, had given her a new power of perception, a new clearness of vision. She saw that in the past she had been something of a coquette, something of a flirt, something of a liar. Why had she dallied with him, once that she was aware that he loved her and she loved him? She wondered. Weren't half the woes of the world caused by just such tomfoolery?

Lieutenant Lathrop occupied Muriel's thought as he occupied the sky—a mere speck in it, perhaps, at times, and a mere drone, but present. She saw him as some sort of a white counterpart to Blue Otter, some sort of a brother. Both were brave; both were upright; both were self-sacrificing. Both flew, even—though one did fly by grace of the "flying-iron," and the other by grace of the spirit only.

But there was a prophetic quality in this persistent thinking of hers—something of a different kind of prayer, perhaps, from any she had ever known or tried before. Or was it prophecy, or was it the mere magnet of thought, that was to bring the flying lieutenant at last to her side?

That afternoon, as soon as the sun was set, Blue Otter and the girl had again entered the ghost-canoe. But this time they followed a different water-trail. It was a trail that led them through another winding green tunnel to a place where the forest ended and the saw-grass flats of the Everglades began.

Blue Otter had paused long on the edge of the grass country. Not for many miles, once they were embarked on this waveless sea, would there be any cover for them from possible watchers on the banks; no cover but the night.

The night had thickened, and then Blue Otter had pushed out into the open canoe-trail.

At this time and place the world presented the prospect of a great desolation. North and south lay the black headlands of cypress and hammock that marked the western shore of the Everglades. Eastward of these lay the featureless waste of saw-grass—no island visible, no water visible—nothing but a dun-colored flatness as far as the eye could see.

"Have you ever crossed the Everglades, Blue Otter?"

"Never."

"How will you find your way?"

He had disregarded her question much as a thoughtful elder would disregard the idle question of an importunate child. Or was that upward toss of his head toward the darkening sky an answer? In any case, she had held her peace.

She had spoken no word any more even when she saw that her pilot of the night—out of the unknown, and into the unknown, like a brief resumé of life itself—was having difficulties. Always mysterious in their movements, the waters of the Everglades seemed to be in the course of drying up. Time and again Blue Otter stepped overboard into the dark water-trail and hauled the boat for a distance—fearless, tireless, giving no sign and speaking no word of discouragement.

"How do you know—" Muriel said.

It was a long, long time before he spoke. When he spoke his voice came soft and reasonable:

"I heard a Voice."

The day had not been without developments in other quarters—Prince Shuiski coming out of his strangled sleep into which Blue Otter had so roughly nursed him; Carlo and the chauffeur returning at last, cautious and armed, only to find the Indian and the girl gone to a destination unknown, and the prince, so called, alone.

There had followed a profane council of war.

"It looks bad!"—this from Carlo.

"Through your damned blundering!" roars the prince.

The chauffeur privately meditates flight by himself in his little swamp-rat of an automobile. There are buyers of such automobiles in Tampa, and girls and liquor for the man with the money.

But finally a truce is patched up.

"They can't get away from us," said the prince.

"God help us if they do—knowing what they do," said Carlo.

"You said a mouthful then," spake the chauffeur, coming out of his thought.

"Shut up and let me think," was the advice of the prince.

There was occasion for thought. The arm of the law was long. True, it was not long enough to reach into all the corners of this part of the world. Tucked away, here and there, in islands and hammocks, in lonely pine flats and unmapped keys, were men enough who enjoyed liberty that the law would have denied them. But the prince had no stomach for a lifetime spent like that. Still, the thought gave him a gleam of hope.

"How many men can you get together to see this thing through?" the prince asked Carlo.

"How much time to get them?"

"A day—two days at the most."

"They're sort of scattered," said Carlo. "They've been lookin' for the gal, too. Maybe four or five."

"We've got to get a gang, and a dug-out or two," said the prince, out of the travail of his thought. "I know Indians. I know these Seminoles better 'n any other white man in Florida. Say I don't," he flared with sudden wrath, turning on the chauffeur, "and I'll cut your heart out of you."

"I didn't say anything," said the chauffeur.

"What's the point?" asked Carlo placatingly.

"The point is this," said the prince, reverting to concentrated thought. "The girl's still weak. She can't walk far. She and the red swine have got away from here in a canoe. They're going to try to make their getaway across the 'Glades to Miami."

"There's no water in the 'Glades," said Carlo.

"They'll do what I say," said Shuiski. "Water or no water, that's what they'll try. I've seen Indians do it before when they were cornered. They'll be beating it for the 'Glades this very night."

Which goes to show that even bad men may have their moments of illumination at times.

Still undismayed, however heavy his heart felt at times, Lieutenant Anthony

Lathrop kept up his search. Tampa Bay came to know his flying-boat, Fort Myers and the mouth of the Caloosahatchee, southern Okeechobee. Over the Everglades north and south, along the rim of the Big Cypress, over the Big Cypress itself—with its mileage of green meadows and quaking bog, forested rivers and grass-green lakes; over dark cypress-brakes where the bird-rookeries sent up their feathered inhabitants to greet this super-bird; skimming the lonely camps of cow-hunters and trappers to see who was there, but mostly who was not.

And during much of this time his thought reverted to that other flight—the time that Muriel Sangree and he had sped and reeled through space as if they themselves were mated birds.

The thought wasn't so much a reversion as it was a continual presence. It was the underlying sea of his consciousness—his thought of this girl, like the sea of sweet water that underlay this land that had hidden her in its breast.

There are some queer stories about the things heard and seen in the air. Few of them have been told as yet because, for one thing, the world is not ready for such tales yet, and, for another thing, because the young men who fly are, as a rule, not given to talking very much. Ghost-stories for the most part—things seen that could not be; things heard where there could be no sound other than the roar of wind and motor.

But at dusk of the day following the one that had been like a Sabbath to Muriel Sangree, when Lathrop was winging for a safe harbor like a belated wild goose, he heard a whisper that caused him to circle far around. He almost completed the circle and held to his original course, the whisper was so strange:

"This is Muriel! I am here! I am here!"

The night had thickened over the 'Glades, but there was still a semitransparent afterglow here at his elevation. He looked about him. Over there to the west lay the cypress country. To the east and everywhere lay the Everglades. Somewhat to the north was a black patch near a bit

of mirror. He knew that the patch was a small island—an Everglade key—and that the mirror was a stretch of open water.

"This way! This way!"

Was there a voice-wave coming to him from the island—or was this hallucination—a mist from that underlying sea of his thought? Doubt when it came to answering questions such as these sometimes meant the difference between life and death. But was the difference so very great that he shouldn't risk it?

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE "FLYING-IRON."

"BLUE OTTER," cried Muriel, "he has seen your signal-fire, and he is coming down."

She caught his arm in her two hands. She leaned against him. He stood as steadily as a tree. Physically he did. But he was glad that the gloom was so deep. He felt as if he were shaking like a girl. He managed to speak.

"The flying-iron—it will carry you away. And this is the end of the trail."

"Blue Otter!"

"I listen."

"I understand. I—oh, see! It looks as if he were going to fall. No, he examines the open water."

"I could cause him to fall. I could cause him to rise again." He suddenly turned, so that he was facing her. She did not take her hands from his arm even when he put his own right hand to her shoulder and drew her closer to him. Their eyes met in the twilight. She did not flinch. "All this," he said, "was for you."

"But it is not the end of the trail."

"Eeti-okholattee!"

"What is it?"

"I have loved you."

"I—I have learned to love you."

"I shall be your shadow in the moonlight."

"Do you think that I shall ever forget you—the look of your eyes—the sound of your voice?"

"You make me wish that we had died together."

"No! No! The world needs such as you. I needed you. The white people need the medicine that you can give them—the dreams, the poetry, the strength, the patience."

"Had we died together, we would now be of the same race."

"We are of the same race. I have friends with the Indian blood in their veins. They are proud of it—as I would be."

"Then, promise me—tell me you will return."

"Let me think."

"We both have thought."

"You don't understand—don't know."

"Yes! In your dreams and mine, our souls have gone to the moon."

With her face still raised to his she closed her eyes. She heard Blue Otter speaking softly—half in Seminole, half in English; but she could understand it all. It was if the quaver of his breast was a special language that she could have understood without the need of words. They were merged to a single shadow in the infinite gloom.

"You are mine by the hand of the Great Spirit. I am told to give you up. I would do that which is easy. I am commanded to do that which is hard. I have the power of the one gift, yet I am stabbed and dying."

The advent of the flying-iron had caused commotion elsewhere than here on the little, isolated island of the Everglades where Blue Otter and Muriel Sangree were fighting out their destinies. Southwest, northwest, and west—by the strategy of the adventurer known to Miami and Palm Beach as Prince Shuiski—were three small groups of men who watched and cursed. Thus far they had followed the Indian and the white girl out through the killing maze of the all-but-waterless 'Glades.

A chase fit to make any one swear, however great the prospective reward; for what good was a reward if you lost your life! And the chances for such an ugly twist of fate seemed increasingly good. No water, when water was needed, and hence a forced abandonment of the canoes. Too much water where none was needed—in

quaking mires and twisting lagoons. Snakes—the big, stump-tailed moccasins which were deadly but too sluggish for an active man to fear; but then a small green cousin to these with a burnished head, and one of these bit a favorite hound, and the hound floundered over dead. And the chance of a shot in the dark.

But uglier than all these other things which, after all, were reasonable and familiar enough to hardened swamperers such as comprised Shuiski's triple crew, was that ominous, invisible menace the men would talk about.

What was it? No one knew. It was something that lived in the Everglades. They all had heard about it. Maybe it was a big snake. The Indians called it the *Chitto-rakkee*, or some such thing. The Indians said that it was so big that it could draw in the water of the 'Glades and blow them out again.

"And a mess we'd be in, too, this far out in the 'Glades, without no boats, if *Chitto-rakkee* did—"

"To hell with your superstitions!" grafted Shuiski darkly.

A pretty way to talk, when hell was so close, and the swamp-lights shining in the night like the lanterns of the dead!

Then, just when reenforcements had arrived—four of them, with other hounds that would run any swamp night or day, and a prospect that the chase would end before daylight, that flying-boat winging up in the early dusk—the glimmer of a signal-fire on the distant island.

Lathrop, in his flying-boat, also had seen that fire, and guessed that it was no ordinary camp-fire. Some one waved a flaming torch.

"Muriel!"

His heart was thudding like his motor, now.

He circled low. The mirror expanded. And there was a rush of water as his flying-boat came to rest.

There followed an interval which was absurdly commonplace. There often does follow such an interval after some extraordinary experience, or in the midst of some extraordinary adventure.

"Jammed in the mud," he had muttered.

He knew that he had missed wrecking his plane by a hair. Then, shortly, there was an Indian in a striped shirt, wading out from the bank of the deceptive lake and inviting him to follow. The island was farther away than he had guessed—a hundred yards or so away through a twisting channel mostly saw-grass and mud.

Not a word yet of the girl. Not much else than silence. But a limkin flew up with the shriek of a frightened woman.

Under a brushy arch Lathrop saw again the twinkle of fire, and this held his attention until the Indian had brought him close to a former landing-place. And not until Lathrop had stepped ashore did he see the dim figure standing there.

"Muriel?"

"Yes!"

"Thank God!"

She had tried to speak, but it was as if a hand had stopped her breath. Blue Otter had turned away. Blue Otter had gone on ahead in the direction of the fire.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BATH OF FLAME.

THERE was no moon, no stars, that night. The only light visible for miles around was an occasional quiver of lightning—such lightning as is seen on the level spaces of the world, flashing low down, apparently near, like the lights of an automobile; this, then the serene glow here and there of a marsh-light—as friendly, in appearance, as the light in the window of a farmhouse.

They were almost past emotion—or past any ordinary expression of it, those three on the island. Lathrop had slept scarcely at all in the week that he had searched for Muriel Sangree. He was like a man reduced to the essential steel skeleton of himself.

Muriel Sangree herself was like something that had been tested with fire. The dross and the superficial had disappeared. Blue Otter was again the red sphinx.

"He lit the fire to guide you," Muriel

had said, when they were alone. She looked at Lathrop through the gloom.

Lathrop had watched the Indian retreating toward the camp.

"He's putting the fire out."

"We are pursued."

"Pursued!"

She sketched the events of the past few days. While she still spoke, Blue Otter had returned. He stood a few paces from them, looking out over the dark infinity of swamp.

"Blue Otter," Muriel had called. "This is a friend."

Blue Otter and the white man had shaken hands. The three of them stood there together now.

"White men—they come," said Blue Otter softly.

"I'm stuck in the mud," said Lathrop, after a long interval.

"There wasn't enough water to go farther even with the dugout," said Muriel.

"It looks like a fight," said Lathrop.

"You no fly—without water?" asked Blue Otter.

"No fly," Lathrop answered. "My machine—you savvy—start like boat—like duck swimming—"

He paused as he saw Blue Otter raise his head slightly in an attitude of watchfulness. He stood there for a while motionless, looking out over the mysterious infinity of morass. To one who knew all the circumstances it would have been as if Blue Otter had surprised the secret of the great serpent—he who controlled the flow of the waters in the canoe trails, in the wide lagoons; he who at will could draw the waters away into the underground rivers of the Ka-Hetlee and cause them to flow forth again.

"No water—no fly away again!"

Even this supreme instrument of the white man's magic was subject to the dictates of the red man's friend and earth-god; and he, Blue Otter, alone had the power to cause the great serpent to grant the needed flood. That could be "the one gift."

"Perhaps it is going to rain," said Muriel.

Lathrop laughed unhappily. "It would

have to rain a week to lift my old boat out of the mud. There's not a foot of water where she lies."

"If there was water," said Muriel, "we could all fly away together."

"Not all of us together," said Lathrop. "The boat will carry two only. I'll have to get you to Miami—where your father's gone."

"And leave Blue Otter?"

"We'll come back for him—round those bandits up."

Blue Otter was listening, but still with the air of one who listens for other things.

"No water!" he murmured, and he spoke in Seminole.

For a space no one spoke again. The wide silence of the 'Glades closed in about them. But Blue Otter, like a restive horse, was also alert to the problems of the earth about him.

"You hear?" he asked. "Over there!" With a slim hand he gestured toward the west.

He listened again. They all listened. There for a while it seemed as if they were the only people in the world. The clouds had lowered. The lightning had stopped. Even the marsh-lights had disappeared. The silence was absolute. Then both Muriel and Lathrop heard the sound that Blue Otter had heard—the baying of a brace of hounds.

The sound seemed to release some spring that had helped the girl keep a grip on herself. A shiver went through her body, and suddenly Lathrop had put his arms about her. At that she broke down utterly. Her face was against his shoulder. She was weeping like a hurt and exhausted child.

Lathrop dropped to one knee and brought her close.

"I wanted to get back to my father," she sobbed brokenly. "And I was so sorry the way I acted toward you."

"We'll see that you'll get back all right," he said. And he kissed her. But he was wondering about many things, quelling some doubt in his own heart. His machine was as helpless on the ground as a condor would have been with broken legs, or as a duck with its feet in a trap. He knew the wastes that lay about them

almost better than any man had ever known them—the treacherous flats—eighty or a hundred miles across to the east coast, almost that many to the west; wilderness of the same sort to north and south.

“Ten men,” said Blue Otter softly, listening, and his glancing eyes indicated that the enemy was scattered. “Think so—get ready—shoot us—” He completed his declaration by a rising motion of his hand from the direction of the east, meaning when the sun came up.

“You know this country?” asked Lathrop.

“Yes.”

“How far could we get on foot?”

There was a long pause. “He could go anywhere by himself,” Muriel whispered, “but he wouldn’t leave me.”

“Two miles,” said Blue Otter.

“Couldn’t we go back the way you came—give these fellows the slip that way?”

“Three trails,” said Blue Otter softly.

“There are only three trails,” whispered Muriel. “He showed me to-day. They are held—or watched—to-night more than ever.”

“They wouldn’t dare—”

But Lathrop checked himself, even if he had intended the remark for the consolation of the girl. He was going to say that these men would not dare to fire upon him. Men had been murdered for lesser prizes than the sum of money that Muriel Sangree represented.

He saw that Blue Otter had turned and was looking down at them through the gloom. Blue Otter spoke:

“Mebbe so—the water come before the sun.”

They saw him for a flickering moment longer, the stripes of his Seminole shirt showing vaguely in the darkness and nothing else. Then he was gone.

“Did he mean—rain?” Lathrop asked.

“He meant—he meant,” said Muriel, with her thought echoing what Blue Otter had said to her about hearing a “Voice”—“oh, I don’t know what he meant, but I do know that he is a prophet.”

They huddled there where Blue Otter had left them, with the void about them—

darkness, silence, the sort of dread born of expectancy when the straining senses get no response. Muriel had surrendered to Lathrop completely. Both of his arms were about her. His face rested against her head. She had dressed herself again in the clothing she had worn when Blue Otter found her. Lathrop had illusory flights of dream—he and the girl were safe; they were not in the midst of the Everglades with a stranded plane and with deadly enemies creeping up on them; this was the garden of the hotel at Miami; by and by Muriel would have to bid him good night; to-morrow they were going to be married.

But there was another sort of dream in the mind of Blue Otter.

He had looked at the white man and the white girl. He had seen them in each other’s arms. And instead of this hurting him in any way there ran through him a surge of power. It was like a flood of fine magnetism in all the fibers of his body.

It was as if some other voice than his own—yet a voice from his heart—had said:

“You are a Seminole! This is the hour of the one gift!”

The power was so strong in him that it made him drunk. He shut his eyes and bowed his head. He straightened himself up again and looked up, shaking his head. Silently and swiftly he turned back to where the embers of the fire still glowed. There he cast off his shirt and he wore no other clothing than his breech-cloth. He next took a dry palmetto fan and blew it into flame. With this flame he lightly anointed his whole body.

“What is that?” whispered Lathrop.

Muriel gasped and watched. She couldn’t speak.

It was as if the two of them looked at some pagan miracle—a slender, wonderfully wrought statue of bronze brought to life and warming itself to an intenser life with flame. The muscles played. The surface of the living statue glowed. Then there was darkness as the fire went out.

Blue Otter, purified, unscathed by the flame, retraced his steps. The others saw him pass, walking lightly and proudly like

a deer. And there was something about him that gave them a shiver of fear, kept them silent.

CHAPTER XXV.

BEFORE THE FLOOD.

IT was near that creation of the white man's magic, the flying-iron, that Blue Otter took up his stand on a slab of lime-rock free from the mud where the water came barely to his ankles. The plane lay there huge and cumbrous, awkward. At the side of it stood the Indian, silhouetted against the pale swamp-light, a sort of a wingless angel. To have seen them there like that one would have been moved to say:

"Here is the masterpiece of man; and here is the masterpiece of God."

Blue Otter was worthy of his Maker, naked and clean, and free from blemish, in the flower of his strength, slender and thewed like an athlete. In his movements there was a perfect and natural grace, as in the movements of a stag.

"*Hesukatemeesee!*" he called. "Great Spirit! Great Spirit!"

He clenched his fists and brought them to his shoulders. He threw his head far back. He crouched a little and drew up first one knee, then another, as if he were performing the first step of some sacred dance.

"Why am I thus hurt?"

He threw his arms down and back and held them rigid, and gradually there was no more movement about him except the straining rise and fall of his breast.

"You tell me that I have my choice. What is my choice? I may have the one gift. Which shall it be? Her? *Her?* HER? Or the water to free the flying-iron and send her away in this other's arms?"

The meteorological reports for lower Florida will show you that on this night there had been local showers, accompanied by some electrical disturbance, along most of the southerly coasts and outlying keys. Yet these showers could scarcely have ac-

counted for what happened. Perhaps more to the point would be the report of Professor Stuebaker, of the New York Botanical Gardens, who had been cactus hunting in the region of Madeira Bay. For days, according to him, there had been such a drift of water from the coast (in response to a northerly wind) that the whole bay had gone dry. Then the wind had suddenly veered, and "*it looked as if all the water in the Gulf were piling back upon us in a tidal wave.*"

The Seminoles have a different explanation:

"Big medicine! Blue Otter, he talked to the great serpent, and the great serpent had to obey; for from *Hesukatemeesee*, did not Blue Otter have the gift?"

Blind Heron sits at the side of the camp-fire and tells the tale. The children, the women, and the other men sit around in the light of the fire, silent and touched with awe. Their eyes shine. They listen. Blind Heron's voice is like a murmur of leaves. He is old and sad, but he smiles.

Suddenly, out of his dreaming, Lieutenant Lathrop uttered a little cry. His first glance about him told him that it was almost dawn.

"What is it?" asked the girl.

She also had slept. She started up and looked about her. She saw nothing but the level Everglades in the fading darkness. The night had gone. There for a moment she thought she heard a chant; she thought she heard the lulling, pathetic voice of Blue Otter. But, just then an owl hooted, and a whole Niagara of sound was let loose—the billion frogs and crickets that feared nothing, the challenging bellow of the big alligators, scattered and far away.

Lathrop leaned forward.

"Water!" he cried. "See! The water is rushing back. It is rising fast."

"Blue Otter!" She was smitten by some thought that stopped her voice.

But Lathrop had swiftly, almost brusquely, disengaged himself from the girl. He was the fighting man. At a moment like this there was emotion for nothing but victory.

"Come!" he said. "Come!" he commanded, when she hesitated.

Then, perhaps — afterward, certainly — Muriel Sangree said in her heart that the Indian was the better man. This was so even if she did become Mrs. Anthony Lathrop. Now Lathrop had half dragged and half carried her off through the mud and rising waters to where the flying-boat lifted and turned like a swimming duck. Like a duck it would rise. Not until she was in the machine and the motor was spinning did she see the figure of Blue Otter standing there at the edge of the lake.

He stood there naked, lean and perfect, his arms out and his head up, as if he also were on the point of flight; as perhaps he was.

There was a splitting roar, a blinding rush, and the flying-boat was wrenching itself free from the clutch of the earth. It was free. It tilted and soared. It came around in a long loop. Perhaps Lathrop wished to convey some message to Blue Otter.

Muriel Sangree saw the Indian. His face was still up. He was still standing where she had seen him last. It was as if their eyes met. He raised an arm to her in a gesture of farewell.

For a time he was there with the first light of morning on him. Then the rippling waters had closed over him.

Amid this scudding roar of the white man's power and magic, the future Mrs. Lathrop bowed her head and wept.

(The end.)

U U U U

THE INEVITABLE IF

BY DOROTHY DEJAGERS

IF you can shop and curb your inner ravings
At insufficient help and rough-neck crowd,
And watch the rapid shrinkage of your savings,
Indifferent, serene and placid browed;

If you can rise at six to light the tree up,
And set afire a brand new woolly lamb,
And have the ladder fall and skin your knee up,
Without a fierce desire to mutter: "Damn!"

If you can kiss an unattractive spinster
Who stands beneath a sprig of mistletoe,
Without a hunch that you deserve Westminster
For such heroic valor, don't you know;

If you can share your room with country cousins,
And with a welcome, too, that isn't bluff—
Accept a gift of which you've several dozens,
And pull that just-the-thing-I-wanted stuff;

If you can carve the goose so it resembles
The work of some accordion-plait machine,
And rise above the way your finger trembles,
And meet the nudging jests with smile serene;

And if you can with mood and manner mellow
Pay all the bills, and even think the fun
Is cheap at that, then you're a reg'lar fellow.
What's more: you've got the Christmas spirit, son,

Land of the Shadow People

by Charles B. Stilson

(A Sequel to "A Man Named Jones")

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

Readers of "A Man Named Jones" will remember that Jones married beautiful Katherine Manning. With Molo—the wonderful dog—they settled in Detroit, and were made happy by the birth of a son, Bobby.

When Bobby was five years old he was kidnaped by an unknown man of foreign appearance. The day of the kidnaping Jones had read of the death of Kay-Kay—Kerwood Kinsella—the partner of Zalmon Grimshaw, who had been left marooned on Zaumouti Island, in the southern Pacific. A little later he received a cable from "The Martian"—otherwise King Kelly, who had married the Ariki Foyara of the island of Bomavalu and thus become its ruler—warning him that Grimshaw had escaped, and promising to come to Jones's aid. What Jones did not know was that Grimshaw had killed Kay-Kay—after forcing him to make a will in the former's favor—because Kay-Kay (who had been informed by Jones of his partner's exile) had done nothing to rescue Grimshaw, but had taken their joint business for himself.

Grimshaw called upon Jones and offered to help him find Bobby—after Jones had taken him to an emerald mine in Peru, of which Jones alone had knowledge. Jones was confident that Grimshaw was responsible for the kidnaping, but all efforts to find Bobby having failed he accepted the bargain offered. Meanwhile Jones had been joined by King Kelly and the latter's native follower, Nambe.

Accompanied by Katherine, his friend, Jim Arnold, and by Grimshaw, King Kelly and Nambe, Jones went to Peru. In the town of Huaraz he engaged as guide a Peruvian gentleman, Don Castro de Ulloa, who was anxious to return to the country beyond the mountains, of which few men had knowledge.

CHAPTER VII.

"I AM NEE-NAH."

DON CASTRO proved himself a man of works as well as words. Punctual to the minute of his appointment, he brought a list of supplies, prices, and places of purchase which convinced his employer that the responsibility for outfitting the expedition was in capable hands.

It was evident that the don had expended his *libras* upon his person. He came shaven and shorn and in the costume of a Peruvian gentleman of moderate means, which became him well. Even in rags he had an air of unmistakable distinction.

When he learned how far Jones purposed to penetrate the wilderness, even to the river Ucayli, he could not conceal his satisfaction. To only one point in his employer's plans did he demur. In language carefully chosen, but none the less forceful, he objected to Katherine's going.

"It is not a place for your beautiful *señora*," he expostulated, waving his hands. "Consider, *señor*, the nature of the country. She would be exposed to dangers and hardships of the greatest: the *soroche*, the mountain-sickness; the wasting fevers, the *tercianans*; the *paludismo* of the malarial swamps where the great serpents lie; the beasts and the barbarous *Chunchos* of the

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for June 26.

jungles—we may see fighting, *señor*. It is a frightful land. Myself, though I have traveled it much, I know not the half of its perils. See, *señor*?"

He turned back the coat and shirt-sleeves from his left wrist, disclosing a thin arm, corded and sinewy. Half-way between wrist and elbow a faintly purple scar, mottled and shiny like that left by a scald, and nearly three inches wide, encircled the arm.

"What is that?" Jones asked.

"A patch which the red ants of the jungle ate through the naked flesh, *señor*," replied the little man gravely. "I have such on all my limbs—on my back and breast. Once I was the prisoner of the Huachipairis near the Rio Madre de Dios. With such trials do they test the fortitude of their captives. They smear the flesh with honey and set free the ants to graze upon it.

"It is only a few years ago, *señor*, that the former prefect of Cuzco, Colonel Fernandez—Christ's peace be with him, I knew him well—descended into the Montaña, taking his young son and a number of Indian servants. Months afterward three of the Indians returned, bringing a tale of horrible sufferings and a portion of the brave colonel's diary.

"They had become lost and perished—the colonel, his son and the others—of hunger and thirst. Think of it! Of thirst!—when perhaps one might have tossed a stone from their death-bed into a great river of cool water, but flowing through gorges so deep and precipitous that it could not be reached. Do not take your *señora*, *señor*."

Jones repeated these arguments to Katherine, with others of his own making. For once she was obdurate.

"After living for years on a savage South Sea island, I'm not to be scared off so easily, Bob," was her answer. "I am going."

Such sources of information as were available to travelers in a strange city shed faint light on the past of Don Castro, concerning which every member of the party was excusably curious. His unvarying dignity and reserve precluded personal questioning. The hotel clerk, a Frenchman, knew him only in his recent capacity as lottery agent. The proprietor of El Nación, also a foreigner, believed the don had served in the army,

Grimshaw, who cultivated acquaintances in the market-place, and perhaps had returned his festival *globo*, brought in the finding that years before their guide had served with distinction as a colonel in the Peruvian forces. What vicissitudes had brought him to his present state, Zalmon's informants could not say. Certain it was that, despite his poverty, the former soldier enjoyed the boundless respect of both Peruvians and Indians.

"Take it from me, our little homunculus is a hummer, class A," declared Arnold after a few trips with the don in search of mules and drivers. "When it comes to bringing a mulishly inclined Cholo bumping down to rock-bottom, commend me to Don Castor Oil. The Indians obey him as they would their priest, which is saying some!"

In a country where only death is hurried, Don Castro performed the impossible. On the day after New Year's, which Huaraz celebrated with another *fiesta*, the party left the city.

Quite a caravan the Americans thought it, consisting as it did of eight saddle-mules, fifteen pack-animals loaded with all manner of supplies, including two tents; and seventeen persons, of whom six were *arrieros*, or muleteers, and three *muchachos*, men-of-all-work.

All were armed. Jones had brought from the States four automatic rifles and a number of pistols of heavy caliber. Advised by the don, he bought rifles and machetes for his men.

"Give them guns, and good guns, *señor*," said De Ulloa. "They can use them. I have hired none but brave Indians."

In charge of the *arrieros* was none other than the colossal Aymara seller of ponchos, Tomás Porres, who spoke Spanish, lied admirably, and was a courageous man.

Each rider was equipped with enormous spurs. "Cruel perhaps, but necessary," explained Don Castro, who showed in handling animals and Indians some of the indifference that is characteristic of the Spaniard.

Nothing escaped the don's eyes. Wherever he was needed, there he was, his slight, wiry form apparently tireless, his big voice raised in terse orders.

In the Cholo mountain villages he was first to spur forward, shouting for the *gobernadore*, and disorganizing with his cries of "Za! Za!" the attacks of the native dogs which rushed from the mud dwellings.

In presenting Jones's papers, it was impressed upon the local magistrates that the foreign *señores* were *ingenieros*, who perhaps would open new mines—information invariably productive of courteous treatment and offers of aid. Such was not stated in the papers; but "It is necessary to lie a little," the don explained. It was noticeable that he left the actual lying to Tomás, who had positive talent in that direction.

Soon after their departure from Huaraz, the travelers began to perceive the value of the mule as a means of locomotion. Ascending rapidly into the *puna*, the almost treeless upland, the trail crossed a succession of plateaux, the roads between which lay through precipitous defiles in the rocks, where the going was much too rough for the feet of horses.

Occasionally they met Cholos with caravans of pack-llamas, the small humpless camels of the southern continent. Sometimes they passed a Cholo shepherd or shepherdess tending their flocks among the hills. If it was a man, perhaps he would be playing weird melodies on flute or pan-pipes; if a woman, she invariably was spinning, twisting her yarn from a ball of crude wool with a dangling wooden spindle which she manipulated with adept twirls of her wrist. Every hill was surmounted with its wooden cross, and bore the name of some saint.

On one of the plateaux the way crossed a sandy desert a number of miles in extent, where the road was marked plainly by innumerable bottles and tins of every size and shape, labeled in almost every known language, and which had contained everything in the way of drinkables from champagne and brandy to mineral waters and beer.

• Mid-way across this expanse the Martian, who had been riding ahead with Don Castro, raised himself in his stirrups, stared, rubbed his eyes, and stared again.

"An army of sea-turtles!" he cried. "Where could they have come from?"

De Ulloa laughed. "They are *médanos*, Señor Kelly," he said, regarding the myriad creeping brown forms which had astounded the Martian. As they came nearer, the don rode his mule into the van of the slowly moving column. Each time that the hoofs of the animal touched one of Kelly's "turtles," it vanished, and a spurt of dust drifted away.

That was all they were—heaps of the finest wind-blown sand, creeping slowly along under the impulse of the breeze, and curiously preserving always the same geometrical form, that of a gigantic tortoise.

From Huaraz the trail which the travelers followed rises to an elevation of more than fifteen thousand feet at the summit of the pass of Yanashallas, by which is crossed the main Andean range. On the farther side of the pass and some distance down the valley of Chavin on the Rio Poccha is the native village of Huantar. From Huaraz to Huantar is a distance of fourteen leagues.

Under the best of conditions, a hardy traveler with an exceptionally good beast can make the trip in one day of hard riding; and on the way experience all variations of climate, from the semitropical atmosphere of Huaraz to the polar blizzards, carrying with them stinging clouds of sleet and snow, which howl through the pass of Yanashallas.

The progress of Jones and his outfit was necessarily much slower. As they ascended into the region of perpetual snows, the members of the party began to realize the truth of their guide's warnings, and to appreciate the preparations which he had made to insure their comfort. Heavy *ponchos* were none too heavy, and knitted Cholo hoods and mittens were grateful in the face of the icy blasts which blew upon them from the white-clad summits at either hand. Lima saddles proved their vaunted superiority.

Here, too, they encountered the *soroche*, the dreaded mountain-sickness, due to the altitude, which attacks the head, heart, and lungs. Strangely enough, Jim Arnold, exceptionally powerful and active, was the only one actually prostrated by this malady, which strikes with the suddenness of a mule's foot. Near the lower entrance to the pass Jim saw near the side of the trail

the immense spiral traces of fossil ammonites among the rocks. Slipping from his saddle, he clambered up to observe them closer. He hurried, heard a warning cry from Tomás, and turned to ascertain its reason.

Mountains, sky and the swirling snow-storm in the pass swam before his vision. He threw up his hands and fell. When he returned to his senses, Don Castro was bending over him and rubbing his temples with aromatic liniment.

"You should have gone slowly, *señor*," he cautioned. "Only the Indians who are born on the height can run and exert themselves here. For others sometimes it is death to do as you did."

At the extreme summit of the immense rift of Yanashallas the caravan skirted the small twin lakes which mark the water-parting of the southern continent. The melted snow-waters of the eastern lake flow down through mountain streams to the Rio Marañon, and on through the Amazon, to reach the coast of the Atlantic a thousand leagues from their source. Those of the western lake have their outlet in the Rio Santa, which debouches into the Pacific.

Night was gathering when camp was pitched in a dry ravine beside the trail, a couple of leagues below the pass.

Recurrent nausea and a throbbing headache, results of the *soroche*, sent Arnold supperless to his blankets in the larger tent. The headache left; but sleep would not come. One by one, his tentmates—Kelly, Grimshaw, Don Castro, and Nambu—turned in and passed him on the road to dreamland; but he still lay wakeful.

For a time the Indians rolled cigarettes and muttered around the fire. Then the blaze died, and a quiet came that was broken only by the champing of the tethered mules, the fitful rushing of the wind along the main trail, and the faraway rumbling of a mountain glacier.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, and Jim at last was dozing, when his senses quickened with a start. He had heard something: faint whisperings and a muffled trampling. Fully awake, he wrapped himself in a blanket and lifted the tent-flap.

The Indians lay around the embers. He

counted them. All were there. The man who should have been on watch sat with head sunk on his chest, slumbering as soundly as his fellows. Again Jim heard the muffled trampling, that time from the lower reaches of the ravine, away from the trail.

He thought of tales which he had read of Peruvian hill-robbers. Could it be that *ladrones* were tampering with the mules?

Unwilling to raise a false alarm, he pulled on his clothes, took his rifle, and crept down the glen. The moon had not risen. The rock masses and the few stunted trees which thrust up among them took on dim, unnatural proportions in the faint starlight. Jim reached in a few steps the place where the mules were tethered. Two of them were missing.

Still loath to arouse the slumbering camp needlessly, and thinking that the animals might have strayed, he followed on until he trod the sand of an ancient water-course. There he stopped and struck a match. A glance at the ground disclosed the strangely distorted tracks of the mules, mingled with the impressions of sandaled feet.

Through cupped hands, Jim holloped softly in Spanish to Tomás, and at the third call received a sleepy response. Informing the big Aymara what had happened, he hurried on into the deeper shadows of the glen.

Some three hundred yards below the camp the bed of what had been a runnel debouched at right angles into cañon of considerable width. Jim reached it in time to see a dark object disappear soundlessly through a rift in the rock wall a long stone's throw to his right. Evidently the *ladrones* had wrapped the hoofs of their booty with cloths or hay.

The rift proved to be the opening of another glen, narrow and tortuous, with many cross ravines. Jim saw no more of the mules; and after an hour's wandering through a maze of cañons and gullies, he came to the annoying conclusion that he was lost. At the same time he made the embarrassing discovery that *soroche* had not finished with him. He was faint, dizzy, and this time overpoweringly sleepy. Quite suddenly he found himself at the end of his forces.

He recalled having seen a few moments before the opening to a small cave in the side of the defile where he was; and he retraced his steps.

A startled movement and two greenish eyes staring at him from its darkness, appraised him that his contemplated refuge already held a tenant. The click of hoofs on the rocky floor assured him that at least it was not a puma.

"Come out of that!" exhorted Jim, clambering in. "Got to do it, old chap. Don't start anything."

Out it came with a snort and a scabble, nearly overturning Jim, and went clattering and *snoofing* down the rough pathway. It left behind it an odor so disagreeable that Jim made haste to light his brier.

For quite a time he sat with his back to the wall, his pipe making drifting dream-clouds in the cave's mouth, in which his fancy traced strange changing shapes and graceful visions. For under Jim's ready, quizzical good humor was hidden a strong vein of romance, almost of poetry. Presently he slept; and while he slept the moon rose.

How long had she been sitting there, he did not know, or how long he had slept—if indeed he were not still asleep and dreaming; but he saw defile and cavern bathed in silvery light, and sitting beside him, so near that he might have reached and touched her from where he lay, a glorious girl.

As nearly as he could remember afterward, for all details were hazy and indistinct, she wore a gown of soft, dark stuff, sleeveless, and gathered below her bosom by a broad girdle, in which was a dull gleam of metal. One of her feet, from which the gown had fallen away, was sandaled.

Heavy rings glittered on her bare arms and on her wrists and fingers; and from her neck hung a chain of crudely cut stones, rimmed about with golden bands. Her night-black hair was parted at one side and held back from her forehead by a fillet which appeared to be woven beadwork, set with rude gems. She was white, or nearly so, and her features were superbly beautiful.

"Who are you?" In his bewilderment

Jim forgot his topography entirely, and asked the question in English.

The girl, who had been gazing down at him, started at the sound of his voice. A puzzled, half-frightened expression disturbed the musing tranquillity of her features. It was the expression of one gripped suddenly by a strong old memory, so long forgotten that it startles in returning.

"I—I—am—Nee-Nah," she replied in the halting utterance of one long unused to speech.

As Jim would have said more, she bent over him and laid a hand on his forehead. From her lips came a low, sibilant, whispering melody, the like of which he had never heard. Its effect was instantaneous. His faculties, only half aroused, succumbed to the lulling influence of those aspirated cadences, which were like the music of forest leaves. A wave of drowsiness flowed gently over his spirit. His eyes closed.

When he awakened the girl was gone, and it was gray morning. Outside the cave, pawing and snorting in high dudgeon, was the "old chap" whom Jim had disturbed, a big Cholo mountain ram, whose skull was adorned with four curling horns.

As Arnold stood up stiffly, something fell from his clothing and tinkled upon the rock. He picked it up, whistled, and put it in his pocket.

In the next cañon but one he found Tomás, returning to camp with the stolen mules. The Aymara told a lurid tale of battle with the *ladrones*, which Jim did not at all believe. In fact, he strongly suspected Tomás of having compounded a felony. But later, when the Indian made his report and repeated his tale, Jim noticed that Don Castro did not chide him.

As soon as he could get Jones to one side, Arnold told his own tale.

"You were tired and weakened by the *soroche*. It was a dream, Jim," said Jones.

Arnold shook his head. There was a rapt expression on his face and a light in his eyes that his friend had never seen there.

"No, Bob; it was no dream. I almost wish that it had been, old chap. That was a living, breathing girl; and," with a vehemence which was foreign to him, "I'm go-

ing to find her, if I have to stand South America on its ears and shake it!"

"Nonsense, Jim! If it *was* a visitation of the flesh, it was some Chola girl looking for her sheep."

Again Arnold shook his head.

"Bob, do Chola girls leave such things as this lying around? If they do, you'd better investigate hereabouts, and look no further for Cooper's mine."

With the words, he laid in Jones's hand a stone, an oblong green pebble nearly an inch in length and the thickness of this little finger. It had been rudely cut and was rimmed with a band of beaten gold. At one end a ring had worn thin and parted, as though the stone had been the pendant of a chain. In the depths of the gem burned a somber, quenchless fire.

It was an emerald!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GHOSTS OF CHAVIN.

FOR some time Jones gazed at the stone in silence, turning it in his hand, examining it on all sides—thinking.

On the surfaces of its golden rim he saw the traces of a design which once had ornamented it, but which was nearly worn away. The pattern seemed to have been of intertwined serpents alternated with spirals; though these last might have been meant to represent shells.

Except for its band of gold, the gem was the counterpart in shape and size and cutting of the one which the dying Cooper had laid on Jones's table in the Coropolis Apartments in Dorchester seven years before.

When he had noted these things, and felt the influence of the train of reflections which they had evoked, it was with a troubled face that the big man returned the jewel to his friend. He had no further doubts to offer to Arnold's story. But who was the girl? How came she to have an emerald so like that other, possession of which had been fraught with such fateful consequences to himself?

"I'm not superstitious, Jim," he said; "but this makes a man think queer things

in spite of himself. You know the story of Halford Cooper; and you know what has happened since he brought me the tale of an emerald mine, and substantiated it with that other stone. You have seen it."

Arnold nodded. "Yes; I remember it well, Bob. This one is just like it. That's the deuce of it—that and the girl. Did Cooper tell you just how he came to get that particular stone, and who did the cutting of it?"

Jones's face clouded.

"There were reasons at the time why I did not get Cooper's yarn as clearly as I should have," he responded. "If he told me such things, I cannot recall them. Then he died.

"But I had the stone, and later the map. They seemed sufficient proof of his story about the mine."

Jim lighted his pipe. The morning had come clear and beautiful, with a golden sun in a turquoise sky. Far away against the blue, but seeming in that limpid atmosphere so near as to overhang the glen, stood the gleaming twin spires of Huascarán.

Arnold wondered if his visitor of the night might be looking at them, too. The thought made him feel friendly toward the white-headed giant, and he shook his head at it.

"It's a devilishly odd coil, old man, take it all in all," he observed, blowing a cloud of smoke. "That girl was white, and she answered me in English, though she was dressed like a princess of Egypt."

"And you say she wore a necklace of emeralds?" Jones asked.

"She wore one of some kind of stones, Bob; but this one she left behind is the only one I can swear to. I think that the others were like it, though."

"That of itself would not be so remarkable," pursued Jones. "Spanish tradition has much to tell of hidden Inca treasure—and we are in Inca country.

"They may have worked emerald mines hereabouts; or, for that matter, Cooper's discovery may be one of their workings, though that is a long way from here. The necklace may have come from the grave of some Inca potentate. The big question is: Who is *she*?"

"It's a question that I'm going to answer before I'm many months older," declared Jim decisively. "I'm going to find that girl!"

"Have you any objections to my telling Kate of your adventure?" his friend asked. "Or perhaps you would prefer to tell her, I take it that you won't give it public circulation."

"No, I won't. But tell Mrs. Jones by all means. For the time it will be between the three of us. I understand that we are going to camp below Huantar this afternoon. If I may have the loan of a guide and a mule, I'm going to take the back trail into the gullies to-night, and see what I can see. Maybe she will visit me again."

By a rugged path, the flooring of which in places consisted of slabs of granite placed there by the Incas themselves, and through a succession of climatic changes almost as marked as those of their ascent of the preceding day, the travelers reached Huantar in mid-afternoon. The town, a collection of mud-walled *chozas*, nestled at the foot of towering quartzite rocks along the banks of a boisterous mountain stream, the Rio Poccha.

Most of the care-free inhabitants of the place were squatted in their miserable little *plaza*, listening to the plaintive melodies of a wandering Quechua minstrel, who was accompanied by a lad with pan-pipes.

Two Huantarian peculiarities presented themselves at once to the eyes of the visitors. One was the church, an adobe structure, roofed with shining squares, which at no distant date had formed the sides of rumbos. The other was that nearly every second one of the population was afflicted with the malady known as *coto*, manifested in an immense swelling of the throat which causes it to depend from beneath the chin like the pouch of a pelican.

As the town was filthy and odorous, no one offered objections when Don Castro proposed that camp be made a distance below it in the Chavin Valley. Some time after the tents were pitched, the don approached Jones.

"If the *patron* will permit," he said, "I will return to the village, and there arrange with the *gobernadore*, who is an honest man,

to keep until our return the heavy clothing which was necessary to our crossing of El Paso Yanashallas. I have also, the *patron* permitting, affairs with certain men of Huantar."

Jones acquiesced, though he wondered what "affairs" might connect the haughty little Peruvian with the wretched *catosos* of the village.

"The Señor Arnold informs me that he wishes to revisit a part of the mountain slope," continued De Ulloa. "He will leave with me. The sun is still high. If I might suggest it, the *patron* and his *señora* and the Señor Kelly would find much of interest in the ancient Castle of Chavin, one of the most famous *Casas de los Gentiles* in this region, which is but a short distance."

In his brief association with the Americans, the don seemed already to have divined the status of Grimshaw, and did not include him in the invitation.

As it would be their first view of intact Inca ruins, Jones availed himself of the opportunity. Thus far the acquaintance of the travelers with the work of the ancients had been confined to specimens of their road-building, and to the blocks of hewn stone used abundantly in the dwellings of the Cholo villages.

For the modern Peruvian Indians, while they fear the ghosts of the departed "*Gentiles*," as they call them, and will not dig among their graves for fear of incurring their displeasure, have no scruples about disturbing the habitations which they occupied while living, and construct huts, and even corrals for cattle, with stones pulled from the antique masonry.

"There can be no danger for the *señora*," assured Don Castro. "I will send with you Tomás and one other who knows the ruins well."

De Ulloa and Arnold and his guide departed shortly, followed by three or four of the *arrieros*, who were attracted village-ward by remembrance of a wisp of barley which hung from a pole before the doorway of one of the *tiendas*, and indicated that native corn-beer was on sale there. For the small outlay of one *medio* a thirsty man can get a surprisingly large drink of this *chicha*.

Nambe, whose tastes occasionally lay in that direction, strolled unobtrusively along with the party. Through some strange freemasonry with the Indians, the islander, though he understood hardly a dozen words of their language, usually was made acquainted with whatever was on foot; and his liberality with his pocket-money made him a favorite.

Escorted by Tomás and Enrique, one of the Cholos who had been raised in the neighborhood, Katherine, Jones, and the Martian rode in the opposite direction.

On the way Jones took occasion while Kelly was riding ahead to relate to Katherine Jim's experience of the night before, an affair as mystifying to her as it had been to the two men.

As they proceeded, they found the valley narrower; at their right the brawling Rio Poccha cut more deeply in the rock, until its course was a quite respectable gorge, almost a hundred feet deep; and above it the sheer walls of the valley towering to twice that height.

Beyond an abrupt angle on the left side of the valley the wall was cleft by a deep and narrow rift, down which cascaded another turbulent stream to join the Poccha.

On the farther side of the chasm which the age-old torrent had cut across the valley was a high, triangular plateau a number of acres in extent, and virtually inaccessible either from above or below except by a stone bridge. On this plateau, and under it—for a large part of the ruins were subterranean—was the Castle of Chávin, stronghold of a former feudal lord of the Incas, now a frowning semicircle of weather-stained masonry enclosing a number of lonely, crumbling towers.

The same hands which built the castle and its companion temple laid the bridge across the chasm; and how its flooring of single fifteen-foot slabs of stone was slung into place is a problem to which no latter-day engineer has offered the solution. At each side of the bridge were low walls of modern construction, terminating at the bridge-approaches in squat columns of cement, also modern. But embedded in the cement of each pillar was a grotesque stone head several times life size, which had been

found among the subterranean galleries of the sunken temple.

Tomás tethered the mules to a clump of mountain-ash, and the visitors, not without a feeling of awe, crossed the ancient bridge and entered the main court of the castle by a massive portal whose timber gates long centuries before had moldered into dust. By clambering over heaps of débris on successive flights of steps, they reached the summits of the roofless towers, which offered a splendid view of the lower valley.

"Truly these folk builded for all time," said the Martian, contemplating the solid walls, which, though laid without mortar or cement, had withstood perhaps six centuries of the attacks of time in a region of wild weather and not infrequent earthquakes.

Below, in a smaller inner court, Enrique showed the entrance to a miniature tunnel mined in the living rock, which somewhere farther up its course had once connected with the stream, and made Chávin secure against thirst in case of siege.

Through Tomás, whose Spanish was not too far beyond Jones's college attainments in the language, Enrique then volunteered to penetrate into the recesses of the underground temple and ascertain if it might be explored comfortably. He explained that at times the waters of the stream flowed into the sunken chambers and turned them into disagreeable cisterns.

As there was both time and light for further explorations, the Indians having brought torches, Jones did not object. Enrique led the way to the ground-level portion of the temple, which they entered by a gateway little less massive than that in the outer wall, and which was so placed that it commanded a view of the other, and of the bridge beyond.

Some of the pillars which had supported the *azoteas* or low roof of the structure still were standing. The others had fallen, and about their prostrate lengths lay the débris of the upper masonry which had crashed down with them.

Through a tortuous pathway from which the rock fragments had been cleared, Enrique conducted the party to the brink of a circular pit or well, sunk in the temple

floor. Around the interior of the shaft, descending in spirals to the lower dusk, was a stairway, the granite steps of which in centuries past had been worn to the smoothness of polished agate by the bare feet of Inca priests. This staircase, declared the Cholo guide, led to an underground court and two strata of corridors and chambers hewn in the heart of the plateau.

Enrique resigned his rifle to Tomás, renewed from his pouch the quid of dried coca-leaves and lime which is as inseparable from the Cholo as is the betel or areca-nut from the aboriginal of the Orient, lighted his torch, and removed his sandals. In another instant his leathery soles were patting on the granite steps, and the smoke of his torch was drifting upward on the current of cool air which came from below.

For a distance of nearly thirty feet those above watched the flaring blaze. Then it disappeared, leaving only a patch of flickering radiance on the wall of the shaft.

Suddenly that light vanished also. Simultaneous with its disappearance, the watchers at the top of the stair heard a startled exclamation from the Cholo. It was followed by a burst of hissing, as of angered serpents, and then a single, prolonged screech of unbearable human agony.

So poignant of mortal anguish and horror was that frightful yell, that leaped echoing from the black throat of the pit into the twilight of the ruined hall, that the four beings who heard it shrank back from the gloomy brink and stared at one another with whitening faces and tongues that refused their office.

The three men as one sprang to the head of their stair and leaned over the ancient orifice, so suddenly become grim and terrible.

"Enrique! Enrique!" shouted Tomás.

Only the echoes of the powerful voice were flung back from the murky bottom of the shaft. Out of the velvet silence the steady flow of cool air brought a few curling drifts of smoke from Enrique's torch. Enrique did not answer.

Then did Tomás the Aymara prove for all time that he was a brave man.

"Stay you with the *señora, señores,*" he said, and lighted another torch.

Few are the Indians of South America, who have come under the influence of the *curas* of the Church of Rome, who do not carry a talisman which has been blessed by their *padre* and which they venerate as a Kaffir does his fetish. The amulet particular to Tomás was a tiny copper image of the Bleeding Heart. In this his hour of need he drew it from his bosom, where he wore it on a string, and pressed it to his lips, after which he loosened his heavy machete in its leather sheath and looked to his rifle.

Having thus put in order his weapons, both spiritual and carnal, Tomás went steadfastly down to face whatever terrors might be in the pit which had swallowed his companion. Shaking himself like a man newly awakened, the Martian struck a match and applied its flame to one of the remaining torches.

"I will go with him, Robert," he said, and followed the Aymara.

Before Kelly was half-way down the spiral, Tomás and his light disappeared as had Enrique. A moment later he called to Jones in a strained voice:

"*Patron,* tell the Señor Kelly to go back and give me room."

The Martian turned on the stairs. Behind him came Tomás, breathing heavily and muttering to himself. He had left his torch below, but still clutched his rifle. By the light which Kelly carried, Jones saw that the Indian bore a heavy burden on his shoulder.

He stepped from the staircase and laid at Jones's feet the limp body of Enrique, its throat horribly gashed and torn.

"He has met the ghosts of the *Gentiles, patron,*" said Tomás gravely. "He has killed one, and has been killed."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHADOWS OF NEE-NAH.

"WHAT'S that!" cried Jones, looking down at the mutilated throat of the Cholo. He knelt and touched Enrique's breast and wrists. Beyond a per-adventure, the man was dead.

"What has done this?" he inquired of

Tomás. "Is there then a wild beast in the caverns?"

Tomás regarded him steadily.

"Enrique, *que Dios haya*, was slain by a ghost, *patron*. He killed it, and it lies down there. Myself I saw it. Much blood came from it—which is strange, seeing that it is a ghost.

"That is the truth, *patron*. *Valgame Dios!* Now let us go from this place before the other spirits come to avenge their brother. *Vamos!*"

Of this astounding statement Jones could make nothing. Something undoubtedly lurked in the subterranean chambers of the temple, and had attacked the Cholo; for Enrique was dead. To credit Tomás, was to presume that Enrique had killed it. Jones recalled the hissing which he had heard just before the death-shriek of the guide. It had sounded like serpent or animal.

"In what form is this dead ghost, Tomás?" he asked.

"In the form of a corpse, *patron*—the long-dead *momia* of a *Gentile*."

Jones stood up, and translated the Indian's remarks to the others.

"We will carry this body to the outer light, Tomás," he said; "and then I shall go down and view this mummy of yours."

So they bore the corpse of Enrique to the portal of the temple and laid it behind a fallen rock.

Katherine, after one horrified glance, had averted her eyes from the ghastly countenance of the dead guide. When she saw her husband making preparations to return to the interior of the temple, she caught him by the shoulder.

"Bob, you are not going back into that terrible hole!" she pleaded nervously. "Whatever fearful thing is there, Tomás says is dead. Let us leave it in peace and go away. I have had enough of the ruins of the Incas to last me for the remainder of our stay in Peru!"

"If it is dead, Kate, all the less reason why we should fear it," returned Jones. "A man who was my servant, and for whom I feel a certain responsibility, has been killed. The least that I can do is to investigate the circumstances of his death.

"The Martian will remain here with you; or, if you feel alarmed, you may wait across the bridge. Tomás will go down with me, unless he is too scared.

"Do you fear to go back and show me the way, Tomás?" he asked the Aymara in Spanish.

"I will go with the *patron*," answered Tomás simply; but he said it without enthusiasm. Jones noticed that inside his shirt the Indian had a firm clutch on his amulet, in whose powers of protection he now relied more than in those of rifle or machete.

"I will stay here," decided Katherine. "Don't stay down there any longer than is necessary, Bob—and be careful."

"Best let me go, Robert," interposed Kelly.

"No, Martian; I want to see this thing, if thing there is. Whatever we shall find down there, I will fetch back to the surface."

While the Martian, with drawn automatic, stood with Katherine by the temple gateway Jones and Tomás returned to the shaft and made ready their torches. Though the white man had no amulet to keep his soul from harm, he looked with particular care to the condition of his own pistol before he set foot on the gloomy stairway.

With the weapon ready for instant use, Jones went deliberately down the spiral. Tomás held a decided opinion on this business, which coincided with Katherine's; but he kept it to himself, and followed Jones so closely that he trod several times upon the *patron's* heels.

"Don't crowd, Tomás," advised Jones. "It is inconvenient; and, besides, if you keep back a little, you won't have so far to run if the *momia* shows signs of life."

Behind him Jones heard the teeth of the big man click together; and he wisely said no more, fearing that Tomás might lose hold of his courage entirely, and desert.

As they went down, the shaft widened, and at its bottom formed a circular chamber in which a dozen men might have stood at ease. Two passages of fair width and height led from it into the bowels of the plateau, one immediately beyond the foot of the stairs, the other a few feet farther.

Somewhere in the depths of the rock could be heard the faint purling of a hidden stream.

Jones looked inquiringly at the Indian.

"There, *patron*—it is in there," Tomás whispered, pointing to the first opening. Seeing that the Aymara showed no disposition to lead, Jones lifted his torch high, and with pistol leveled, stepped into the mouth of the gallery.

A draft of air set the flame of his torch to flickering. By its inconstant light, he saw that the tunnel sloped downward from the shaft and ended some five yards from where he stood in a square, black aperture, which seemed to be at the head of a flight of steps.

This was a fleeting impression only; for his entire attention was centered at once upon an object which lay at his feet—the naked body of a man, which lay upon its back, its knees drawn up, and its arms flung wide.

At first glance, the thought of Jones was that fell mutilation had been practised upon the stark remains; that it was only the lower portion of a body which lay before him—*so like in color were torso, arms and head of the dead man to the dun rock upon which he had fallen!*

His eyes becoming better used to the light in the place, Jones saw his error. The corpse was whole. That the man, whoever he was, had been roughly used by Enrique, was attested by a stream of blood which had trickled from beneath the body and made a pool in a depression of the floor.

"As the *patron* may see for himself, it is the *momia* of a *Gentile*—long dead and half rotted," observed Tomás, thrusting his head over Jones's shoulder.

"Nonsense!" Jones spoke sharply, for the place had tried his nerves. "Hold this light. There is nothing to be feared."

Tomás took the torch, muttering, nevertheless, "*Ojalá estuviésemos en campo!*" which, freely translated, means, "Would to God that we were out of this!"

By the doubled light of the two torches, Jones examined the body. It had many peculiarities.

To begin with, was its oddity of coloring, which Jones at first had thought due to the

manner in which the light fell upon it, but which was not. On closer view he discovered a narrow strip of fibrous cloth, similar to the gee-string of a Papuan, wound about its loins. Below that cincture the flesh was light-colored, not darker than that of a white man who has been much exposed to the sun. Above, it was an indefinite, earthy brown.

The man was hatchet-faced, with high, shriveled features; and his body, though broad of shoulder and equipped with wiry sinews, indicating considerable strength and endurance, was so gaunt as to consist of little but skin and bones.

His head was as bald as that of Grimshaw. Moreover, there was not a sign that hair ever had grown on either head or body, not a vestige of fuzz on the cranium, not a suspicion of either eyebrows or lashes.

The eyes were wide open and staring. Jones looked into them, and was unpleasantly impressed by their strange, indefinite quality, the entire lack of expression in them, and in the face in which they set. Enrique's machete, swung by an arm to which terror had lent a giant's strength, had bitten into the bare skull above the left ear, crushing the bone.

Thus far in his examination Jones had not touched the creature. Laying aside his automatic, he gripped the stranger's bony shoulders and partially lifted him; but he at once let him fall back with a shudder of repulsion. Contact with the still warm flesh of that singular corpse thrilled him with an unaccountable loathing.

He had disturbed it sufficiently to reveal the weapon which had killed Enrique. It lay under the man's side, a narrow-bladed, triangular hatchet, blade and haft of which had been beaten from a single piece of copper.

"Did I not tell the *patron*?" put in Tomás, who had watched Jones's proceedings with uneasiness, and whose keen eyes had missed neither the shudder nor the copper ax. "This is a ghost. Many such a hatchet have I seen dug from the *huacas* of the *Gentiles*."

Jones looked up, and had a testy reply ready, when he noticed that the eyes of the Indian were beginning to roll in their

sockets; and he changed his admonition to a sharp "What now?"

"P-patron," stammered Tomás, "p-patron, where is the machete of Enrique?"

This was a question indeed. Jones picked up his pistol and arose. The flooring of the passage was smooth and free of débris. No machete was to be seen upon it.

"Perhaps he threw it somewhere," Jones suggested doubtfully.

"He fell like a stone, patron. With such a wound, a man would not move again," declared Tomás with finality. "He fell upon his face here where I am standing, patron. See; his blood is here. His machete is gone."

Jones turned hopefully to the body of the strange man and moved it with his foot. Still no machete. The inference was unavoidable and disquieting: Enrique had met more than one assailant. One of them had carried off the machete.

"Give me a torch," said Jones, making one of his characteristically quick decisions. He moved on down the gallery toward the square patch of darkness where it terminated. Tomás edged circumspectly around the prostrate body and followed.

Jones made mental note of a debt to Tomás in the sum of one golden *libra*, in reward of the most extraordinary bravery he ever had known an aboriginal to display when facing what he so firmly believed to be the terrors of the supernatural.

At the end of the passage a flight of a dozen steps led down to the flooring of a large court, hewn entirely from the solid rock. It was more than thirty feet high.

By the feeble light of the torches, Jones could no more than guess at its other dimensions. In its center a group of columns ascended to the roof and surrounded an immense altar, carved from a single stone and ornamented with all manner of arabesques, in which the favorite Inca symbols—the serpent and the shell-like scroll—predominated.

A shaft at one end of the altar connected with a second corridor below; but as the torch-flare was reflected back from stagnant water, Jones did not venture down.

All around the circumference of the great court narrow doorways opened into series

of cell-like chambers, connected one with another by cramped tunnels or passages.

A glance around him showed Jones the futility of further search unless he should have at his disposal a large party of men well acquainted with the ruins. In such a maze a score of fugitives could play him hide-and-seek at will. To the manifest relief of his companion, he gave the word to turn back.

Tomás, who had followed, now preceded. As they neared the upper end of the corridor, the Aymara shrank against the wall with lifted torch, and groaned with terror.

"*Virgen Santísima!* The *momia!* the *momia!* It is coming to life, patron!" and Tomás, who dared not go on, sank to his knees and began to patter his prayers; though he still had the presence of mind to retain his torch and keep it right side up.

Racked nerves had put Jones in a frame of mind that, had the dead man sat up and demanded a cigar, it would have surprised him little. But so far as he could see, the corpse was behaving like the general run of corpses.

"What ails you, Tomás?" he asked impatiently. Tomás pointed a shaking finger.

"It is turning white. It is coming to life, patron. It is of *los demonios*. Soon it will stand up, and we shall be dead men. It will eat us. *Dios mio!*" Tomás made the sign of the cross and redoubled his supplications.

Jones stepped past him. Then he in turn halted. The corpse had not stirred, it was true; but it had changed. When he had left it, its lower limbs only were white. Now, before his astonished eyes a broad band of slowly creeping pallor appeared above its loin-cloth. It was turning white.

For a moment Jones regarded the phenomenon. Then he shook his shoulders. "Hell!" he breathed to himself; "I'm getting as bad as Tomás."

The Aymara's big white sombrero had fallen on the floor of the corridor. Jones sternly ordered him to pick it up, take the other torch, and go ahead. Conquering by an effort of will the instinctive repugnance which forbade him to touch the body, he

stooped and swung it to his shoulder. It was not heavy.

Tomás, when he saw what was coming behind him, needed no further urging to hasten; and so they ascended the spiral stair. They had been in the subterranean temple something less than twenty minutes.

At the temple portal Katherine and the Martian watched the lengthening shadows of sunset creep down the sides of the distant cordillera. They had been waiting for a quarter of an hour or more, and Katherine had seated herself on a fallen column, when she thought that she heard a noise as of something scurrying among the ruins in the outer castle court. She looked; but the slant rays of the sun, which made of the court a gorgeously checkered pattern and of the ancient bridge a gilded pathway, disturbed her vision.

She was wearing a brown Cholo sombrero. Pulling its brim low over her eyes, she looked again.

With the swiftness of a transformation on a cinema screen, the graceful figure of a girl sprang from the shadows of a heap of granite blocks and stood poised in the patch of radiance which the sinking sun cast through the castle gateway.

Jones's description of the girl whom Arnold had encountered in the hills was still vivid in Katherine's mind; and she instantly recognized the figure before her, the dark robe, the floating masses of raven hair, and the gleaming rings of gold on the bare arms.

As the girl took a rapid step toward the gateway, Katherine leaped to her feet.

"Nee-Nah!" she called. "Nee-Nah!"

Like a startled bird, the girl turned on the tips of her toes and glanced up to where the man and woman were watching her. From Katherine her gaze darted to the Martian. She regarded him intently for an instant, and seemed to make a little *moue* of disappointment.

Again she turned, waved a hand in which a glittering object flashed back the light of the sun, and bounded through the gateway. A moment later she appeared on the bridge, running with incredible speed, and vanished among the rocks of the valley.

Behind her the mules picketed at the

bridge-head tossed their muzzles and snorted loudly in affright.

Katherine and Kelly turned toward each other. Each found the other pale and breathless; and each knew that it was not the apparition of the girl merely which had made them so.

"Did—did you—" began the Martian.

"I did," Katherine answered. "What—"

At that moment they heard behind them the voices of Jones and Tomás.

When he emerged from the pit into comparative daylight, Jones lowered the body to the temple floor. Its parti-colored appearance was entirely gone. It was the corpse of a sunburnt white man; otherwise it was as he had seen it by torch-light.

"It must have been the light," he ejaculated.

"Let us leave it here and go away," said Tomás. "And, *patron*, take my advice, which is good, and let nothing be said to the other men of what has happened here to-day. They are Cholos, and therefore cowards, and they would desert you. I am an Aymara and a brave man."

While he was saying this, the face of Tomás was as nearly ashen as its copper hue would allow. Yet what he said was true. Within his limitations, there were few braver men than Tomás.

"I think the advice excellent," replied Jones. "What lie do you propose to tell the others?"

"I shall say that Enrique fell among the rocks and was killed. I shall cast the body from a high place and break it a little more, *patron*, and so make the tale seem true. Enrique is dead, and he will not mind," Tomás answered naively.

"Do you and the *señora* and the Señor Kelly go on ahead, leaving me Enrique and one of the mules, and I will attend to the matter. But, for the sake of *Maria Santísima*, do not ask me to touch the dead ghost, *patron!* That thing I cannot do."

"We will leave it here, and to-morrow I shall ask the Señor de Ulloa to come with me and see it," agreed Jones.

"Oh, Bob! we have seen Nee-Nah!" cried Katherine. "She came from somewhere among the ruins and crossed the bridge just now. I called to her; but she

seemed to be frightened, and ran down the valley. Mr. Kelly and I both saw her quite plainly."

"I did not know her name," said Kelly gravely, "but we certainly have seen a most remarkable young woman, Robert; most remarkable." The Martian paused and glanced significantly at Katherine.

Jones just then was carrying too many odd affairs in his mind to notice that both his wife and his friend looked queerly, or to pay attention to the emphasis in Kelly's words. Besides, Tomás, who *had* noticed, broke in to ask if anything new had happened. Jones found it wise to say nothing.

The three Americans walked down toward the bridge. At a little distance behind them Tomás followed, bearing the body of his dead comrade. Jones asked how and where they had seen the girl, sketched briefly his underground adventure, and told Kelly what was known of Nee-Nah.

"Could she have had anything to do with the affair back yonder, I wonder?" he continued. "I wish I had the time and men to turn this old place inside out. I shall suggest it to Don Castro, anyway."

One ray of sunlight, shed between two hills, still lay warm upon the bridge. As they crossed, the Martian continually changed his position, looking to one side and the other and behind him. Katherine watched him intently; indeed, to a lesser extent, she imitated him. For the first time Jones noticed that there was something strange in their glances and actions.

"Here; what kind of a parade are you two doing?" he demanded, laughing. "Have you lost anything?"

"Robert, after seeing that marching army of turtles vanish into dust, I thought that I was prepared for anything," replied the Martian; "but I was mistaken. Bear with me, Robert. You yourself have just passed through a strange experience.

"Robert, look at my shadow here; at Mrs. Jones's; at your own. Does any of us appear to have more than one?"

Jones looked, and laughed again. "Bless you, no. What are you driving at?"

"Robert, the young woman who crossed this bridge a few minutes ago had six of them—as true as I'm a living man!"

"Six what?"

"Shadows, Robert."

"It is true, Bob," interrupted Katherine. "I saw them, too—six shadows—if they were not ghosts." She laughed nervously. "They raced beside her as she ran."

Jones beat the air with his hands as though he were combating hornets.

"I think that we are all going *loco*, as the Indians say," he answered.

CHAPTER X.

DON CASTRO'S STRANGENESS.

NIGHT was closing down on the camp when the adventurers from Chavin reached it. Near a leaping fire of *ichu* grass the ever-gregarious Grimshaw was seated on the edge of a spread poncho opposite the squatting figures of two of the *muchachos*.

With a set of celluloid dice and a handful of *medios*, the fat man was amusing himself and the Cholos by instructing them in one of the oldest games in the world. He did not appear at all lonely; and a scorched odor on the evening air, as of something cooked not wisely but too well, bore testimony that the "bones" had weighed heavily in the balance against the *muchachos'* preparation of supper.

As the others entered the fire-lighted circle, Zalmon arose with the agility which in him was always surprising, and stood clicking the dice in his fingers.

"I trust that you found the ruins interesting," he said affably.

"Very," returned Jones, striding past him.

"Exceedingly," observed the Martian, two syllables less laconic, and flung his lean form down by the fire, into which he began to gaze as though its depths held a weighty problem.

"Something is up," thought Grimshaw. Five minutes later Tomás came in with the broken body of Enrique slung across the back of a mule. Zalmon listened to the voluble explanations of the Aymara, and did not believe a word of them.

"Something is certainly aloft," he mused. "That fellow can lie like a Chinese cook,

and he is doing his best at it now. But why should I be downhearted? I am not."

His chubby fingers sought papers and tobacco, and he rolled himself a consolation.

Presently Nambe and the *arrieros* returned from Huantar; and the Cholos held an impromptu but vociferous wake over the remains of Enrique. Don Castro had been delayed, and Jones did not see him that night.

Soon after the arrival of the morning sun, Jim Arnold rode in from the mountain-trails, stiffened and weary from hours in the saddle and a fruitless vigil among the rocks.

"Saw nothing but moonshine and mists," he reported to Jones. "Didn't even meet a thief, though they seem to be fairly plentiful hereabouts. I think that some of the town boys in this neighborhood work while we sleep."

"After breakfast come to my tent," said Jones. "I can give you one good reason why you didn't find your mysterious enchantress—and I guess we will hold a council of war."

"My eye! What's the dirge?" Jim turned his head, and for the first time he saw the body of the dead *arriero*, which his brother Cholos was noisily preparing for transportation.

"That's a part of one hellishly queer mess. Your little experience in the rocks night before last was only a sample," Jones answered.

In Jones's tent Jim found Katherine, Jones and the Martian waiting for him. As briefly as he could, Jones set out the tale of their experiences among the ruins of the castle of Chavin, including the inexplicable presence there of the girl Nee-Nah. He did not in the relation see fit to make any mention of that young woman's puzzling multiplicity of shadows, which Katherine and Kelly had seen, or thought that they had seen.

Jim was tremendously excited by the story. Almost before it was finished he was upon his feet, flushed and eager.

"You saw her!" he exclaimed, turning to Katherine. "Couldn't you keep her? Did she speak to you? Which way did she go? What was she like?"

Without sequence the queries tumbled from his lips. His usually cool, gray eyes were all alight, and his rather matter-of-fact countenance bespoke an inward disturbance which surprised his friends.

Next to Grimshaw, Jim was the last one of the party whom they would have suspected of being led afield by the rare-hued goddess, Romance. But here he was, mounted upon one of her fleet horses and spurring it desperately.

Jones, who in his time had ridden one of those steeds, and ridden it hard, watched the youngster through narrowed lids and with a gleam of sympathy in his deep eyes. Katherine smiled. The Martian looked troubled.

Katherine held up her hand. "I will try and answer you categorically," she said. "I saw her. I called to her to stay, but she would not. She did not answer; but she did wave her hand."

"She disappeared on down the valley. With the exception that she wore a crest of green feathers in her hair, your description of her was almost photographic; and—she is very beautiful."

"Does she look like a Cholo woman?" asked Jim with a triumphant glance at Jones.

"Most assuredly no!"

"Remains the question of what she was doing at the castle of Chavin yesterday, where, to put it mildly, the proceedings were very unconventional," said Jones.

Arnold's broad jaw crept forward at least a half-inch. His expression became almost challenging.

"Do you mean to infer, Bob, that she had anything to do with that—that—"

"Murder," Jones finished for him. "It's an unpleasant word, Jim; but a murder was done yesterday. I don't know just how they handle these matters down here, but I assume that there will be some kind of an investigation."

"Pardon my getting hot under the collar, old man," rejoined Arnold with more moderation. "But that girl! Say, Bob, if you had seen her face as I did, at short range, so to speak, you'd hesitate a deucedly long time before you linked her up with anything as ugly as a murder."

"Just so," Jones nodded. "It is because I have seen that you are—er—interested in the young lady that I have called you into council. I haven't told Don Castro about the affair yet, though I suppose that Tomás has. He would hardly tell De Ullos the yarn which he served up to the other Indians.

"Anyhow, Tomás knows nothing about the girl. So far, she's your own little party, Jim. But the killing of Enrique will have to be explained in some manner, I suppose; and I suppose further that the law of the land will want all of the facts. *Sabe?*"

"Sure," replied Jim, after a moment of consideration; "I wasn't born the son of a coroner without learning that much. Likewise, there's a lot of dope turns up at an inquest sometimes that the newspaper chappies don't turn over to the public.

"I hate the idea of that girl being hunted through the mountains by a lot of half-civilized and revengeful Cholos. Plainly, I want to find her myself; and when I do, I'll answer for her.

"I'll bet my last Abe Lincoln copper that she didn't have anything to do with that killing—but that ain't going to prevent some miserable Indian from taking a shot at her for luck, if he thinks that she was connected with the snuffing out of a member of his tribe."

"Then you propose that we hold out the appearance of the girl?"

"Why, I do and I don't. I want you to do what you think is wisest, Bob. You're the head of these works, you know. Still, I would appreciate it if she could be held out of the mess until it seems very necessary that she be brought in."

Jones smiled tolerantly at the younger man. "Very well," he agreed. "I shall say nothing to the don about her, unless further investigation makes it imperative."

Impulsively Jim wrung his friend's fingers. As he turned to leave the tent, the red-headed king of Bomavalu laid a lean hand on his shoulder and halted him.

"My first duty is to Robert," said the Martian gravely; "but at any time that I can be of use to you, the services of Nambe and myself will be at your disposal. It is in my mind that you will find your princess,

Mr. Arnold, and that you will be very happy—as I have been," Kelly sighed, and his long features became a shade more melancholy. Poor chap; he was thinking of the dusky wife from whom he was separated by so many leagues.

When Jones went out to find Don Castro he noticed that Enrique's body had already been sent on to his native village of San Marcos, and preparations to strike camp were under way. This was despite the fact that Tomás, as Jones had surmised, had told De Ulloa the truth about the death of the *arriero*.

Jones added nothing to the Indian's report. As the don was a former officer of the Peruvian army, and moreover had organized the caravan, the American decided that he would leave entirely in his hands the investigation and notification of the authorities.

De Ulloa said nothing to indicate what course he would pursue; but he suggested that he and Jones ride down to Chavin at once, which they did, accompanied by Tomás, and carrying torches, which Jones thought the Indian prepared rather unwillingly. During the ride the Peruvian was preoccupied; and though he was courteous, as always, he was not talkative, which was unusual.

As he had done on the preceding day, the Aymara tethered the mules at the bridge-head, and the three men crossed the chasm on foot and entered the ruins of the ancient temple.

Out of respect for the superstitions of Tomás, Jones did not ask him to touch the uncanny corpse of the stranger, but himself dragged it down from where he had left it, atop the fragment of a toppled column. The hours which had intervened since he last had seen it had not added to its attractiveness.

From white, fanglike teeth the shriveled lips had drawn away, and that, with the wide-open, impersonal eyes, gave the almost expressionless face the semblance of a vague, horrid grin—a mirth too large to reckon of human beings, a smile at fate, destiny, the universe.

Don Castro, tugging hard at his enormous mustache, walked slowly around the

body, eying it from all angles, but not touching it. At its head he paused again and shot a glance at the Aymara, accompanying the look with the sharply intoned question:

"What is it, Tomás?"

"*Maestro*, it is a *momia*—the dead ghost of a *Gentile*," replied the big Indian, who stood at a discreet distance.

"*Cáspita!* I believe that it is so," said De Ulloa. "Now go you, Tomás, and stay with the mules. The *patron* and I would talk."

Tomás went gladly. Over his shoulder he cast Jones a glance that registered "I told you so" as plainly as though he had uttered the words.

So soberly had the little don spoken in confirming the belief of the Aymara that for a moment Jones was deceived, and wondered if De Ulloa, too, was the prey of childish superstitions.

No sooner was Tomás out of ear-shot than the manner of the Peruvian changed. He smiled faintly at Jones, went down on his knees and examined the body closely, even eagerly.

"It is of course a man, *señor*," he said at length; "and a white man, even as the *señor* and myself—but *carramba!* how strange!" He mused for a moment. "Shall we bury it, *señor*, or shall we carry it below and leave it in one of the chambers there? That would be simplest."

"But the authorities," objected the surprised American. "Shall you not notify them? Will there not be an investigation?"

"What would be the purpose, *señor*? Tomás has told his tale, and it is a good one. To alter it, would but be the beginning of endless trouble. Enrique, *que Dios haya*," and he crossed himself piously, "will sleep as soundly without it—and we much more so. You are in haste to go on, *señor*, are you not?"

"You mean that we should be much delayed?"

"*Ciertamente*. To change the story of Tomás, would be to bring a visit of the *alcaldes* of San Marcos with their silver-trimmed staves and their ignorance; then an inquiry before the *gobernadore* of the town, who is hardly less ignorant.

"In time the *corregidor* of Huantar would hear of the matter and, though he is an honest man and not like some of the miserable *caudillos* in office, he would be forced to notify the government at Lima. There would be a fine *función* (row) over one poor Cholo; and many weeks, perhaps months, of the *patron's* time would be wasted."

"We will leave the body in the vaults," said Jones, setting a match to one of the torches.

In one of the narrow chambers in the rock beyond the great underground court of the temple with its carven altar they left the mysterious stranger to sleep out his long sleep.

As the gloomy crypts seemed to hold no terrors for Don Castro, the two men penetrated them for a considerable distance. Nowhere did they find trace of occupancy, or any clue to an explanation of why the grim-visaged white man should have lurked there and slain the guide.

When they had given up the search and turned once more toward the shaft, Jones asked his companion if he had formed any theory on the occurrence.

"No, *patron*, I have nothing of what you name theory," was the ambiguous reply; "but strange things sometimes have happened in the Cordillera—and in the Montaña."

It was too dark to see the Peruvian's face; but his voice broke queerly: and he had not stumbled.

"It is best that this matter should rest where it is, *patron*," he continued. "At the present moment wild tales are being whispered in the mountain villages. Tomás told you truly: should a breath of what has happened here reach the ears of our Indians, brave as they are in the face of things which they can comprehend, they would desert like rats. Neither your gold nor my words would hold them. I advise you to let it rest, *patron*, lest it interfere with the larger matters which are to come."

"I never have told you my object in wishing to reach the Ucayli," began Jones, in the thought that now would be as good a time as any to inform the don.

"Nor do I seek to know that reason,

señor," came the quick response. "It is sufficient for me to know that you *do* wish to go so far as the Rio Ucayli. And I tell you, Señor Jones, that strong as your reason may be, it can be no stronger than mine for wishing to accompany you."

They had reached the gallery leading to the shaft. De Ulloa stooped and picked up the blood-stained copper ax of the stranger, which still lay on the floor where Jones had left it.

"This at least *is* of the Incas, *patron*," he said, his tones indicating that he welcomed the change of subject. "Never have I seen a finer specimen. Tomás shall clean it, and you will keep it as a *souvenir*."

"I guess we are quits, old chap, so far as holding out on each other is concerned," thought Jones, and he felt no further qualms on that score.

De Ulloa preceded him up the spiral stair, and they left the temple. As they were crossing the outer court, Jones asked casually:

"Señor de Ulloa, have you ever heard that any of the natives have found an occasional emerald among the hills?"

Don Castro started like a man touched by heated iron, and let fall the copper ax.

"*Esmeralda!*"

The single word burst from the man's throat in a hoarse cry of anguish. He whirled to face Jones, who had pulled up in surprise at the result of his simply query.

The little Peruvian's lined face had suddenly become haggard; his black eyes glared, and his mustaches fairly bristled. "*Dios mio!*" he groaned, and again, "*Dios mio!*" His features slowly composed themselves; but he breathed like one who has run a hard race.

Jones, feeling that he never should become used to the explosiveness of the Latin temperament, eyed him disapprovingly.

"Your pardon—*patron*," the don gasped, and it was evident that the words cost him an effort. "You startled me—you cannot understand—how much. Some day—I will explain. No, *patron*; I never have heard of such a thing. Does the *patron* then—"

He checked himself, recovered the hatchet, and strode hurriedly on. All the way back to camp he was silent, gazing

steadfastly between the ears of his plodding mule.

For the first time Jones began to regret his choice of guide.

Was the don crazed? Why else should a casual interrogation so affect him? The word "*esmeralda*," which De Ulloa had shrieked at him, Jones knew to be merely the Spanish for "*emerald*."

Was the little don, too, a seeker after the green gems? Was he an honest but deluded man, or was he a trickster?

CHAPTER XI.

THROUGH THE CORDILLERA.

CAMP was being broken when Jones and the don returned; and the start was made at once down the valley of Chavin.

Jones, riding near the head of the little caravan, reined in alongside of Arnold and related to him the sequel to the adventure at the castle of Chavin, and the inexplicable behavior of Don Castro.

"Looks as though we were heading into the unknown under the guidance of a lunatic—or worse," he concluded. "Pleasant prospect. Mysteries are great things—in books; but when it comes to a man's daily diet, they're a bit too highly flavored for comfort. I think we're getting more than our share."

"Our Castor Oil may be a trifle touched in the head, but I'll wager that he's an honest man just the same," responded Arnold. "Why, he even has scruples against telling a lie to an Indian. And I doubt, Bob, if in the whole of Peru you could have found a better guide. Everybody says so."

"David, the Cholo who went back into the hills with me last night, declares that the don has made more trips into the Montaña than he has fingers and toes. There is some sort of a queer yarn connected with his journeys into the wilderness; but David doesn't know what it is—or won't tell, which amounts to the same thing. He looks at the don as something more than human."

"By the way, I tried to pump David discreetly as to whether he'd ever heard of a strange white girl living here in the moun-

tains; but the cuss began to lose his toe-hold on earth at once, and I had to quit. He began to roll his eyes and tell hair-raising tales in his shivery Spanish about the spirits of the rocks—at least, the yarns seemed to raise *his* hair; it fairly bristled.

"If I hadn't choked him off, he'd have scared himself to the point of refusing to go on with me. I gathered from what he said that he'd heard something from the village gossips of Huantar that had given him the jiggers, and his goat was getting out of control. Bob, in the name of time, who and what can that girl be?"

"Seems to me that some one else's goat has slipped its tether, too, old fellow," retorted Jones banteringly. "I never thought it of you, Jim; but—I've been there myself. From what you and Kate and Kelly have told me, the young woman must be a marvel. There is one consolation for you, Jim: she appears to be traveling in the same direction that we are.

"Kate says that when she hailed her yesterday she looked awful wishfully at Kelly, and seemed to be put out when she discovered that he wasn't some one else. Perhaps she's constituted herself your guardian angel, Jim, and means to see you through."

Arnold flushed and had no reply to offer.

Jim had come to South America to do all that in him lay to aid his friends in the recovery of Bobby Jones. Events of the last three days had added another objective to his future. It was to find the beautiful wanderer who had crossed his path—to follow and to find her, though the search should prove as hopeless as the strange quest of Don Castro.

That afternoon the party reached San Marcos, the home of Enrique, a village of *tapias*, or mud-walled hovels roofed with tiles or grass; with the ever present *plaza* and church; and with a sewage system of open trenches or gutters dug along, and in places across, the roadway.

As the sky threatened, and as they did not wish to submit their tents to the severe test of the torrential downpour of a cordilleran rain-storm, the travelers could have wished San Marcos different.

Luckily there was near the town a *tambo*,

a building maintained by the Peruvian government for the accommodation of transients, according to a usage which dates back to the days of the Incas themselves; and thither the wayfarers betook themselves.

"Wish the government had to live in it," groaned Jones when he saw it.

A *tambo* is not a hotel. It has neither landlord nor *maitre de cuisine*, nor yet servants. This one had four walls of sun-dried mud and a part of a roof; and that, and the fact that it was out of nasal range of the village, were about all that could be said for it. The *machachos* turned to and worked with a will to make it habitable for the night—and then it did not rain after all.

"A dog's limping, a woman's pouting, and a cordilleran sky: be ye ever doubting," quoted Don Castro, stepping in the morning from the inhospitable *tambo* into a smiling and cloudless dawn.

By the advice of De Ulloa, the members of the party attended the funeral of Enrique, which took place that morning in the little adobe church of San Marcos, and at which the presence of *los Americanos*, especially that of the golden-haired *señora*, provided a feature to be talked of by the inhabitants of the place for many days afterward.

"It will make us friends among the Cholos, who are none too well disposed toward strangers," explained the don; "and will make a good impression upon our own men, who do not labor entirely for the gold of the *patron*."

Shortly after the departure from San Marcos, the weather proverb of Don Castro was exemplified with a vengeance. Within an hour the sky became overcast, a chill wind tore down from the snow-caps of the cordillera, bringing with it a drive of rolling mists, and then a cold, pelting rain.

As no adequate shelter offered the way, it was decided to push on to the village of Puntou. Such rainproof articles as had been provided were brought into play, and the riders settled dispiritedly in their saddles to jog on through the downpour.

Even the stolid *arrieros* had to grin at the spectacle of Grimshaw. The bulk of the

fat man, shapeless within his rubber *poncho*, was balanced at the apex of the ridge of a raw-boned, scrawny, but brawny, gray mule, where it bore a resemblance to an enormous hot-water bottle. Where the plug of the receptacle should have been, thrust forth the vast pink face of Zalmon, a limp and lightless cigarette depending from his lower lip, extinguished as soon as kindled by the spray which the wind dashed into his countenance from the dripping brim of his drooping sombrero.

But cordilleran weather with all its attendant discomforts could not dispel the sunshine of Zalmon's smile. That was indestructible.

Jones, yielding to the inevitable with the best grace he could muster, had come to tolerate Grimshaw, as once before he had tolerated him. But Katherine, robbed of her son, hated him with a relentless and unabating hatred, which looked out of her eyes whenever they rested upon him; but to which he was smilingly impervious.

From the pass of Yanashallas, the route which Don Castro had chosen to reach the *Montaña* lay for many leagues through the almost treeless *puna* region of the upper slopes of the Cordillera—a succession of plateaux, interspersed with valleys, gorges, and cañons, cut mazelike among towering peaks and mountains of granite.

Almost the only vegetation to be seen was the *ichu* grass in the valley meadows and on the plateaux; and the only reminders of animal life were the peculiar, plaintive cry of the *vicuña*, a species of small llama, met infrequently in the misty meadows, and the warning shriek of the *alcamarini*, a shy, white, gull-like bird.

Through the transverse rifts wild winds swept down from the summits of perpetual snows, chilling even the hardy mules, and benumbing their riders. Electric-storms continually rumbled across the upper plateaus. Sometimes the dampened atmosphere became so surcharged with the fluid that the boas of *vicuña* fur, worn as a protection against the winds, crackled at the slightest friction, as did the hair of their wearers also, even to the emission of sparks if it were combed in the dark.

At times the trail became a mere ledge,

scarce foothold for a mule, winding around the base of an overhanging cliff at the brink of some frightful chasm, in whose unseen depths roared and rushed a mountain torrent.

In such spots each member of the crawling little caravan, plodding on in single file, instinctively leaning toward the bulging rock walls, felt the fearful loneliness of nature's solitudes:—at one hand the blind and forbidding mountainside; at the other the curling, billowing fantasies of the mists, creeping like white ghosts over the edge of the pathway, and beckoning with shadowy fingers to the terrible abyss which had given them birth; above them the clouds clinging about the summits of the granite spires—and so far floated the mists and so low the clouds, that none might say where was the boundary between them.

Always in the open places was the same tremendous background of successive ridge and spur and peak, piled mass upon mass and pinnacle upon pinnacle to where the highest white-clad summits, gleaming in some far-off sunshine, seemed to belong to another world. Always the ear was saluted by the same distant thundering and muttering, either of swift, insistent storm or of slow, patient, grinding glacier.

In this loneliness the tireless and hearty cursing of the *arrieros* was at once a welcome relief and a never-failing diversion; though it was well that Katherine knew nothing of the Quechua tongue in which it was couched. Certainly no muleteer of Andalusia in old Spain could have surpassed them in variety and fluency of objurgation.

Nestled at the foot of the mighty peaks, on flat plateau, in rolling valley, or beside a turbulent stream, were occasional villages of the type of Huantar and San Marcos, inhabited by the Cholo descendants of the ancient Quechuas, over whom the Incas ruled.

An out-of-the-world, primitive existence these people live, subsisting on the maize, potatoes and vegetables which they grow on the valley slopes, and on their noisy rookeries of fowls and their flocks of sheep and *vicuña*.

In each of these towns were folks who knew Don Castro, and who came to wel-

come him and to talk with him apart, calling him "Taita" (father). Sometimes it was a wrinkled Cholo crone, grinning with toothless gums and ceaselessly twirling her spindle as she gabbled rapidly in the ancient language; sometimes it was a stalwart young shepherd of the hills.

Whatever were the reports which they made to the don, he seemed to derive scant consolation from them. He was often moody and thoughtful, bending his lean, worn face over the head of his mule and twisting at his great mustache.

At Puncao, next stopping-place beyond Puntou, *los Americanos* had an opportunity to observe just how favorably these Cholos look upon the stranger within their gates.

It was necessary to procure fodder for the mules; and Jones, seeing a number of well-stocked coops in the village, asked Don Castro to negotiate the purchase of a plump pullet and a few eggs for Katherine's dinner.

To the door of one of the most prosperous-appearing of the low, thatched hovels rode the don, accompanied by Tomás, subduing with their fierce cries of "Za! Za!" a half-dozen miserable and savage dogs, which disputed every inch of their approach. De Ulloa dismounted, and, hat in hand and in his most courtly manner, interviewed the *señora* of the place, a middle-aged Indian woman, unwashed, uncombed, stockingless and shoeless, yet proudly conscious of the finery of her six skirts and her flat hat of plaited straw, bedecked with bits of dirty ribbons of all the hues of the rainbow.

"Has the gracious *señora* any alfalfa to sell?" queried the don.

"No hay, señor (I have not, mister)," replied the woman indifferently.

"Any barley?" persisted the don.

"No hay, señor."

"Any eggs?"

"No hay, señor."

"Any chickens?"

"No hay, señor." At least a dozen fowls were clucking within a rod of the door.

"*Cápita, señor!*" cried the woman, suddenly becoming animated; "your mule—he is eating a hole in my house!"

It was literally true. The hungry beast had taken advantage of his momentary

liberty, and was calmly munching the grass thatch of the low hut. De Ulloa took out his purse to make settlement for the damage, and at the same time passed a wink to Tomás. A cleverly aimed pebble from the hand of the Aymara laid one of the hens kicking in the dirt.

"*Dios mio, señora!*" exclaimed the don in feigned consternation; "my servant has misunderstood, and has had the misfortune to kill one of your fowls. What is the price of it?"

"*Ladrone! Picaro! Bruto!*" shrieked the enraged *señora*, and then began to curse Tomás in Quechua with all the fluency of a muleteer. Presently, under the influence of one of the don's cigarettes, his continued courtesy, and a few small coins, she became appeased, brightened up, and ended the comedy by offering quantities of all the articles which previously she had refused.

"Poor people," said De Ulloa, "money has little value for them; and they have been so often robbed that it is small wonder that they are suspicious of all strangers. They fear all strangers may be soldiers, and they abhor the soldiers as they do *los demonios*. They have the foolish notion that the government makes use of human tallow for the greasing of the soldiers' carbines, and that it is obtained by the kidnapping of luckless Indians."

Beyond Puncao the character of the country changed rapidly. The valleys were more frequent and more green; the sun shone warmer; here and there grew small groves of trees; thickets of willows bordered the water-courses; clumps of blue lupinus nodded about the edges of the tilled fields; violets and stitchwort bloomed near sunken boulders; and there were meadows aglow with yellow buttercups, grassy slopes spangled with dandelions, and high, nodding mustard encroaching on the Cholo gardens.

In succession the travelers passed the village and bridge of Chuquibamba and the towns of Chavin de Pariaca and Tanta-mayo. Above the bridge of Chuquibamba they had their first glimpse of the Rio Maranon, here a swift mountain stream dashing through the rocky gorges on its way to the lower reaches of the Montaña and the Amazonian plain beyond.

On the crest of almost every hill along the way were to be seen the ancient ruins of the Incas.

At these Jim Arnold often cast a wistful eye, wondering if within their crumbling portals the splendid, dark-eyed girl who had become his ideal and his dream might not be looking down to watch him pass. After leaving Huantar, he had heard no more of her; but his determination to find her was unaltered, unalterable.

At Tantamayo Jim fell before temptation.

CHAPTER XII.

“SOME EVIL BEFALLS.”

FEW earthly things breed such a sense of loneliness and depression as does the sight of a deserted human habitation moldering into quiet decay, untenanted, uncared for and alone. An abandoned village is more gloomy by far than a cemetery.

What then might one say of an abandoned country—the desolate, empty ruins of a nation that has vanished?

Scarcely a traveled league is there of the Andean trails that does not yield its poignantly melancholy reminder of a grandeur that is gone, of a civilization that has passed utterly from earth.

Sometimes it is a bit of rude but enduring masonry in the roadway, set there by toiling hands in past centuries to make safe the way for the tread of an armed host; or perhaps for some dusky emperor traveling luxuriously with his retinue of sycophants and slaves.

Sometimes it is a crumbling watch-tower or a length of old gray wall, frowning down upon the road from an almost inaccessible height. Here a feudal lord had his keep, and with his vassals and retainers lived his furtive life, in constant fear of attack by the enemies against whom he builded so strongly that even time, the leveler, has forborne to overthrow his work.

Again, it is a great, quiet hillside all furrowed and checkered with the remnants of the ancient terraces, where a teeming population once tilled the soil for its subsistence, utilizing every available inch of

space where the life-bearing mold, flesh of the earth itself, clung to its ribs of rock.

No vanished civilization of any land has left behind it such indelible traces of its having been, such a vast loneliness and melancholy in its departure as that of the Incas has bequeathed to Peru and her sister states of South America, where once its empire lay.

Even the Andes, mightiest of all the world's mountain chains, derive their name from the humble Quechua laborer's lowly terraces, the *andenes*, wherewith he set the impress of his simple toiling upon the hills forever.

Something of this Jim Arnold felt as he stood in the waning sunlight in a rolling green meadow near Tantamayo, and saw on the opposite side of the valley a row of square towers, dark and grim against the fading sky; eery and fantastic in their almost inaccessible isolation on the brow of a beetling, sullen hill.

It was quite the most remarkable collection of ruins that Arnold had seen; and it appeared to be in an exceptional state of preservation.

Though near—hardly more than a half-mile from the village—the stern old towers seemed as aloof from the squalid life of the valley town below them as though they had been separated from it by the width of a continent. Their proximity attracted Jim. He was in the mood for such things.

“I suppose that I'm an adjective fool to think of tiring my bones any more to-day,” he thought; “but I'm just coming up there to have a look at you old fellows.” He nodded at the brooding towers.

Katherine had been feeling indisposed, and Jones was with her in the small tent. The Martian had ridden into the town with Don Castro. Remained only Grimshaw, Nambe, or one of the Indians as a possible companion in the venture.

“What do you say to a little hike over yonder, Grimshaw?” Jim asked, pointing to the towers.

“Pardon me, Mr. Arnold.” Zalmon surveyed his bulk and heaved a sigh as he reached for his tobacco-pouch. “I wasn't designed by nature as a hill-climbing machine, except under strong compulsion.

"I'm afraid that you will have to excuse me. Next time we stop long enough in one place, I'll be glad to go fishin' with you, though."

"Nambe, want to take a walk?" called Jim.

"By dam! yes, sar," responded the islander promptly, and he ran to fetch the rifle with which the Martian had persuaded his grand vizier to replace his bow and arrows.

Arnold then asked Tomás if he would go along also; but the big Aymara, when he learned of the proposed destination, shook his head decidedly.

"No, *señor*—and I advised the young *caballero* that he not go. Do not enter there, *caballero*," he added earnestly. "Some evil befalls those who enter there."

With a grin at the superstitious warning of the Indian, Jim touched a match to his brier and strolled on across the valley. A couple of minutes later Nambe trotted out to join him.

Tomás looked gravely after them, shaking his head and muttering an incantation to ward off the evil influence of the *pistacos* or demons.

Twenty minutes of walking and climbing took Jim and his companion to the foot of the hill. The nearer he approached it, the more Arnold marveled at the strength of the place. With water and provisions, it seemed as if a half-score of men might have defended their stronghold indefinitely against any attacking force.

From the upper slope of the valley the hill rose almost sheer to its summit, and it stood apart, divided from its lesser sisters in the chain by chasms too wide and deep to have been bridged by primitive engineers in the face of opposition. In only one spot, on the valley front, was the acclivity susceptible to scaling, and there only by a path which was throughout most of its course hardly wider than a goat-run.

At the very bottom of their adamantine pile the archaic builders had begun their fortifications. They had hacked notches in the rocky spine of the narrow pathway and set slabs of hewn stone therein, thus spanning the steep with a tremendous stairway of more than three hundred steps, which

grew ever narrower and more abrupt as it approached the summit.

Half-way up their giant staircase the artisans had constructed a land-platform or sentry-box, strongly walled with masonry, in which was pierced a narrow postern. Above, at the brink of the precipice stood another section of wall with its trapezoidal portal, characteristic of the Inca architecture, defending for a number of feet each side of the last steep stair.

Aided by nature, the Indian craftsmen had achieved a masterpiece of military defense.

"Some place—eh, Nambe?" asked Arnold, gazing up the precipitous staircase, from the bottom of which he could no longer see the towers.

"Ho, yes, sar. Indians tell-um ghosts of granddaddies make-um heap years long time 'go," informed Nambe, looking doubtfully from the stairway to Arnold.

"Well, here goes." Jim set foot on the granite steps and began to climb. As they ascended he noticed that Nambe's enthusiasm was oozing rapidly, and he was lagging. "Getting cold feet?" inquired Jim with a grin.

"No, sar; my shoes plenty warm," the islander replied innocently.

They reached the landing-place half-way up the acclivity, clambered through its postern and stopped to rest. Nambe was breathing much more heavily than his exertions seemed to warrant.

"S'pose-um we go back camp—come try him to-morrow?" he suggested ingenuously.

"Why, we've lots of time! You're not afraid, Nambe?"

"Ho, no, sar. Jus' t'ink Tamal Kellee might want-um something. *Huh! Wha' dat?*"

Clack!

A hard object struck sharply on one of the topmost steps of the ascent.

Clack-clack! Clickety-clack! Clack!—Clack!—Clack! each time lower and nearer.

Whatever it was, it was descending the stairs in widening leaps, striking, bounding, and striking again, and setting dry echoes rattling across the cliffside.

Jim, peering upward, caught one glimpse of a whitish sphere as it flashed through a

beam of sunshine above his head; then it crashed on the rock at his feet, rebounded wildly from wall to wall of the landing-chamber, and lay still in the middle of its floor.

Nambe regarded it with bulging eyes. Stepping backward as cautiously as though he trod on pigeons' eggs, he lifted a leg over the threshold of the postern. "Me go-um back camp now," he whispered.

The thing that had come down the ancient staircase to meet the intruders, though chipped and battered by its rude career, was still recognizable. It was a gray human skull, which sat upright on its base and regarded them blankly out of its cracked eye-sockets.

Arnold stooped and picked it up. Nambe shrank farther through the doorway, as though bent upon eliminating himself gradually from the situation.

"Who could have thrown it?" was Jim's first thought. At once a number of ways occurred to him by which it might have been started on its perilous course. It must have lain at the very brink of the stairs. A touch had toppled it, and it had come on, gathering new impetus each time it struck the rock.

And what had given the first impulse to its flight?

Perhaps a bird had its nest at the foot of the wall, and it or its young had fluttered against the skull and displaced it. A squirrel might have done it; or perhaps it had been plaything for the cub of one of the small, spectacled bears of the regions, which live timidly in hidden caves on the rocky heights. It might have been merely the prank of a sportive gust of wind.

"Come on, Nambe; probably the wind blew it down," said Jim, moving on across the platform.

Now Nambe, after his own fashion, believed in a hereafter, and called it *Panoi*; and would have followed Brutus Finlayson Kelly thither without hesitation or question. But Jim Arnold was not Kelly; and Nambe was not prepared to die—and he smelled death at the top of that steep stairway.

Skulls did not jump down-stairs at people

for nothing. Probably there were more of them up there; and they were not pleasant things to meet in battle. Whoever heard of a man, even a white *tamal*, killing a skull? It was not done in Nambe's country. Nambe's private view was that only a idiot would try.

So the islander shook his fuzzy head vigorously and withdrew from the platform.

"Nambe go-up back camp, quick now," he repeated, and took a step downward, clutching at the pit of his stomach, where, under his husks of civilization and next to his naked hide, reposed his *vele-mana*, the magical pouch which every true Melanesian carries to preserve him from spiritual damage.

Jim saw that Nambe's superstitions were rampant, and that it would be useless to cajole them.

"Well, anyway, wait here for me," he said. "I won't be gone long; and I'll carry this thing with me if you don't care for its company."

"Nambe wait-um down dar." The islander indicated the foot of the stairs, and began to clamber down, humming to himself a Savoan ditty as a crutch for his lame courage. Jim, cool-eyed and unafraid, started on the steep ascent.

At the foot of the stairs Nambe sat down where he could see the comforting gleam of the leaping camp-fire across the valley, and waited for the young white *tamal* to go up and meet the ghosts. Only once he looked up. Jim already had disappeared.

The sun's light failed rapidly. Night was peering over the distant summits and preparing to descend into the valley. Curling white mists of evening crept up to the bare rocks and clothed them for their night's repose.

Nambe took out the big gold watch which Kelly had given him. Ten minutes he counted on its dial—fifteen—twenty—

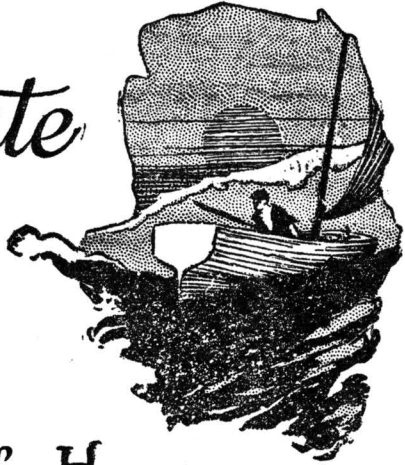
From the misty heights of the hill rang a hoarse cry. It was not repeated.

Before its echoes ceased to tremble on the hillside, Nambe, without a backward glance, trotted off across the twilighted meadow to report at camp that an evil had befallen.

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.

Teach: Pirate De Luxe

by C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne



THE first of C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne's series of stories detailing the adventures of "Teach: Pirate De Luxe," was printed in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, issue of May 22. One will appear in each of our issues throughout the summer months. While each story is complete in itself, all are concerned with the adventures of that likable blackguard, Captain Teach—descendent of the notorious pirate Blackbeard—and charming Mary Arncliffe.

VII—BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

THE boat was flung dizzily up on the top of a wave-crest, with the spin-drift slicing over her gunwales, and then sank with a sickening swoop into the next sea valley.

A slop of dirty water swished backward and forward in her interior, carrying with it bits of a broken floor-grating, and a baling can, and three straw bottle cases.

A gorgeous silver sunset balanced steadily over the uneasy water ahead, or at least it was silver on Cambridge blue, with French gray fitments. The man in the boat, who was an architect by trade, admired this sunset between spasms of seasickness. The view astern was blocked in with an assortment of purples, slashed by one streak of lurid red.

It seemed incredibly threatening. He was a nervous man, and he knew that somewhere behind him was the dark and threatening Captain Teach he had escaped from.

The sunset ahead changed. The silver

went. The grays increased; dove grays, French grays, lurid grays; and some of the clouds began to mottle with golds and yellows. Astern the purples darkened, and the distant boom of a gun bumped through them dully. Astern, too, the wave tips were neatly gilded by the afterglow, and suggested to his scared mind smoldering flames.

The man was no sailor, but—solely with the idea of escaping from the neighborhood of Teach—he had got the whale-boat's mast stepped, and a jib, the only sail he could find, hoisted. He sheeted it slackly, and the jib flopped about as it pleased.

Steering with an oar was beyond him. So the boat automatically kept the wind aft and got away to the westward on a reasonable course.

Just as the sunset died—without that opalescent warning one is used to in more northern latitudes—and the tropical night snapped down, the whale-boat rose on one

of the giddy wave-crests, and the man caught a glimpse of a small turtle-backed islet, decorated by one small palm tree. Then he slid down again into a trough, and when next he was expressed to a summit, stare how he might, there was no islet in sight. All was blackness, and—for him—despair.

Then from out of the darkness ahead a crumb of yellow light appeared, hung steadily in place for a moment or two, and then moved away to his left.

The man in the boat refused to draw comfort. "Bahama wreckers," he told himself, "up to their old games. They think they are going to lure me ashore."

The man, you gather, had a fine opinion of his own value, for from the look of the boat one would hardly have taken him for a realizable asset. Further, the "luring" part was rather overestimated, as he had no command over the boat whatever.

That any one should be carrying out a piece of ordinary longshore courtesy did not occur to him for a moment because, if the positions had been reversed, he certainly would not have troubled himself to do such a thing.

As a consequence, when the boat, which was a dainty, flimsy yacht's whaler, did hit the beach, she missed the snug bay where she could have landed handily, and was crushed into match-wood by the surf inside a dozen seconds. The man was lugged out, limp and draggled, by a slim, athletic young woman who wore white satin knickerbockers and bobbed black hair. She dragged him to where she had set her hurricane lantern on the sands.

The man spat out salt water and seaweed, and "What do you want?" he gasped.

The girl stared at him for a moment, and then: "I want to shake you," said she. "Why didn't you head up for the harbor when I showed you the way? You'd sail on the boat. You could have done it as easily as not."

The man blinked at her through the gloom. She might be extraordinarily dressed, but she was a really pretty girl, and had the tones of a lady. "I'm afraid I'm a duffer at handling a boat. May I ask your name?"

"I'll learn yours first. Also, what are you doing on my island, please?"

"I'm Halton Ghyll." He paused there, evidently expecting her to recognize the name. As she showed no signs of doing so, he added, "of Boston. The landscape architect, you know."

"Ah," said the girl, and she might have known of his celebrity, or again she might not. "And why is Mr. Ghyll boating in these seas, after dark, when it is possible to catch a chill?"

"I am escaping from the pirate, Teach."

"Then, after seeing your seamanship, I am sure Captain Teach did not want you, or he would have helped himself."

"My dear young lady, may I suggest that your attitude is rather frosty to an unfortunate castaway? I have been down in Florida building a beautiful house for a purse-proud millionaire who doesn't deserve it, and was coming home on his yacht. Yesterday afternoon a thing like a Hudson River tug came near us, demanded in the name of Teach that we surrender, and promptly began to fire on us."

"And you fired back, I hope. Are you a good shot?"

"Well, you see, that's rather the crew's job, don't you think? And as you pointed out just now, I'm no sailor. But when the engines got disabled, I did come up on deck and help to lower a boat, and get into it."

"But why alone? That whaler would have carried ten."

"The others weren't quick enough. The boat got swept away from the yacht's side, and, as I've told you, I'm no sailor. I could no more get her back than fly. I suppose there must have been a current or something. And the way she tossed about made me disgustingly squeamish."

"Anybody else get away besides you?"

"I'm afraid I don't know. You see, it was all so very confused."

"Well, was the yacht captured, or was she sunk? You must know that. It would be one or the other if Captain Teach was after you."

Ghyll stared at her curiously. She was an extremely good-looking girl in spite of her weird clothes, and she seemed defiant.

"That again, I can't tell you. I drifted away very quickly, and was for the most part lying down in the bottom of the boat. Perhaps I was a little delirious."

"Afraid of being shot at, I suppose. Whose yacht was it?"

"Ogden Brearley's Maid of Athens."

"Phew! The lumber king. My father met him once. And was he on board?"

"He was."

"Any ladies?"

"No. They went North by train. They shied at Hatteras."

"Thank God for that. Well, Mr. Ghyll, you may take it, I fancy, that Captain Teach has got hold of Mr. Ogden Brearley and is wringing something valuable out of him. Captain Teach is not the man to kill the goose that puts by the golden egg. I'm not exactly sorry, either. My father, who is in the bent-wood trade, told me the way Mr. Brearley pushed up prices during the war for the stuff we had to use for aeroplanes was a national scandal.

"Now, about you. You've come to my island without being invited, and you'll have to do as you're told. To begin with, do you want a house?"

"Well, I can hardly sleep in the open, can I?"

"I don't see why not. I've done it myself."

"May I ask where you live now?"

"In a house I've built for myself out of wreck wood stuff, and I've neither room nor inclination for a lodger."

Mr. Ghyll was pulling himself together. "I think there's a law in the Bahama cays, Miss—er—er—"

"Miss Bahama."

"Bahama? Er—oh, I see. Certainly, if you like. Well, as I was saying, Miss Bahama, there's a law hereabouts which says that if hospitality isn't offered to you pleasantly, you help yourself to it; gently, of course, but none the less firmly."

"May I ask," inquired this surprising girl, "if you've got a pistol on you? A gun, I believe you call it in the portions of your own country you probably affect."

"No, I haven't. I told you I came away from the yacht in a hurry."

"Now, that's deplorable. Because you

won't be able to shoot back at me when I shoot at you." She drew a line across the wet sand where the lantern light fell upon it, with her bare toe. "Your territory till to-morrow morning, is to the south of that line. I live on the north side.

"To-morrow I'll readjust your boundaries—perhaps. But if you encroach by so much as one yard before breakfast time, Mr. Halton Ghyll, I'll make you wish you'd never been born. Again, in the film language of your own land, do you get me?"

"I do. But you are very unreasonable. I only wanted—"

"Quite so. I am unreasonable." The girl picked up her hurricane lantern, and held it up to illuminate the man's blond, handsome face. "And I grasp what you said you wanted.

"We will now part for the evening. Right about turn. Do you hear me? Right about turn. Quick—march. You may halt before you walk into the Atlantic Ocean, which is deep in places."

Miss Mary Arncliffe's residence on the Bahama cay, to which she had given the somewhat unoriginal name of Maryland, owed its site to a wrecked sponge-boat. The ribs of this craft protruded from the sand. The skin and decking, which had been of soft wood, had mostly disappeared.

Mary made up deficiencies in scantling with other wreckage, filled in walls and roof with clumps of seagrass and sea-thistles, and actually achieved a door, which, with its necessary frame, she found flung up above high-water mark. A niggardly skylight the wreck already possessed, and the detail that it lacked glass was no detriment in a climate where ventilation was an urgent necessity. She christened it—with two chocolates—Maryland Manor.

Once built, Mary stood back from her house, with thumbs in armholes, chewing a straw, and saw that her house was good. It even achieved a rusty stove and stove-pipe, and though of course cooking indoors was an impossibility owing to the Maryland temperature, there is no doubt that the stove made for hominess.

She built in a narrow shelf for the seagull eggs that she knew to be fresh, and a broad shelf for the might-be's. Her two

chocolate boxes and the mending materials had a shelf to themselves, not because they were mementoes of Captain Teach, but because they were useful.

Captain Teach's two cases of loot she hid elsewhere, and wondered if he would torture her after the manner of his kind, if he arrived and found them missing.

Be it well understood though, at this time she told herself repeatedly she had thrown Teach off the scent. But then Teach was so detestably clever that you never could be sure.

Three days she had spent on Maryland Cay too busy housebuilding to be either frightened or lonely, and then had arrived Mr. Halton Ghyll.

Now Mr. Ghyll was a good-looking, fair man of rather the barber's block type, and women liked him. Possibly they liked him for his outward charms, possibly for his little ways, possibly because he was a fashionable architect; I am not analyzing the reason, but merely reporting fact.

As a consequence, he had that assured way with women which those sort of men always acquire. Presumably the bulk of women like it. Mary Arncliffe did not. Mary resented him from the moment she pulled him out of the surf, where he did so little to help himself.

Ghyll was an architect, certainly, but prided himself on not being a vulgar builder. Consequently, after stumbling about some time in the dark over the sand dunes, he at last sat down and promptly dropped off to sleep.

He awoke with a headache, and a red nose, and blown sand in every fraction of his person. He was savage against Teach, he was savage against Ogden Brearley, but, unreasonably enough, he was most savage of all against the young woman in the white satin knickerbockers and the ragged upper garment who had the impudence to introduce herself to him, of all men, as "Miss Bahama." With a vast experience at the back of him, he had every intention of teaching her a lesson.

First, however, it was necessary to find her, and as there were no sign posts on Maryland, and he lacked the instinct of direction, this entailed a weary plod among

sandy wastes, where resting seafowl resented his intrusion with noisy vigor. A tang of wood smoke in the air gave him the required hint when he was nearly dropping with tiredness.

"This morning," said Mary Arncliffe, "I will put up the breakfast. Afterward, it will be your job to do the hunting. Also, the wood gathering.

"I shouldn't bite into that baked egg all at once, if I were you, unless you are fond of chickens. Divide it with your thumbs first, and then you can see if it is likely to be too rich for you."

"Ugh!" said Halton Ghyll, and flung the egg violently over a hill of the sand. "Give me that other egg, please, which you were going to eat yourself. I may say, these kids' tricks do not amuse me."

"Certainly, Mr. Ghyll. Here's a second egg; the one, as you politely guessed, I was going to eat myself. And that's the end of your ration."

"Unless I want more."

"If you want more," said his hostess dryly, "you won't get it at my table. You'll have to forage for it yourself at the end of Maryland I assigned to you, and cook it."

"You've eggs there. I shall take what I want."

"Now, here's news!" said Mary Arncliffe. "When do you propose to begin?"

Mr. Halton Ghyll, it appeared, was a lawn-tennis player of note, and his rush was a quick one. So also was his halt. So also was his retreat.

"You needn't run away any farther," Miss Arncliffe informed him, "if you will learn to behave yourself like a—well, shall we say a reasonable member of society?"

"I'm bleeding horribly. You just missed my eye with that stab."

"Sorry. It was your eye I aimed for. You've the weight, you see, Mr. Beast, and I won't let you come to close quarters."

"There is a Richardson's skua's nest behind you that the owner has ceased to occupy. Please sit in it. Do you hear me, Mr. Ghyll? Sit in that nest, or I'll jab you again.

"Thank you. Just so. And stay there. You are safer at moorings.

"But don't forget, if you're feeling evil again, that I've my spear quite handy. Here's your second egg. Catch."

"It seems," said the architect viciously, "that I'm out of the frying-pan into the fire. I suppose Teach would have robbed me, but he would have behaved decently over it. Yes, I will say that for Teach, and one way and another I've seen a good bit of him. He always behaved like a gentleman."

"Here's news! Also, a character for a notorious pirate. Are you speaking the truth by any chance—did you really know Captain Teach?"

"I regret to say he was a member of the Beefsteak, which is my New York club. Don't know how he got elected; but there he was; and a jolly popular member, too. He was a man who always could be relied on to order the best dinner available, and that, let me tell you, is an art."

"He once showed us there a portrait by Sir Godfrey Kneller of the original Blackbeard. I honestly believe it was genuine. Fancy bucking about having a pirate for great-grandfather."

"It isn't every one who knew what his people were in 1718."

"Well, there you are. It's an infernal pity he's turned out the way he has. I used to meet him a lot till about a year ago—er—as I say till about a year ago. Haven't seen him since."

Miss Arncliffe thought a moment, and then: "Why have you ceased going to the Beefsteak for this last year?" said she.

Mr. Ghyll jumped up from his nest as though he had been stabbed a second time. The sticks creaked and crackled as he sank back on to them.

"What have you heard about it? There, I felt all along you knew Mr. Infernal Teach. I'd never have thought he was the man to distort things. Anyway, I don't care a row of pins what he said.

"The plain truth is, I resigned. What the committee chose to do after I'd ceased to be a member, I can't say. The whole thing was very damaging to me professionally.

"You see, Teach was so popular with the rest of the members, I felt I shouldn't

have a look-in if it came before the committee. So I resigned."

"I wish you'd sit quiet, and not talk about things that don't interest me. You've trodden on that second egg—well, I'm afraid it was a rich one. Here's another. Catch."

But in spite of her austere proposals to limit Mr. Ghyll's breakfast, Mary's natural hospitality went further than her words. The man ate till he was filled, but even then he did not appear decently grateful to his hostess.

His fine-blond face was sullen and lowering. Mary, despite her debonair manner, felt him to be menace incarnate, and kept the thin haft of the spear handy to her fingers.

As a weapon, the spear was new to her. But at school she had learned fencing, and she had kept it up at intervals during her service with the W. A. A. C.'s, and knew how to do that daunting thing, "give the point." The one item she had to keep in mind was to dart in and out so quickly that he could not get a hit on the frail bamboo shaft and smash it.

She was horribly afraid of Halton Ghyll, but viciously determined to damage him badly if he gave her the least opening. In the meanwhile she wasted no civility on him.

"As you've finished your breakfast, you may now go to your own side of Maryland, and gather eggs."

"I'm fagged out. I'm going to stay where I am—Ough! You little hell-cat! I'll wring your neck if I get hold of you!"

"I'm sure you'd try. Now get a move on, or I'll puncture you again. D'ye hear me, beast? March! Right—wheel!"

Mary did not sleep in Maryland Manor that night, but in a burrow she made for herself, after dark had fallen, and before the moon rose, under the farther side of the wrecked sponge-boat's ribs. As she expressed it to herself, she "had a feeling in her bones" that the devilish Mr. Halton Ghyll still imagined himself a power in Maryland.

She lay awake, watching.

The noisy sea-fowl of the isle dropped the main parts of their arguments at sun-

down, but kept up a *soto voce* chattering throughout the night. Also, the surf bellowed on the weather beaches, and the wind hissed and swished through the seagrasses and the sea-thistles. So there was plenty of noise to cover the approach of the most clumsy of stalkers. And, of course, the sand muffled all footsteps.

But Ghyll had forgotten the moon, and although he made the last advances crawling, he showed his menacing silhouette against a skyline, and Mary was ready for him when he arrived.

But she did not interfere at once. She let him fumble for the handle, and open the door of Maryland Manor, and lower himself into the dark interior before she moved. But she acted then with a vigor.

She reached the door in a couple of jumps, slammed it shut, and wedged it fast with a stiff balk of wreckage. Then jumping on to the roof, she proged downward with her weapon through the narrow glassless skylight and elicited howls.

I do not blame Ghyll for giving tongue. Anybody would have vented his feelings if he had been punctured so vigorously with an inch of darning needle set at the end of a bamboo rod.

It was Captain Teach himself—I beg his pardon, Admiral Teach; I. R. N., of course he was by that date—who put an end to the performance. His predatory, hawklike nose, and his ear with the bit clipped out, and his dogged black chin, rose from behind a sand dune, and his voice inquired unpleasantly:

“Mary, what are you doing with a man on this island, may I ask?”

There was a pause, and then: “Please remember I am Miss Arncliffe to you,” came the retort.

“Don’t give yourself airs. What did you let Blausberg, of all creatures, come here for? And what are you doing with him, anyway?”

“I don’t know what it’s got to do with you, Captain Teach—”

“Admiral Teach, please, if you want to be formal.”

“Oh, admiral, if you’re vain enough to want it. I don’t know what it’s got to do with you, but if it interests you, I’ll admit

that I was fighting him. But why Blausberg? The person said his name was Halton Ghyll.”

“Very likely. He’s a blond beast with many aliases. I understand he was on Ogden Brearley’s Maid of Athens, and had a bad attack of panic when I overhauled her. Sort of thing a dirty card-sharper of that clip would do.

“Drowned about six of his undesirable stable companions at the same time. Well, you get down to my boat, little girl, and I’ll attend to Blausberg.”

“Are you going to kill him?”

“Would you object if I did?”

“Certainly. He’s my—how do you put it?”

“Your meat?”

“I suppose so. I’ve been making holes in him with a darning-needle.”

The pirate’s grim dark face relaxed into a grin. “The darning-needle I left for you? That pretty lilac-sprigged organdy muslin seems to have petered out. But you’ve found another use for my darning-needle, have you?”

“Perhaps. Anyway, it’s an efficient darning-needle. Two-thirds of it are pushed into the end of this bamboo, and the other third sticks out. Mr.—er—the blond one, has been punctured by that odd third at least twenty times. It wouldn’t be fair to shoot him after having gone through all that.”

“I wasn’t thinking of wasting a shot on him. There’s one lone, lorn tree on this cay, and we’ve a spare end of rope.

“Now, Mary dear, you get away on board the launch. You needn’t wait for the rest of the ceremony. I’ll be with you in twenty minutes. Ah, Mr. Pickles, there you are. Brought that bit of line?”

“Yes, sir,” puffed the stout gunner. “But I hope you’ll give me time to splice an eye in the end of it. A bowline knot makes rather a clumsy job of this kind of noose, I always think.”

“Get your line hove over the top of that tree, Mr. Pickles, and don’t waste time. Miss Arncliffe and I want to be off.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” said the gunner, running a thick finger round inside his eighteen-inch collar, and taking himself off. “I

dare say we'll make an efficient job of it with the hangman's knot all the same."

"Captain Teach?"

"Admiral Teach, as I've just told you, please."

Miss Arncliffe stamped well-shaped toes on the sand. "Admiral, then. Well, I never asked you a favor before, and never shall again. But if you let that beast go unhanged I'll—you may—well, you've tried to call me by my Christian name a lot of times, and I've not let you. Now, will that do?"

"I don't quite see what you're driving at."

"I mean you may call me Mary if you want to, when you've let him go."

"Then you are fond of the fellow after a fashion."

"He's a beast, and I hate him. But I've punished him quite enough, and I'm a sportsman if you are not. I suppose he's swindled you at cards, and you're after him for that?"

The pirate's smile was an ugly one. "I've a strong mind to shake you. But nobody ever said I wasn't a sportsman. Your man doesn't hang. We'll leave him on your blessed Maryland to eat gulls' eggs, or fly away, or drown himself, exactly as he pleases.

"As my excellent great-grandfather would have said, we'll maroon him. And apropos of that, my dear, I want to take

you across to the other cay over there to leeward and show you the very desirable dugout my venerable relative had constructed for himself and Mrs. Blackbeard. You needn't fear there are any horrors. I've tidied it all up."

"But I can't go away with you," the girl gasped.

"I don't see what other choice you have," said the pirate grimly. "And 'once aboard the lugger,' you remember? Mary, don't be foolish. You have been about quite enough to know when a man's madly in love with you. And this man's not a nobody now.

"All the world is humming with his name. He's admiral commanding the Irish Republican Navy. And he's made Ogden Brearley lend the republic two million dollars, free of interest. Think of the delicious mess that lands the English and American politicians into! Just worry it out for yourself.

"It's mighty few people who dare to call me a pirate now. I'm a high-minded patriot. They made Morgan, who went pirating, with great-grandfather Blackbeard, a knight.

"Pooh! What's a knighthood these days? I'll have an earldom, Mary dear, before I'm through with it, and you shall be my countess. Come on now, and I'll show you now what the story books call the pirate's lair."

BOBBY THINKS THINGS OVER

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

DON'T like all these newfangled rules,
 Mus' think all us kids is dum fools—
 Can't have no fireworks, Fourth o' July;
 Jus' baby p'rades—an' speeches—*My!*

My dad an' uncles act real queer,
 Since they can't have their glass o' beer—
 Whichever way you turn you see
 Some new reg'lation, seems to me.

"Safe an' sane Fourth"—no crackers—gee!
 An' they call *this* the Land an' the Home ov the FREE!

Midnight of the Ranges

By George Gilbert

Author of "The Flame Orchid," "They Were Seven," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

ED BURLANE seated on his stallion, Midnight, had witnessed the altercation between Nicked-Nose Peters and Bart Barnquist over the lease of the water-rights on Twin Springs Ranch, Peters's place. What he had not witnessed was the frame-up in Brown's saloon. Young Barnquist had proposed the idea which met with the enthusiastic endorsement of the elder Barnquist and his henchmen, Maltrane and Weaver. Barnquist was to invite Peters into the saloon, pretend friendliness, and, when his back was turned Maltrane was "to get" Peters while Weaver shot-up the place with a nicked .38, such as Peters always used. Then Weaver was to grab Peters's cold gun and leave his own, which was like it, in the dead man's hand, and the rest was easy; a mere matter of explanation and corroboration. Peters's daughter, Berenice, would inherit her father's place, but young Barnquist undertook to deal with her.

Burlane followed Peters to Twin Springs, where he was welcomed by father and daughter. Burlane undertook to remain indefinitely, since he had come from Vernon way on just such a chance.

On the way to the Barnquist ranch, which was the largest and richest place in that corner of San Felice County, father and son quarreled over money. Barney wanted his father to give him a big sum of cash. Greasewood Kate, the Papago Indian half-breed, who presided over the domestic arrangements, had heard the last of the wrangle. She tried to comfort Barney, and reminded him she expected him to marry Ess-Way, her daughter.

Barney hastily dismissed the girl with an indifferent caress and consoled himself with a visit to Mescalero Pedro's place, where Maretta sent him about his business until he could show a big roll like a real ranger. Before he retired that night, Barney lifted a bullet from Weaver's belt and prepared his gun and six blank cartridges which looked like good .45's. The next morning before they left for town, Barney exchanged the faked .45's for the good ones in Maltrane's gun.

When the party of four reached Coppered Jack they found Peters on the street and invited him for a drink. Burlane, a few minutes later, arrived at the saloon and found it in an uproar. With both guns ready for action, he immediately took charge of the situation. Peters was on top of a writhing mass on the floor, and young Barnquist was denouncing him as the murderer of his father. Peters explained he had been attacked from the rear, and when he had reached for his gun found it had been slipped from his belt. Then he started in with his fists.

Peters asked Burlane to take the news to Berenice at Twin Springs, and he would wait at the house of his friend, Wickson, until the sheriff arrived. Barney watched beside the body of his father while all the town seethed with excitement.

While Burlane was taking Berenice into Coppered Jack to see her father, Pedro Aguilar slipped into the Peters place and stole Midnight.

Meanwhile the sheriff arrived and the coroner. A preliminary inquiry was held, but not the inquest. Barney, Weaver, and Maltrane all testified they had seen Peters shoot down the elder Barnquist. The sheriff committed Peters to jail, to be held on suspicion. Then Burlane went back to Twin Springs to get Midnight.

Burlane tried to follow the trail of the horse, but Midnight's tracks were lost in the trampings of the herd. Impelled to follow somewhere, he came to Maretta's place. The woman denied all knowledge of the horse, but promised to keep a sharp lookout.

After the funeral, Barney assured his men the ranch would be run in the old grooves. Maltrane, who admitted he was aware how the shells in his gun had been changed, was taken on by Barney at an increased wage. He would continue to act as the private killer for the master of Ox Bow Ranch. Barney had been unable to find a will, but Kate assured him his father had confided a will to her keeping and she had sent it on to Vernon for safety.

The jury to consider the death of Barnquist was not impaneled. The sheriff seemed to delay of set purpose. Burlane waited impatiently.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for June 19.

Then, when he was driving Berenice back to town, they met Maretta on horseback. The Mexican woman tried to imply things in her acquaintance with Burlane, and Berenice fell a victim to the other woman's wiles. That night she cried herself to sleep, having first dismissed Burlane with the taunt "he was just like other men." Mother Wickson, with whom Berenice stayed in town, thought she understood the girl's trouble.

CHAPTER XIII.

BARNEY PROMISES TO COME.

SWEEPING back toward Ox Bow, Maretta kept her keen eyes on the trail far ahead. So it was that she saw the object of her quest long before he had sighted her. Barney, astride the huge roan, his father's favorite mount, tricked out in a fine outfit of new clothing he had had sent up from San Antone, plenty of money in his pockets, was in high feather that afternoon.

He felt that everything was going as he wished. Working through Weaver, Barnum and Maltrane, he had kept up a constant running fire of small talk, indicating public impatience with the slowness of justice and the need of severe punishment against Peters. Toward Burlane he was studiously polite. He hardly noticed Berenice.

So he was feeling sure of himself. He had dismissed Maltrane at noon, intending only to ride about the home grounds of the ranch. After inspecting near-by improvements that he had ordered under way, he had ridden out to the main trail junction.

He had held himself in leash, now, for days. All the wild urges of his sullen passions were seething inside him, and he was really longing for an opportunity to give vent to his nature's inner stresses. The routine task of browbeating, deceit, domineering had palled on him. Maretta could not have appeared at a better moment.

With the wisdom of her kind, she was about to ride by, seemingly without more than a casual nod, when he touched his horse with spurs and in a moment the roan was beside the white mare. He glanced about. They were alone on the trail. It was safe to spend a few moments in dalliance with the dark-eyed woman whose taunts had worked such a deep influence upon him!

His hand went out to check her mare in. He caught the bridle rein, tugged at it.

The little mare, submissive, and hearing also her own rider's voice, slowed. Barnquist pulled the big roan to a walk. The Mexican girl shot a glance of slumberous provocation across the space between their saddles at the new heir of Ox Bow.

"Eet is long, Barnee," she cooed throatily, "dhat I wait to see you."

"Yes, Maretta, but it's been a busy time for me."

He reached into his pocket with his free hand, leaving the rein slack. He jingled his gold pieces seductively, smiled at her.

"You never thought, when you ragged me 'bout not havin' money, that I'd be in pap's boots so soon, with oceans of cash money, did you?" he demanded.

"Oh, Barnee, I deeadn't theenk so much 'bout dhat monee," she wheedled, eyes alight. "I was justa makin' a joke for you."

"Huh!"

He outthrust his chin, jingled his money again, took up the limp rein. He let go the rein of her mare.

"But you come soon to Chaparral Cock?" she asked softly. "It ees so lonesome dhere, Barnee."

He glanced about. No one was in sight. A short quick gallop, and they would be there. She laughed, letting her eyes flare over his features, on which his raw, callow desire burned fiercely.

"Yes, I'll come—soon," he agreed, leaning toward her so far that his saddle leather creaked with the strain he put on it in the leaning.

"How soon?" the lure of her coming to him stronger and stronger as she met him halfway by bending toward him with the supple grace of the born horsewoman.

"How soon—"

Her lips, fiery, compelling, swept his; his caution dissolved.

"Now!" and he struck her white mare a smart cut. The white mare bounded forward. The woman's light laughter trailed as the mare made off before his

heavier roan could get into his stride. Then, making it a merry chase, they went over the trail together, toward the wayside drinking hole.

Glad to be rid of his new employer for a while, tired of being kept close at the heel of the man who fed him, clothed him, armed him and paid him; tired, too, of teaching the seemingly slow heir of Ox Bow the elements of weaponry, Lars Maltrane yawning, uneasy, fared forth on the main trail, afork of his horse, and turned his steed's head toward the Chaparral Cock. He had not had his accustomed toss of *aguardiente* for days; had not bantered with the bar woman there; had not played a hand of poker with some one of the place's habitués. The dead King of Ox Bow had given him stated times off for such relaxation as could be obtained; so far, the new ruler had not seemed to care whether Lars ever rested from his lazy labors of retainership. Maltrane was in one of those moods when his silent nature craved for excitement—the jog of the unusual.

It was fully dark when he set forth. He let his mount go slowly, and as he rode he fingered his guns, new ones from the Ox Bow armory—a pair of the dead man's that Barney had thought best to give Lars. Maltrane was meditative, his mind running upon the curious fouling of his gun in the fight; his failure to kill Peters, although his thumb, fanning the hammer, had sped the six shots within the space of a triple heart-beat. He thought over again each detail of the swirling scene—in vain. It was beyond him. Heretofore he was sure when he shot that that which he aimed at would die. But now—

The lights of the Chaparral Cock shone dimly. With the gunman's usual caution, Lars did not make a direct approach. Sundry exploits there had made him enemies, and it was always best not to take the risk of a direct line of fire! He left his horse, reins on the ground, at a safe distance, sure that the animal would remain where he left it. He came to the entrance at an angle and brushed past several men who were about the door, evidently concerned with what was going on inside. He

heard voices high, angry; one most familiar. He had happened into the midst of a tense little drama that had its beginning when Barney Barnquist had arrived with Maretta long before.

When the two had ridden up to the Chaparral Cock, Maretta had sent the two horses to be cared for by one of the ubiquitous Mexican *muchachos* hanging about. She had indicated to Barney that for the time being he was to amuse himself about the place, while she, in deference to custom, supervised the early details of the dribble of traffic over the bar and in the kitchen. *Tortillas* and *frijoles*, *carne* in several modes, were served to Barney at a little table aside from the main groups, and he relaxed, smoked, jingled his gold. The Mexican habitués of the place drifted in and out. Many games sprang into action—chuck-aluck, poker, monte. The place was too small for faro—small in usual traffic. A couple of Mexicans in their steeple hats, little bells ajingle, began to throw dice softly on one corner of the bar.

Barney, his mind vacant, his senses limp, yearned for some excitement to bridge the present over into the future hours on which he was counting so much. The rattle of the dice caught his ear. He strolled over to the bar and watched the play. Maretta was not behind the bar, her place being taken temporarily by Aguilar, who greeted Barney courteously.

Barnquist always had had a desire to gamble, man-fashion, but owing to his father's policy in keeping ready cash for him, had not been able to gratify his passion. He had played for small stakes with the ranch hands and once had diced in Coppered Jack on credit, only to have his father's heavy hand upon him, when he was discovered at it. And now—

Barnquist shoved forward. Gamecock-like, he was athirst for battle, for big deeds, measured according to his standards. He had been bred to look down upon Mexicans as "mere greasers." That the two dicing there had any rights that he was bound to respect entered not into his head. He wanted to dice, to sprandle his money on to the bar, to hear it chink.

He shouldered between the two Mexi-

cans, seized the dice box at the end of a cast.

"I'll play you both," he roughly said, "dollar a throw."

The two Mexicans drew back, seemed about to dispute. A low word from Aguilar made them bow.

"*Si, Señor,*" one of them said, signing that he accepted for the two. "Poker dice, shall it be? Why play small? Gold piece against gold piece? One throw to decide each round?"

Barnquist rolled the dice, nodding, one of his gold pieces clanged on to the rough deals of the bar. The Mexican companied Barnquist's yellow bit.

Barney threw two pair—treys, fours.

The Mexican who had spoken cast—four fives. He took the money.

Barney threw again. The dice showed a lone pair—fours.

The Mexican cast, sardonic in expression. He had rolled *four fives*. He took the money.

Barney, irritated, snapped the dice from the box again. He showed three deuces. He thought he had won on such a throw.

The Mexican, smiling blackly, rolled the dice out. He had cast *four fives*.

Barnquist drew back quickly and eyed the two, who smiled at him so urbanely. They stood, hands on hips, puffing their cigarros quietly, their black, beadlike eyes gleaming.

"I don't like men who *all-ways* throw four fives," he snarled. Standing so, he was the great, hulking, clumsy boy.

The clack of tongues ceased in the room. Aguilar, smiling evilly, never ceased to puff at his cigarette.

"The *Señor* will recall that wee did not ask heem eento dhtee game," the Mexican spokesman smiled, shifting his weight just a bit.

"What's that mean?" Barney scowled, bulking over the other angrily.

The Mexican simply puffed, then sent a cloud of smoke toward Barney's convulsed face.

"The *young Señor* has poor manners," he purred.

Aguilar laughed, low, easily. The Mexicans in the room echoed it.

It was at this moment that Lars Maltrane looked in the front door. He saw the tensed bodies before the bar. He saw Barney's outthrust jaw, the silky playfulness of the insulting Mexican. He was on the point of crushing past the human barriers between and taking his place where his salary called him to be—at the side of his chief in trouble, when—

Barney Barnquist's right hand flowed in even, smooth, snakelike rhythm over to his left hip, where hung his gun, butt not worn sloppily turned backward as was his usual wont, but turned frontward, in real workmanlike fashion. The two Mexicans started their draw at the same moment, and because their hands were hipped in their seemingly languid pose of set insolence, they appeared to have the better of it. Barnquist had completed his draw; his gun spat—right, left.

The weapons of the Mexicans spun, shattered, with almost unbelievably accurate shooting; struck from the hands that had held them. Then the gun of Barnquist held the two cringing dark skins at his mercy and, his eyes blazing, he dominated the room. The two so threatened scuttled from the room, followed by Barnquist's scornful laughter.

Maretta came from behind the bar, having emerged swiftly from the inner room at the first sound of the clash.

"*Basta,*" she shrilled, "what have we? The King of Ox Bow is no boy; he is a man. He has fairly driven two of the worst gamblers of the whole region from our place. They are crooks, throwing cocked dice—"

A murmur of approval greeted her praise of Barney. In another moment Barnquist was ordering drinks for the motley crew and was accepted among them as one worthy of admiration.

Maltrane, amazed, watched the curious scene to the end. He saw the evident favor the woman was showing to Barney, remembered the young man's former subdued air and foolish attempts at frontier gallantry. And, more, he remembered the hours spent in showing the apparently hulking, slow heir of Ox Bow how to work out the fine points of revolver practise.

He left the neighborhood of the Chaparral Cock, musing. He caught his mount, forked the horse and rode back over the trail to Ox Bow. As he went, he found himself often saying mentally:

"I wonder how that young squirt is able to out-game two hard-boiled Mexican crooks like that at night and not able to get his gun out of its holster in time to hit a tin can that I throw up in the morning?"

"An' if so be he's such a good actor as seems, what else has he acted out, and how, and why?"

And again:

"He'll bear watching—a heap of it. You tread light an' soft an' easy, Lars Maltrane. You went into one J. P. with a gun that only shot dirt. Don't go nosin' into another 'till you know you've got real bullets in your gun and why you're into it, an' furthermo'e, how's 't goin' to end up?"

CHAPTER XIV.

A PRISONER OF HOPE.

"ATTEND, Maretta!"

It was Aguilar, cap bells ajingle, *cigarro* smoke acurl about his well-poised head, hands on hips, as he stood in the quiet of the morning before the bar of the Chaparral Cock. The woman behind the bar was pouting.

"I am attentive, *Señor*," she gave him, yet in seeming careless inattentiveness. Both were speaking correct Spanish.

"Attend!"

His hand flashed out and caught her small, supple wrist. Their eyes engaged in psychic duel. Hers fell—her wrist yielded. He twisted it.

The joint snapped. Her face wreathed in agony. He cast the hurt member aside.

"Attend!"

"*Sí, Señor!*" her phrase submissive, her great glowing eyes belieing it.

"There, that is better, *Señorita dulce!*"

He puffed smoke toward her—a cloud of insult that wreathed her face. She coughed. He laughed.

"It was well enough to entice that Barney Barnquist here, for gain," he went on, suave, cool; "but to do it for love, to give

him such warmth of greeting and attention—"

"But, *Señor*, it was your wish to lead him on—"

"There is a limit. Forget not that I, Aguilar, have the first claim on you, Maretta. In business we may do queer things, but once our fortune is made here, we go down into Old Mexico again, to enjoy our money. Now, attend again."

"*Sí, Señor?*"

"In some way procure a bit of the writing of that Burlane who owns the big black *caviard*, that Midnight."

"Why, *Señor?*"

"It may come well if I have it, that I may forge a bill-of-sale, with Burlane's name as seller, to me—"

"But that would be perilous—"

"In a certain case, yes. But Burlane is opposing the Ox Bow people. Something may happen to him," his mouth wreathed in a cruel smile. "If he should be found on the prairie, dead, and no one wise enough to say how he died; if I were to appear in time with a bill-of-sale, showing I have bought the big horse—it would add a thousand dollars to our wealth, *Señorita dulce.*"

"I understand. You shall have the paper, Pedro."

This softly, caressingly. She leaned over the bar, kissed him lightly on his pouting lips, just covered with a fine black line of well tended hair. He chuckled her under the chin and strode out, humming: "To-reador, make ready!"

As he went, the woman leaned her head on the bar and her eyes glowed. As Aguilar flicked forth into the sunlight, Maretta said to herself:

"Paff, for you, *Señor* Aguilar! But to draw from that huge Burlane a bit of writing will do no harm, and it will give me the chance to know him better."

Barney Barnquist had been gone for hours. He had left her with the dawn and ridden quietly off toward Ox Bow. The place would be quiet for hours, save for the occasional passer-by. She felt satisfied with the status of their *affaire* and glimpsed, afar, the delights of being mistress of Ox Bow. She thought she had but to humor the man-boy, the new heir, into marriage.

The depths of the new cattle prince's passions she had not plumbed—even his mastery of the gamblers had not opened her eyes. She had wound so many pliant men about her pink-white finger tips that to wind this one more completely seemed easy of accomplishment.

"Paff, for you, Pedro," she said to herself again.

Pending her triumph, she was a prisoner of hope, chained to the four walls of the wayside joint by the fear of the man whose will, up to a not remote day, had been her master. It was interest and a certain tiger-cat admiration for the suave Mexican that had kept her with him for so long. But now other ideas had entered her handsome head, and her eyes blazed as she teased her imagination by pondering upon them.

As he left the barroom, Aguilar first glanced about to make sure that he was not observed. Then he stole away, cat-like, toward the hidden stable where Midnight was.

The Mexican had treated the horse well—fed and watered him regularly. The stable was roomy, with one window that was so screened by low bushes that it was not discernible to the casual passer-by. The horse at first refused food and even water from the hands of the stranger, but, finding that no harm was done him, he gradually began to drink and eat, when no one was about. Sundry bits of salt and sweets had solaced him, yet every time he felt the hand of the Mexican on his silken coat, Midnight trembled with disgust.

Often he bared his teeth, squealed, kicked. Yet, quick as he was, the experienced horse thief was quicker. Aguilar kept out of the stable and was depending on kindness and usage to make the horse amenable to his will. He did not want to sell the horse injured, broken. He knew the value of the animal and meant to sell him in prime condition—hence his extreme care of Midnight.

As Aguilar edged back the hidden door of the concealed stable, there was a flash of hoofs, a sequel. The stallion had kicked at him.

Aguilar, missed by a hair, stepped back and laughed.

"In time, my friend, in time, you will yield," he chuckled. He shut the door, almost, and waited. He talked to Midnight who stood, ears a-cock, listening to those smooth, flowing, nearly lispng tones, seeking in them for sounds that would appeal to him. For in truth, the horse, used to the air, the sun, the tang of wind, was lonesome and anxious for friendly nuzzling, a loved voice to answer his own deep whickering.

Aguilar's voice flowed on and on. The great stallion's head drooped, his eyes paled. He shook a fly from his mane with quick tremors of his shining skin. He stamped nervously with one forefoot, then another.

Aguilar inched the door open, slid inside, talking, crooning, reaching for the nose of the lonely animal. Midnight seemed to drowse.

The soft hand touched the soft nose. At the touch a shiver of hate ran through every fiber of Midnight's being. The feel of the man's cold palm on his own warm nose brought into the animal's memory the agony of the constricting rope, the heavy fall, the long, blind, fearsome walk over the prairie.

Midnight became a whirlwind of anger. His head went up. He blared in rage, lashed out before and behind. Aguilar, caught off-guard, yet had wit enough not to dash for the door, but into a corner. The stallion whirled, as if on a pivot, sought his foe in the dark space and missed him, for the agile Mexican slid, viperlike, from gloom to light and, flicking loose the guard chain, was outside before the stallion could wheel again in that narrow, pent-up stable. Aguilar barely had time to turn and draw the door to when the thrumming hoofs crashed against its timbers and the stallion's squeals told of his rage and disappointment over his lack of success.

Aguilar stood outside for a moment, his face scowling. Then he smoothed the scowl from his features and smiled.

"All the better, when you do become mine," he said to himself. Then, puffing calmly at a fresh *cigarro*, Pedro went toward the Chaparral Cock again. There he

ordered a trusted peon to take water and feed to the stallion, hoping by keeping away himself that the big black would quiet down and forget him.

Behind the well-concealed door Midnight stood, alert. His eyes blazed for a time, then paled. His head drooped. The wan light from the window was dispiriting. He shifted about, shook himself, and then stood, the picture of equine dejection. All his great heart was yearning for one thing and one thing only—the touch of a loved hand on his velvety muzzle; the sound of a loved voice that, in answer to his deep-chested whicker, would say in the well-remembered tones:

“Darned ol’ son-of-a-gun, you, *Midnight!*”

Early the next morning, when Burlane appeared for his usual call at the Wickson place, he found gaunt Pop Wickson out behind the house, busy at some chores. Burlane sat himself down upon an upturned tub close to the rear door of the house, smoked, idled.

A whisk of shimmering hair near the back window, a half-mouthed phrase by Berenice to Ma Wickson, told Ed that the girl was inside, combing her braids, hair-pins in full-lipped mouth. He had caught several glimpses of her so upon fortunate occasions when the door had been swung ajar by Ma Wickson, issuing from her domain to give orders to Pa.

This morning Ed was not hoping for a distracting glimpse of Berenice after that fashion. He wanted to be justified. And not mechanically, end-on, but casually, as if naturally. He had planned the scene with deep cunning, according to his own estimation.

“Anything on you’ mind, son?” Pop mildly inquired.

“Who? Me?” Ed answered, making sure that a certain pair of shell-pink ears were listening through the crack of the ajar door. Sidewise he had caught a hint of her presence inside—just where he wanted her to be.

“Why, yas, son, I was p’intin’ my mind towa’d you—all.”

Pop grinned at Ed, friendly-wise.

“Well, no, Pop, unless I might hitch up those ponies an’ have them skulldrag that buckboard out to Twin Springs.”

“Better do that thing t’-day, son,” coming to the step to sit down with Ed and light his pipe.

This suited Ed exactly.

“Say, Pop,” with what Ed judged to be absence of guile, “you remember how you told me th’ other day I ought to keep an eye on that Mexican fire-water joint—th’ Chaparral Cock—for news of Midnight?”

“Why, yes, son. What ’bout it?”

“That Mexican woman from down there spoke to me on th’ trail yesterday evenin’, and she ’lowed she wanted to see me again soon.”

“Well, son, you’re of age, full age,” Pop puffed. “She’s a bad un, that Maretta is. But if you c’n get any news out o’ her, you git it. No tellin’ what she might say to a handsome man—”

There was a scrape of a chair inside. Ed caught, through the door’s crack, the flirt of a disappearing skirt.

“What’s matter wi’ your face, son?” Pop asked in surprise; “you lookin’ like a boiled owl soured on his wife’s relations. Dawg-gone it. I ain’t said nothin’, have I?”

“Not a darn thing, Pop,” and Ed got up. “Well, s’long; I’m goin’ to drive out to Twin Springs, and after that I’m goin’ to ride out to the Chaparral Cock to quiz Maretta.”

“Pop, he came ’long noble until th’ climacterical point,” Ed confided to the off buckboard pony as he harnessed him a few moments later; “he meant well, but he didn’t tip off th’ hand I played right through. If he’d left off that ‘handsome man’ part an’ just let her know, casual like, that he’d urged me to play that bar lady for news, it would have been O. K.”

He sagged onto the buckboard’s seat tooled the ponies to the front of the Wickson house. Here he called:

“Ho, Miss Berenice. C’me on out, an we’ll ride out to th’ Springs. It’s our ’day to.”

A large and profound silence followed Ed called again—again. The off twitched his ears.

Ed exploded at him:

"Whoa, there, you ornery, mealy-mouthed humdinger!"

Ma Wickson stuck her head out of the front door to call:

"Miss Berenice says she can't go t'-day, Mr. Burlane. Got a headache."

"Gid-ap!"

Burlane started the ponies, that soon were careering through Coppered Jack as if going out to win a steeplechase, the buckboard bobbing wildly behind them.

Berenice came down, listless, aimless. Ma Wickson packed a basket of lunch for her father. The girl took it and came back soon distraught. She kept silence most of the time Ed was away. Soon after he turned the ponies out again, after he had left word that Twin Springs was in good condition. Burlane found it expedient to take himself off. The girl was plainly ill at ease in his presence.

Ed forked the Wickson cayuse and jogged off toward the Chaparral Cock. Before going he mentioned his errand several times in a loud tone to Pop, laying down what he deemed to be a perfectly reasonable alibi.

But without meaning to, he played the part a bit too well. No adept at outright deceit, the appearance of being engaged in it confused the range rider, and he made a bad job of it. And Berenice, listening, sensed deceit. For some time after he had gone, she remained in the Wickson kitchen, assisting Mother Wickson with her baking. That out of the way, she sat near the back window.

"A penny for your thoughts!" Mrs. Wickson bid, putting the last touches on a heap of pone, ready against the coming dinner time. "Oh, I wish Mr. Burlane hadn't gone away, my dear. I wanted him to enjoy some o' my ponies. He always eats like a man who would be easy to manage."

Having shot this rather broad hint at Berenice, Ma Wickson smiled slyly to herself.

"Yes," snapped Berenice, whisking her head about, "yes, like all the rest. Feed them. Faugh!"

"Hoity-toity, madam!" Ma Wickson

snorted, getting up from her comfortable half-barrel chair with the steer-hide seat; "you must be cross-grained t'-day?"

"Oh, Ma Wickson, not at you—"

Ma Wickson wisely held her tongue. Silence now. The kettle bubbled; the oven gave forth a volume of grateful odors from a crack in the door that had a tendency to bulge away from the face of the fireplace.

"Ma Wickson," Berenice was facing her squarely now, "tell me right out, what sort of a woman is that Mareta at the Chaparral Cock—"

Ma Wickson's hands went up in protest,

"For the land's sake! Now what—"

"I want to know."

"W' for?"

"Never you mind, Ma. I got reasons. Is she—a—a—a—hussy!"

Ma Wickson pursed her comfortable lips, blew out a scathing breath:

"You might add something on to that yet."

"Oh."

Silence again. After a long, long time:

"Ma Wickson?"

"Well, Ber'nice."

"I'm goin' to hitch up those buckboard ponies. They ain't had 'nuff exercise lately."

"I ain't noticed they was a dyin' for it, Ber'nice."

Silence again. The kettle talked; the oven gave out its fragrance. Pa Wickson, whistling out behind the house, split the stillness with a few melancholy bars of "Jesse James."

"Well, Ma, never mind that. I'm goin' to hitch them up an' drive them out this afternoon. Please come 'long; will you, Ma?"

Ma Wickson looked at the girl. Her deep knowledge of people often had stood her in good stead. She sensed something unusual — that Berenice needed her, Motherlike, she yearned to be of use to the girl whom chance had placed under her protecting wing.

"Why, yes, Ber'nice," she said softly; "I dunno what's in your pretty head, but I'll go for a drive with you, any time."

"Oh," and the pretty head went over

against the broad, comfortable bosom, "thank you, Ma Wickson; we'll go right after dinner."

CHAPTER XV.

AT THE CHAPARRAL COCK.

BURLANE'S ride to the Chaparral Cock was anything but cheerful.

Firstly, the Wickson cayuse, sober, steady, a bit nagging in his gait, was so different from huge Midnight, with his pretty *pasears*, deep-chested whickerings, prancings, friendly-wise nods of loyal head.

Secondly, confound it, there was Berenice! She had misunderstood his reasons for wishing to talk to Maretta. Hang girls, anyway!

Thirdly, there was the Mexican girl, bold, over-ready, but who might, in some way known to her breed and calling, come at knowledge of Midnight's whereabouts.

The afternoon was drowsing to a heated climax. The trail was over-hot; dust puffs whiffed up from under the cayuse's hoofs. Ed got past the Ox Bow turn-off without meeting any one. He let the cayuse amble. He described the Chaparral Cock soon afterward and reined the steady cayuse in.

Mid-afternoon sloth reigned in the place. The cayuse, head a-nod, knees all but unsprung, promptly dozed as soon as Ed had alined him with the tie-rack. Inside there was only Maretta, behind the bar, seemingly asleep, her head on her crossed arms that were on the deals. Her lately fired cigarette sent up a spiral of blue vapor—last flicker of its fire. That, even, ceased, as Ed stepped softly over the sill.

He paused a moment to glance at the woman, so ripe, so potent for heartache to men of fiery passions. He noted the little pursuing of the full, red lips at each breath's outgoing, the way in which the lips drew in tenderly at each intake. Her glossy hair, in seeming disarray, was over one rounded arm.

She stirred, straightened indolently, yawned, brushed her eyes, then put her hair back with a pettish gesture. Not until then did she deign to notice that Ed

was standing in mid-room, looking at her, smiling.

Instead of playing the prude and pretending confusion, she merely flashed him a happy smile, in which each of her pretty teeth did its duty. Then she signed him to approach and, with a quick, supple bending of arm and body, swung her rebellious hair into place.

"Dhere, *señor*," she gave him; "dhat hair, so saucee, she is what your 'Mericano girls say? Done up?"

"Tha's it," Ed laughed, sidling easily to the bar and ordering a wee drink. She joined him. They lighted weeds and puffed across the bar.

"You wanted that I'd come out this-away?" Ed queried.

"Yees, *señor*"—low, evenly, deep in her full chest.

"'Cause why? Heard or seen anything?"

His interest was keen, unmistakable.

She blew a pretty double smoke ring at the end of his nose. Ed, with Midnight in mind, laughed.

"Yees, no," she teased.

"Come, sister," Ed urged. "Let's know th' worst."

"A'm 'fraid—eet eesa deefecult," she procrastinated.

"Eh?" his level eyes studying her.

"A'm 'shameed, *señor*, for tell you."

"Aw, now, sister—"

"A'm not a writer—"

"What's that—"

"A'm wanting you wreeté me a—a letter—I sign weeth my mark, eh, *señor*?"

The relieved expression on her face at having gotten out that artful confession of ignorance was matched by Ed's as he realized the reason, it seemed, for her long preamble. He knew few of the border Mexican folk, women especially, could write or read, and that she would want him to write a letter for her was reasonable. That it might contain something she should not want to expose to the ribaldry of the casual barroom hangers-on he could appreciate. It had been a proper bit of acting on her part, and it removed every bit of doubt from the mind of the range rider.

Up to that moment Ed had been divided

in his mind between the feeling that she was going to try to play some barroom woman's trick on him and a genuine yearning to humor her into giving him news of old Midnight. Now a way seemed to open to work into her good graces in a purely legitimate way. Ed was inclined always to be chivalrous to women, no matter of what class or creed, and Maretta's pretty confession of ignorance of writing was made in just the right way to enlist his sympathy.

"Sure," he said heartily; "hand me th' ink, pen and paper, an' I'll write what you say."

She speedily produced a stuttering pen, a bottle of semifluid ink, some time-browned paper. Ed grasped the unfamiliar implement, dipped its nib, made a preliminary flourish—the pen sputtered and one sheet was spoiled.

The woman made a pretty moue of mock annoyance and tore up the spoiled sheet.

"*Encore!*" she urged.

"No, not thataway," Ed said, puckering his brows. He dipped the nib anew, squared himself and, at her dictation, wrote in a labored hand:

My friend, that I send you with this, may be trusted. Treat him well. I am well and happy. Ten thousand blessings.

Gracioso Dio!

"Who's it to?" Ed demanded, poising his pen to fill in the neglected name and salutations.

"Oh, a freend, just a freend. Now, you sign, *señor*, and A'm makin' my mark."

With a flourish Ed signed her name. She seized the penholder and made her tiny (X) mark after the name and before it, then thanked him.

"A'm askeeing dhat a friend," she explained, "have a job down Vernon way."

"Oh."

"Yes, *señor*, and my thanks to you, *señor*, a thousand times."

"Never mind, sister. Now, you heard anything about my hoss?"

Her eyes were wide in sincere sympathy.

"Notheeng do I hear, *señor*. But eef I do—"

Her gesture indicated that she would let him know.

Ed's face fell. He had hoped that perhaps, at the end, she would, from her scattered stores of information, bring forth some hint, some phrase of enlightenment. But he read nothing hopeful in her face.

Leaving the writing materials on the bar, he said:

"Well, sister, I'm ramblin' now. S'long!"

"*Buenos jornada*," she cooed.

He heard the paper crisply rattle.

Outside he found the Wickson cayuse drowsing, heedless of flies and the sun's lances, now showering low against the tie-rack's sides. Ed whiffed the reins taut and set foot to stirrup. The sleepy horse sagged under the wonted burden, then came to equilibrium as the rider forked neatly and came to rest astride.

Off up-trail there was a rattle of familiar wheels. Ed was stretching his neck to scan the newcomers when he heard behind him:

"*Señor*, a mo-ment."

Maretta was at his saddle's side, holding up paper and dipped pen.

"One word, add," she coaxed, smiling up.

"Say it," he said, anxious to be away. The jangle of that buckboard out beyond was familiar. One he knew had a terrible rattle to it—

The Mexican woman here caught the sound of the wheels. She was facing the trail; she had maneuvered Ed so his back was toward it. She had run after him merely to gratify one of her wayward impulses, her desire for male-worship. The proximity of the big range rider had fired her wild nature's very depths, and she was glowing with a yearning to possess, to fondle—

Ed made a fairly stiff pad of the sheet by doubling it back onto itself until he had the bottom of it, under the signature, ready for a dictated postscript, that, the cayuse remaining quiet, he waited for. She spoke:

"My freend, he is my eespecial freend, please to attend."

Ed jotted this down mechanically. The buckboard out there jangled and rattled.

"Here, sister," and Ed reached down pen and paper.

The sleepy old cayuse drowsed. The buckboard rattled, its familiar syncopation cutting into the peace of Ed's thoughts like a strophe of recurrent pain.

Maretta reached up for the materials. She could see the buckboard plainly now—the face of the girl driving it, and the jealousy on that face. The spirit of mischief, of evil, swept over Maretta.

She took the pen, made a pretty pretense of missing the paper, had to reach for it, managed to prick the sleepy cayuse with the pen. Amazed, that old sinner pranced—and the paper she did not grasp, so she had to reach again. Ed, to help her, bent far over in the saddle; their heads came together for just a heartbeat; then she had the paper. Ed, his face flushed from bending, from the contact of cheek against hot cheek, swirled the cayuse around and, raising his hand in salute, spurred for the trail. Maretta whisked indoors, in well-planned confusion.

The buckboard ponies, recognizing the Wickson cayuse, whickered and the sleepy old creature whickered back. Ed, feeling that crimson tides were ebbing and flowing over face and partly bared neck, was very uncomfortable as he swung alongside.

Berenice, her face drawn, icy, did not respond to his greeting, although he humbly swept low his wide-brim over his saddle's horn. He turned to Ma Wickson, whose comfortable body joggled about with the sway of the jolting vehicle.

"Oh, I say, Mrs. Wickson," Ed pleaded, after he had noted the angle at which that usually friendly person's nose was tip-tilted away from him; "I say, Mother Wickson, what's up?"

"I do declare, Ed Burlane," she burst out, as cayuse and ponies exchanged news by means of friendly-wise horse-talk; "I never 'd thought it o' you if I'd not seen it with my own personal eyes."

"Seen what?"

Ed's tone was wild, his eye wilder.

"Seen what? An' this here girl a break-in' her hea—"

"Mrs. Wickson."

Berenice's voice, like a clash of supple, steely blade, cut into the soft flow of the other's indignation.

"Well, it's true—"

"Mrs. Wickson!"

Again Berenice headed off the other. She hit the ponies a vicious cut with her whip. The animals, astounded, bolted.

Ed jammed spurs to the sleepy cayuse which, likewise taken unaware, made a wild *pasear* off-trail, then lumbered to retrieve his vantage point against the withers of the pair, that he might resume his interrupted question.

"Here, what's wrong?" Ed pleaded, when he had reestablished himself beside the buckboard.

"I declare, Ed Burlane—" Mrs. Wickson began.

"Declare, then," Ed bawled; "but what is it all about?"

Berenice turned in her seat and looked him squarely in the face.

"A man who kisses a wayside bar girl," she snapped, "would do well to keep away from me, sir."

Open-mouthed, Ed watched her lash the ponies into a canter. The buckboard, with Mrs. Wickson hanging on to the jouncing seat, swung and bumped. Soon they had gone from Ed's sight, over a rise in the land, on the way toward Coppered Jack.

"Dog-gone it," Ed confided to the sleepy cayuse's left ear, "I might's well kissed her, at that, as be accused of doing it, and not getting the kiss. Darn a girl, anyway!"

He set spurs to the cayuse and coaxed a canter out of him. As he lagged toward Coppered Jack, Maretta, from her place behind one of the window spaces of the Chaparral Cock, peeped forth and waved a kiss at his receding back. To Aguilar, who came in presently, she gave the note Ed had written for her, and he took it into her cubby behind the bar and began, in odd moments, to work on a forged bill of sale, purporting to transfer Midnight from Burlane to himself for a goodly sum.

Silently intent, Berenice drove the ponies into the town and put them out. Ed did not appear for supper and the meal was eaten in silence. Once Ma Wickson ventured to speak to Pa of what had happened. He defended Ed by saying that he, indeed, had urged Ed to see the Mexican girl on account of Midnight.

"But not to kiss her," Berenice snapped, her face like flames.

"How fierce our cat is to-night," Ma consoled, drinking the dregs of her tea and setting the empty cup down noisily.

"I don't care!" Berenice exploded. "I saw him."

"Well, what o' that? In dealin' with men, Bernie, you take my advice. Don't believe anything you hear o' them and on'y half you see. Then you'll be happy, though married."

With which piece of sage advice she lumbered about the room. Presently she glanced about. The girl was gone.

"Went to her dad, at th' calaboose; said she wanted to cheer him up," Pa Wickson said.

"Best place for her," Ma said, waving her dish-towel at an intruding fly buzzing in the early lamplight. "I saw Ed Burlane bend over that greaser hussy, an' by all good rights he was a kissin' her, an' she's handsome 'nuff to excuse sich doin's, but though I saw him do it, I don't believe my own eyes. He's not that kind o' a harpen!"

"You said a mouthful then, Ma," Pa agreed.

"You shet right up, Pa Wickson," she flared at him, bouncing to the door leading up-stairs; "you men allus stand together."

Pa Wickson's face went blank. He got out his old pipe, filled it, lighted it, sat down heavily on the doorsill outside. There was a stir in the open space beside the house; Ed came softly around.

"Hist, young-timer," Pop said, puffing peacefully. "You tread light; you're in disgrace here."

"Why?" Ed demanded, but softly.

"I'll tell you," and he did.

Ed laughed sheepishly and went over his side of the affair.

"Sounds mighty nice, but somehow it lacks what the poet might call verisimilitude," Pop laughed. "You lay low, young-timer, on that trail, till this blows over a bit. I'll stick up for you to Ma, an' you watch a chance to explain to the girl. One thing's sure—Berenice must o' had a notion towa'd you, or she'd not been mad if you kissed fifty greaser fire-water sellers."

"By thunder!"

So Ed, bouncing upright. Pop looked at him amazedly.

"She must think something of me, tha's a fact." Ed was joyous.

"Yes," Pop said soberly, "but now she's thinking *about* you, in thinks not loud but deep. Next time you want to call on a Mexican bar lady, you manage it all in th' dark, young-timer."

"I will," said Ed fervently.

CHAPTER XVI.

MALTRANE WONDERS AGAIN.

WITH inborn cunning, Barney Barnquist, as soon as the glamour of his adventure in the Chaparral Cock, his first care-free fling as a ruthless man of the sort he had always secretly admired had worn thin, remembered what the possible effects might be to him later. For whereas up to that time he had been simply a hulking, somewhat surly son of a man of means, he now was the heir, the man able to awe a barroom full of bad men, the Lothario of the roadside *aguardient* joint. That the news would travel and lose nothing in the travels it was sent on, by gossiping tongues, he had no doubts.

But the sense of growing power, the sweep of egoism following his exploits with gun and gold, with bad man and bad woman, elated him. All the naturally evil traits of his nature expanded, dilated. They filled his coarse being, and yet his inherited shrewdness whispered, with an inner caution, against too great a degree of confidence in mere chance.

The work of the big ranch was going forward carefully, driven by Pardee, who, anxious to retain his old-time place and prestige, managed well. Barney had too much hard sense to interfere in that, and knew that as long as he let Pardee alone, Ox Bow would flourish.

Barney had, however, three cares eating away at the back of his mind: Greasewood Kate's threat of producing a will; Maltrane's actions when he came to discuss Barney's roasting of the Mexican gamblers, as he was bound to do in time when

the Mexican spectators of the scene had talked it about, gossip-wise; Barnum and his discovery that the dirt on the bar mirror was akin to that on Maltrane's badly fouled gun.

At the first claim by Greasewood Kate that she knew of a will, Barney had written to his father's attorneys in Vernon, Blackwell and Storton, advising them duly of his father's death and of his temporary assumption of full heirship. He had asked them if a will had been drawn, and to make inquiries of any of his father's old-time friends among retired cattlemen there who would be apt to know of such a document.

So it was with relief that three days after the exploit in the Chaparral Cock Barney received a letter informing him that so far as Blackwell and Storton knew, no will had been made out by the dead man. And the firm did not know of a will; had drawn none for Barnquist at any time, they reported.

Armed with this definite information, Barney decided to have done with one of his worries. If Maretta Esquimala were to be installed as nominal housekeeper at Ox Bow, his then plan, the rugged decency and honesty of Greasewood Kate would have to be dispensed with.

So it happened, on a morning a few days afterward, that the half-breed woman, busy with her duties of overseeing the Mexican servants, received a call to attend in the room that did for the ranch's office.

She hastened there, her somewhat heavy face anxious, for she felt that the call presaged friction of some sort, as Barney had taken of late to hectoring and oversetting long-established household customs in the new fervor of his majority.

Kate came into the room to find Barney seated before the rough desk. On chairs at the rear of the room were Barnum and Maltrane. The grim gunman and Kate exchanged crisp nods, for she, like him, had been so long at Ox Bow that they were part of the fixtures of the place.

Barnum, the newcomer to the big ranch, she did not deign to notice. The breed woman, who before the death of Barnquist the elder had kept the ranch hands' time in a rough and just way, and attend-

ed to other like duties, resented the bringing of Barnum to the ranch for no other purpose than to do the slight tasks that to her mind were mere routine, unworthy of a man's attention.

"Kate," Barney began with disconcerting suddenness, "I wanta know 'bout that will."

The breed woman started back, glancing at each hostile face in turn. Her gaze lingered on that of Maltrane, and in it she found a flicker of yielding.

"I've told the men here," Barney continued, "that you claimed to know of a will. Now, I've *proof* there is none; never was one."

The woman plainly was confused by this direct attack. She hung her head, then raised it and shot angry glances at Barney, who grinned wolfishly.

Kate fingered the folds of her coarse linsley-woolsey work dress. Again she studied the faces of the two spectators. That of Barnum was set, hostile. That of Maltrane was less hostile, yet his agate eyes had a glint of deeper meaning in them.

"Come, speak out, Kate," Barney's voice came, commanding, ringing with assurance.

Maltrane stirred and snapped erect. He waved his hand toward his vacated chair. "Sit down—here."

She shot him a glance of mingled gratitude and puzzlement, for never before had Maltrane made even an attempt toward courtesy to a woman on the ranch. Barnquist frowned and nursed his upper lip, where some day a real hirsute adornment would be. Now it was but a promise of what would come when the fuller tide of Barnquist life should burgeon in him.

"No stage plays, Mal," Barnquist grated; then to Kate again:

"Come, what about th' will. Is there one, or no?"

She remained silent. She did not sit down.

"I'm makin' one guess and tha's all," Barnquist persisted; "you were usin' th' will, thinkin' I'd be scared? You used it, like, to try to keep me in line with Ess-Way? Was that it? Playin' to make you' girl safe?"

She was grimly silent, her stubbed, patient fingers working at the folds of her dress. Her head down. She seemed daunted.

"Come, own up," Barney went on, relentless. "You thought you'd make me knuckle; make me keep sweet on that little house-cat I've played wi' since we were kids together—"

"Barnee!"

Her head snapped erect. Her hands ceased their play with the old, worn dress. Barnum grinned, guffawed. Maltrane turned on him with an oath.

Barnquist caught something in the tone of her that stirred him out of his easy, overbearing demeanor.

"Well?" he snarled, with a new access of determination, put on to hide his underlying uneasiness.

"Youa estop," the breed woman ordered, one long arm flailing out, an accusing forefinger pointed at him; "you best not call my girl bad nahmes, Barnee."

"But you lied 'bout th' will to keep me in line wit' her?"

"Yes," with growing intensity, "I lie 'bout will, Barnee. Why so? 'Fraid you goin' not maree my girl, Ess-Way, Barnee. You all taimie lie, lie, lie, f'om kid up, Barnee. I'm think eef you makin' some love to her again, you'll maree her, what she wants—"

"Marry! Her? Good enough for a kid plaything, but marry—"

The breed's eyes blazed.

"You take th' girl, an' you git off'n Ox Bow, *poco pronto*. Do you hear?" the cattle princeling bellowed.

"Yes, I'm hearin' you, Barnee," came the level, menacing answer. "I'm been here years, for your fadher, he made me housekeep'. Ol' Bart, he was bad man, some ways. He kill, he steal cattle, yes. He make quarrel, he make Mal kill. But one t'ing he was—a friend to friend. You"—her voice went up to a scream—"you bad—all bad, to friend, to enemy. Pagh!"

She spat—

The defiled face of the heir went white. He wiped off the spittle with shaking hands. His hand flew to gun-butt. He surged upright.

"Not thataway! Not to a woman, breed or none!" Maltrane had his hand in a firm grasp.

The door slammed. The breed woman was gone.

"She—she riled me," Barney said, his hand, futile, drooping from his gun.

"'Nuff to rile any one," Barnum cut in, with like acid.

"Yes," and Maltrane's thin-browed eyes narrowed as he fixed the other in his intent gaze; "yes, but not thataway to a woman, breed or none."

"Gettin' soft—under th' hat?" Barney growled.

"I'm 'bout this soft, Barnquist, that I stick by them that sticks by me. I wonder by hell, how far you'd subscribe to sich doctrine?"

Without a word farther he whipped around on his heel and went out.

Barnquist and Barnum, sitting there in silence, soon heard a stir in the ranch yard. There was a clack of Mexican tongues as the servants of the lesser sorts came filing out; they caught the words of farewell.

The ranch's buckboard was there, harnessed. On the seat was Greasewood Kate, silent, face immobile. Seated on her dunage, strapped on behind, was Ess-Way, her eyes ringed from grief. The girl clung to some of the straps as the harness was being cinched on to the ponies. The driver came from the bunkhouse—Lars Maltrane.

There was a rattle of wheels, and the buckboard had gone. Barney sent out to make an inquiry, and Barnum brought back word that Kate had told the servants she was going to Coppered Jack to work in one of the eating-houses there, giving no reason for quitting her place.

"There's another goin' soon," Barnquist stormed to Barnum, when he had heard the hireling's report; "an' tha's Lars Maltrane. I fired Kate so 't I'd be boss inside my own house, an' I'll have to get rid o' Mal so 't I'll be boss outdoors. No man c'n ride herd on this ranch crowd *all-ways* behind another geezer's gun."

Barnum salved his pride with a chuckle of approval. He was glad to have the

straight-seeing breed woman gone, so that he could have free rein with books and petty cash, the ordering of supplies, the doling of them out to the hands.

"You count on me to back your play in such a case," he soothed.

"I'll count on you," Barnquist gave him heartily. But behind the veil of his inner thoughts he was thinking—"And after Mal, you! Mebbe your turn 'll be fi'st."

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT BERENICE SAW.

BERENICE, uneasy, haunted by a sense of the possible injustice she had done to Ed Burlane, too proud to make an excuse for telling him her real feelings, too unskilled in affairs of the heart to know how to make the first advances, spent some miserable days and nights.

There were times when she heard the range rider's even, vibrant voice as he talked with Pa Wickson about the yard of the Wickson place, and then she had a catch of longing at her heart. And when Ed went by her window, whistling and even humming with assumed gaiety, she felt his seeming good humor as a stab of pain.

"How can he be so happy—when I'm not?" she found herself asking, in vain. She quite forgot that she had not let him see that she was not happy, for she kept a brave exterior. So each, bent upon making the other feel that their disagreement was a trivial matter, really suffered internally.

Ed went to the jail with tobacco and other things he judged Peters would need. He rendered an accurate account of the state of Twin Springs to the prisoner, and together they discussed the aspects of his case.

Public opinion continued well balanced. Barnquist, dropping a word here and there among the younger element, kept the flame of suspicion against Peters burning; the old-timers combated this fire. The inquest yet loomed. Harvison and Alberstone seemed to have disappeared from the horizon of justice, sundry hold-ups, horse

thieveries and killings keeping them busy elsewhere.

It was while matters were in such poise that Berenice began to ride out in the long sun-hot afternoons, from sheer weariness of mind and soul. Such casual attentions as the youngsters of the town attempted to pay her she put aside with the disdain of the true woman for the attentions of those she has already estimated as of little worth. Beside them all the big range rider bulked, appealing, calm, a man-size man, a man to make a real woman happy.

Often as she rode she found herself wondering about old Midnight, and at such times floods of sympathy for Ed would sweep over her. By comparison with the big black stallion she had once ridden so happily, her own saddle pony, that she had brought in from the Springs, seemed stale, vapid. The recollection of the glorious, sweeping gallop she had had on Midnight's back was to her a tonic every time she reverted to it in rose-dream thoughts, and its close, when she had ridden up to Burlane, the gold bead of her rosary of past pleasures.

Riding out so, Berenice, on the day that Barnquist dismissed Greasewood Kate, passed the buckboard in which was the breed woman. Berenice nodded to her and waved her hand to the Indian's girl, on the dunnage behind the racketing seat of the bumping vehicle. Maltrane, stonily erect, paid no attention to her, save to sweep her once with his chilly eyes.

Past the side trail to Ox Bow the girl let the pony lope. Although she told herself there was nothing planned about her present trip, really it was the culmination of the others, for far underneath was the thought:

"If I could see the woman at the Chaparral Cock! What sort of woman is she?"

It was a girl's natural jealousy, in curious outworking. She refused to admit to herself that such a woman as the way-side *aguardiente* seller could compete with her in a fair woman's war for a man; but she wanted, at the same time, to see the other close at hand—and be sure.

But once down the trail a way her na-

tural plains-born caution came to the surface. It would never do for her, she knew, to ride boldly to the place, where such as she had no business to be.

She twitched the good little pony off the trail and struck off across country. Far out back of the *aguardiente* shack she rode, apparently in aimless ramblings. Twice or thrice she dismounted to pick some prairie flowers and make of them a gay wisp for her belt and hatband. This was such a plausible excuse for her riding thus that it would divert the attention of any chance observer, she thought.

Letting the pony amble without an apparent purpose, but really adroitly drifting him to a position behind the Chaparral Cock, she began to work back toward the trail, hoping to pass near enough to see the Mexican woman through door or window or in the open, about the joint. For her personal safety so far as the Mexicans were concerned she had no fears. In those days and times the Mexican who lifted up unbidden eyes to a daughter of the soil ceased to exist, and under the aegis of that stern code the girls of Texas rode far and wide, unafraid, unless of the few wolves of their own race who are apt to appear in all ranks and walks of human society in cities or in wildernesses—throwbacks from the norm of male chivalry.

The land was more rolling than common out there, and there was a spring, small but well known locally, where Berenice was counting on getting water for herself and the pony. Berenice desried the hackberries about the spring just as the earliest dusk was coming. The pony, sniffing the water afar, began to prance. She let him have his way and soon was drawing closer to the spring that was in the bottom of an otherwise dry draw between two high rolls of prairie.

She left the pony to his own devices after she had alighted, drank herself, and remounted. The rein was slack, and the pony fussed with the water after he was replete. Deep in meditations tinged with unpleasantness, Berenice was thrilled of a sudden to hear, seemingly afar but oddly near, the rumble of a deep-toned whicker. The pony answered.

Again she heard it—that deep-toned whicker. There could be but one such! But where was the animal that had made the sound?

She was beginning to gaze about, to twitch the pony away, that she might begin a tour of exploration, when she saw, afar, a man approaching. She saw it was a Mexican—knew him for Aguilar, the Chaparral Cock's familiar spirit of evil.

In the absence of secure knowledge of the exact whereabouts of the stallion, if indeed it were Midnight that she had heard and not some other horse near the Chaparral Cock, Berenice decided quickly to assume indifference. She forced the pony slowly about, as if she were just on the point of leaving because her mount had finished his drink, and rode toward Aguilar easily, naturally. She passed the sleepy-eyed Mexican, who gave her a deferential bow in response to her distant nod, and rode toward the main trail with just the right degree of languor. Altogether, to Aguilar's mind, she was just one who had turned aside to get water for herself and horse.

After she had passed and he had hastened to the concealed stable in the middle of the hackberry clump, in the swell of the dry draw's side, where Midnight was hidden, Aguilar found the ventilating hole that did service for window partly ajar. But he attached no importance to that, as the girl's acting had been so perfect that it would have taken a keener man than Aguilar to discover its ultimate purpose, even had he sensed it in the least.

But Berenice, breathing more freely, set the little pony along the path down which Aguilar had come toward the spring. It would take her close to the Chaparral Cock—just what she desired.

Approaching the place, she reined in the pony and spoke soothing words. The little fellow slowed easily, his hoofs making scarcely a sound on the soft grass beside the path onto which she twitched him with intent purpose to deaden the sound of his feet.

Opposite that window of the Chaparral Cock that lighted the bar the girl stopped the pony and gazed through the aperture,

Leaning over the bar was Maretta Esquimala, her lips pursed for a kiss. A hand on each shoulder, drawing her forward to get the kiss, was—Barney Barnquist.

Berenice cut the pony sharply, and he dashed for the main trail. She had a fleeting, over-shoulder glimpse of Barnquist at the window; but she cared not for that. She had seen something so different from what her jealous thoughts had made her fear she might see, that her heart was singing within her. And, atop that, was the thought of the whicker of the horse with the deep-chest tones.

Suffused with the beguiling glow of such thoughts, the girl let the pony go as he pleased and came to herself at the end of a happy, peaceful hour, with night over her, the kindly stars beaming down the coolness of the evening, and the trail clearly lost.

But that did not worry the daughter of the plains. She simply turned the pony and let him wander back to the trail, confident that he would find it in due time.

The moon came up, argent, wonderful. Berenice, riding in the glowing radiance, sang softly:

“When I hear his saddle leather creak,
Oh, it makes my heart grow weak;
And when his spurs go jingle-jingle,
I wonder if I'll keep on—single.”

The glimpse Barnquist had caught of the girl riding away from the Chaparral Cock had been too fleeting to give him cognizance of her identity. He had returned to Maretta, laughing and jingling his money. Together they drank and gossiped, bantered and made pretense of quarreling. Barnquist, luxuriating in his first open affair with a woman, yet had the inborn distrust of others that kept him from giving the bar-woman his absolute confidence. Feeling this, Maretta had tried again and again to break down his last fibers of inner reserve, but in vain. She was too experienced in the ways of men not to know that Barney was keeping something back from her—something of trust and goodwill.

As their affair had progressed, she had found the precocious heir of Ox Bow grow-

ing beyond her in depth and force of passion and control. That irked her, and she had that day tried her best to become mistress of his inmost citadel of desires; but in vain. At the end of their hour of outward gaiety she had to acknowledge to herself that Barnquist was farther from under her control than ever, and she was irritated, distraught.

“Clearly,” she thought, “the way to Ox Bow lies not on the trail I am using. I have been overbold, too open with him. I played him for boy; behold, he is a man!”

When he left her, Barnquist shook off the outward seeming of gaiety that had been his during his comradeship with the bar-room siren. The blanket of mental reaction descended upon him. A wide disgust with the dizened and forward woman swept over him, and he measured, in thought, the difference between her and the girls of the ranches roundabout. The first headlong pursuit of woman in the abstract had been satisfied in him. He now wanted something finer, of a different mold.

It was while this mood was on him that he heard the sound of singing, and he saw, under the level rays of the rising moon, a girl riding trailward. He caught the lilt of the fresh, clear voice. Barnquist spurred his horse and in a trice had swept alongside Berenice. He knew her at a glance.

The moon, mellowing everything in its effulgence, had made of the sordid texture of the girl's cheap dress a fabric of wonder. The umber shadows cast by her hat's brim were on her face and added to it a touch of mysterious charm. Her seat in her saddle was superb. So different was she from the woman he had left, so far above himself, that Barnquist instinctively reined his horse aside and swept his hat low in salute. The girl, coming to herself with a start, gave him a cold, “Evening, sir,” touched her pony with a reminding spur, and was up the trail before Barnquist could awaken from his maze.

The beauty of her, the song of her, the aloofness of her from him and his ilk, the chill of those eyes, together smote him to the core.

A wave of deeper disgust for the Mexican woman swept over him. To ride after

her, to ride her down, to possess her, seemed the easiest, most attainable things. But Barnquist had too deep a knowledge of what that would mean in Texas, then, to attempt it. Berenice, a daughter of the soil, the pure, the good granddaughter of a native son, poor in purse, was yet a goddess—a being far, far above an upstart Barnquist, and was not to be soiled thus by violence. But he might wait, plan, contrive.

Like lightning his thoughts leaped the chasm of the possibilities; he saw himself married to her, accepted as his hard-fisted father had not been, the old cattle-rustling reputation lost under the mantle of Berenice's good name, Ox Bow the center of real influence that his father had been compelled to buy when he could get it at all.

"I guess," he said to himself, riding quietly homeward soon afterward, "the Chaparral Cock will see less and less o' me. Some women are not wo'th what they cost."

Homing quietly, Berenice put out the pony in the Wickson corral. She went into the house, intent upon procuring a bite of something cold, in order not to put Ma Wickson to any trouble. No one was in the kitchen, but on the steps outside a rumble of conversation told of Pa Wickson out there talking to—Burlane. The door was ajar. She smiled to think that Burlane was there because—well, because he might see her on some pretext.

She found some cold ponies and bacon and ate with the best relish in days. She finished with a happy feeling of well-being and sat quietly. Soon in came Pa Wickson and went by her to bed. She could see the glow of Ed's pipe through the jar of the door; the fragrance of the smoke came to her.

She got up quietly and pushed the door open, as if intent to go out. Then she drew back.

"Oh, is some one there?"

"Yes, Miss Ber'nice," came Burlane's deep, musical bass.

"Oh."

She did not come out. But neither did she go in.

"Puff, puff, puff!" from Ed. The pipe glowed, the red of it lighting up his strong, calm features. He did not look over his shoulder at her.

"Ahem!"

She moved her feet, edged way out, let the door slam to.

"Puff, puff, puff!" from Ed.

"Ahem!" she repeated. She stepped to the edge of the little stoop of squared logs and slumped down, dangling her feet, as it were. Her heels kept time to the rhythm of his on the log ends.

"If, Mr. Burlane—" with serious inflection.

"Mr. Ed," he suggested tentatively.

"Well, then, Mr. Ed!"

"Yes?" non-committally.

"Oh, dear, men are so dense—"

"Eh?"—turning toward her.

"Well, Midnight—"

"Wow!" He bounced up. "What about him? Do you know anything—"

"Oh, if it were about me—"

"But do you know—"

"Oh, fudget!"

She got up.

He accompanied her eagerly to the door.

"Please, Miss Ber'nice," he pleaded.

And then she relented.

In five minutes he was in possession of her story and had made a plan for ascertaining the truth of the case.

"You'll never know, Miss Ber'nice," he said with deep feeling, "how much you've done for me, if it turns out that I get th' horse through your information. He sure means a lot to me, Midnight does."

"I think a lot of him, too—Mr. Ed," she returned, dodging past him into the house. "And now, good night."

"Good night, Miss Ber'nice. You been mighty good to me."

And long after she was gone, Ed stood, head bared, in worship of the very passing of her presence. Then he went out to the street, whistling.

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.



By Hoof and Fire

By John H. Hamlin

LUCK smiled upon Tige Northrup and at a time when he appreciated it from the bottom of his heart. One by one the cowboys of the Gray Dog Ranch threw down their cards, shoved back their chairs and quit the game in disgust.

Tige's cards ran in straights, flushes and threes of a kind with such smashing regularity that even his bluffs were not called, and when every dollar on the Gray Dog Ranch had passed into his possession, Tige jumped up from the table with a whoop of exultation.

He did not tarry to tell 'em how it all happened—he could crow over the Gray Dog victims at another time; instead, Tige clanked out to Peanut, his pinto pony, swung into the saddle and streaked for his own stamping grounds, the Buckjump Ranch, as fast as his cowpony could go—which was going some!

And the while Peanut's hoofs beat a rapid tattoo upon the highway, Tige's thoughts buzzed in harmony with the world at large. Over and over he conned the results of his poker winnings—one hundred and fifty dollars! To this sum he would add the one hundred and fifty dollars stowed safely away in the old tobacco jar which reposed back of a rafter in the bunk-house.

The total was the exact amount necessary to buy his third interest in the seven-passenger "used" automobile which he

and Loop Brown and Dummy Norris had figured on buying. Loop and Dummy had had their three hundred dollars for the past week and they had been prodding him considerably of late to dig up his *pro rata*. Tige had been optimistic—in fact, he had assured his prospective partners time and again that he would come through with his share before either of them had accumulated theirs.

It was somewhat of a shock to Tige when Loop and Dummy had each flashed his roll of bills. That was a week ago and Tige immediately got busy. He sold his extra saddle, swapped his six-shooter for an inferior gun and five dollars to boot and made several other deals—all of which had netted him but the \$150.

Now, the Gods had smiled upon "Lucky Bird" Tige—it was by the merest accident he had sat in with the Gray Dog outfit and trimmed them beautifully. No wonder he let out a whoop of joy when Peanut took the turn at the stone dairy at top speed and whirled into view of the bunk-house.

Tige's whoop dwindled to a strident gurgle of amazement when he saw a rakish-looking car standing in the yard. It had a familiar aspect—by the time Peanut had come to a stiff-legged halt, Tige recognized the machine. It was the seven-passenger "used" car, of which he was soon to become third owner.

Loop Brown was seated on the running-board, Dummy Norris was leaning on the hood and Gary Burney was examining a front tire. None of the cowboys seemed particularly happy over Tige's precipitate appearance, but Tige was too tickled to notice any little thing like that. He leaped from his saddle and strode over to Loop:

"Talk about your luck, old hoss! Trimmed that Gray Dog bunch to the last strand of a busted cinch! My three hundred bucks is rounded up for fair. Ain't that great? Who brung the car up? They musta knowed I was ready to pungle up."

Loop said nothing; neither did Dummy, and Gary Burney passed on to the rear tire without glancing at Tige.

"What ails you birds?" demanded Tige, beginning to get suspicious.

"Aw, you're just thirty minutes late, Tige. Me and Dummy got tired o' waiting—you'd promised to show up with the coin too many times and fooled us. They was another party after the car, so we had to grab it to-day or lose out on the best little old bargain ever."

Loop was talking against time and a climax and Tige failed to get his drift.

"Well—to-day suits me. The dance is to-night, you know." Tige rattled the loose coin in his pocket and produced a roll of bills suggestively.

"Now ain't that too bad, Tige—you oughtn't to have rung up so many false alarms. Gary, here, he kicked through with three hundred, which was mighty white 'of him, seein' as how that other party woulda grabbed the car if we'd waited another day." Dummy's eyes fell before the blaze of wrath in Tige's expression.

Tige turned to Gary: "You're gonna turn over your interest to me—wait'll I go get the balance of my money."

"Nothin' stirring; I ain't a buying for you, Tige—not yet," snarled Gary Burney.

Tige ignored Gary. Once more he faced Dummy and Loop. "You mean to say you've double-crossed me? And you've let that fuzz-tail in on this deal of ours?"

"No double-crossin', Tige. We was plum forced to do it, seeing as how you disappointed us a heap," explained Loop.

Tige's rage choked him. He wanted

more than anything else to jump upon Gary Burney and grind him into the dust; but he forced a laugh instead. It was not a mirthful laugh and the look he fastened upon Gary caused that individual to shrink from sight on the far side of the car.

Tige swung on his boot heels and, without another word, mounted his cowpony and headed down the lane. He knew that Loop and Dummy had it in for him on account of the last bet he had won from them—giving him the privilege of ordering them about for a week—and he had issued some pretty strenuous commands! But this was a mean advantage to take—to let that yellow dog of Gary Burney in on this little plan they had talked about for the past month.

A jointly-owned car, roomy enough for six, and a jolly sextette it was; they were to have surprised the girls this very night by calling for them in their own machine and whisking them away to the dance at Grasshopper, thirty miles up the valley. He could picture the pleased smile on Nora Willis's face; the surprised delight of Belle Ramage and the noisy enthusiasm of Jennie, her sister.

Well, he'd put a crimp in their old party—he'd ride over and ask Nora to go—he'd get her there some way—and since Nora was the life of the sextette to say nothing of his own mirth-provoking qualities, they would soon be sorry that they had played such a low-down trick.

Tige opened the gate into the fields—he would take a short cut to the Willis's Ranch. He rode along, too thoroughly mad to be dejected, but formulating plan after plan to wreak his vengeance upon his erstwhile pals.

The hum of a motor aroused him from his scheming. He looked down the road and saw a car whizzing past the fence posts. He recognized it—and something warned him that more devilry was in the air.

"The dogs! That yellow-livered vulture!" Tige touched spurs to Peanut's flanks. The pinto sprang forward and broke into a clipping gate, but the race went to the occupants of the rakish-looking automobile. When Tige thundered up to the Willis's Ranch, the automobile was

just leaving in a cloud of dust and Nora hung over the gate, a smile of anticipation wreathing her rosy-cheeked face.

When she saw Tige, the smile faded slowly, but her dimples were still showing and her dark eyes sparkled.

"He's asked you to go to that dance at Grasshopper to-night?" said Tige through clenched teeth.

Nora nodded her pretty head, a gleam of mischief darting from beneath her heavily lashed lids.

"And you're going—with that?"

Another nod of Nora's head, this time with a sign of indignation. Tige's look of utter contempt stirred the girl's independent nature.

"My, that's a grand car and Gary sure can drive it," said she, sweetly ignoring Tige's black mood by adding more fuel to it.

Tige wheeled his pony abruptly and rode away, refusing further argument with the belle of Willow Creek Valley. She had thrown him down hard for a second-hand automobile and Gary Burney!

Jealousy seethed within Tige's breast. This Gary Burney had been cutting too wide a swathe since his arrival at Buckjump Ranch. The girls were silly about his good looks, his reckless horsemanship, his dancing.

And who was this Gary Burney? That's what Tige wanted to know. He had ridden up to the Buckjump Ranch, flat broke, in the midst of the spring roundup and the boss had taken him on. Gary had made good—and now he was regarded as more or less of a fixture; but Tige had never taken a shine to him—there was a yellow streak in the man—of that Tige was positive.

Tige was in a good fit to commit murder when Ike Berg overtook him. Ike was head rider over at the Smoke Lake Ranch and outside of a bit of rivalry the two cow-punchers were upon fairly good terms with one another.

"Ain't run across a small bunch o' steers wearin' our brand, have you Tige?" inquired Ike, familiarly dubbed "Iceberg."

"Nope," replied Tige shortly.

"Well, there ain't no reason you should

snap a guy's head off, is there?" growled Iceberg.

Tige proffered no response, for the honk of a siren sounded and within a minute the rakish-looking car whirred past, leaving in its wake a thick cloud of dust.

"Wasn't that Gary Burney driving?" inquired Iceberg.

"Yep," was Tige's curt answer.

"Humph! Gary musta struck a easy mark—he was trying to pry a hundred off'n me last week," said Iceberg.

Tige lifted his head. Something cleared up his despondent mood. To the rhythmic beat of his pinto's hoofs he silently repeated the words: "Yellow streak, yellow streak!"

Before the dust kicked up by the speeding car had settled, Tige was in earnest conversation with Iceberg.

Over at the Buckjump Ranch, Loop and Dummy were constantly on the alert to note the arrival of Tige. Gary pretended supreme indifference, but he was restless and several times suggested that the trio make an early start for the dance at Grasshopper.

"I'd sure like to cut a dash before Tige, the old son of a gun! This is the first real good trick we've ever pulled on him. 'Cause we can rub it in good and proper to-morrow about the swell time we had at the dance," said Dummy.

"Yep; and we won't forget the going and coming in *our* car. Tige never'd quit crowing if he'd given us a jolt like this," exclaimed Loop, arranging the robes in the back seat.

"Time to start, ain't it?" suggested Gary, coming out of the bunk-house door arrayed in a boiled shirt, red tie and his Sunday trousers.

It was half after six and they figured on making the run to Grasshopper in something over two hours' time, so Loop and Dummy hastily put the finishing touches to their toilets and Gary climbed into the driver's seat.

"Reckon as how we'd better pick up Nora first and get Belle and Jennie on the way out. That jake with you, Gary?"

Gary nodded his head and the car slid away from the Buckjump Ranch. The

sun was dipping behind the Sierras and a faint breeze rustled the ripening fields of timothy as they hummed down the long lane leading to the main highway.

Nora was awaiting them on her front porch. She tripped down the walk looking sweet and sylph-like in her dainty organdie. She wound her new motor-veil, of old-rose chiffon, about her head and shoulders and smiled delightedly as she greeted the three proud possessors of the seven-passenger "used" car.

Gary assisted her to the seat beside him—he was always gallant, and Nora thought his manners perfectly grand—not abrupt and bossy like Tige Northrup sometimes behaved.

On they skimmed to the Ramage Ranch up the valley and Nora ran into the house to powder her nose afresh and summon Belle and Jennie.

The moon was pushing its way across the pines cresting the mountain when the sextette finally got under way for Grasshopper. The going was comparatively smooth until the road merged into Willow Creek Cañon, but the six-cylinder engine pulled the heavy car up the twisting route at a steady gait. Then there were miles of dips and rises across the plateau which stretched clear to Eagle Lake where the road skirted the shore line, winding in and out the bristling cliffs and great eruptions of volcanic rock. The moon silvered the pinnacles of these crags and lengthened the deep shadows to gruesome and weird proportions.

The Ramage girls shivered as the car chugged through this dreary section. Tales had been told of daring hold-ups and frightful encounters and Nora, with impish delight, was in the midst of a harrowing recital, when a wild yell reverberated from cliff to cliff.

Belle and Jennie shrieked in terror as a horseman clattered from behind a ghostly crag and galloped close to the rear wheels of the car. Gary Burney stepped on the gas and the car shot ahead, but the going was treacherous, the turns sharp and jagged rocks encroached upon the road at perilous angles. Gary became panicky, the car wobbled, slackened speed and crawled

around a bluff where it was halted by a raucous command:

"Hands up!"

A mounted man, bathed in the full light of the moon, blocked further progress of the automobile. Nora Willis, cringing close against Gary Burney, suddenly straightened her slender but independent shoulders:

"That's Tige Northrup!" she announced in a clear calm voice.

"Right you are, Nora, and not trying to hide it," came the gruff answer. "You'll step down and out, Mister Burney, and be quick about it!" continued Tige.

There was a movement in the rear seat of the car and the horseman who had first startled the joy-riders, took up the conversation:

"Steady there, mates! Jest you keep your shirts on till we have our little say-so with your gay chaffeur." These orders were emphasized by the glint of cold steel flashing in the light of the moon.

Gary Burney, mumbling unutterable things, descended from the driver's seat. Tige ushered him beyond earshot of the automobile party and within the shadow of a towering cliff where the figures were blurred. In remarkable short order Tige returned alone.

"Your turn next, fellers. Just hist your shapes out of that there car and onto your ponies. Keep your seats, girls—we'll join you in a minute. Me and Iceberg rode your hosses this far, Loop and Dummy, but we'd admire to stampede up to that dance on rubber tires.

"I guess if you're right keen about the dance you can amble along on your ponies. Most likely you'll be late, but the girls'll save a coupla dances for you—won't you, girls? Gary, he's changed his mind—he ain't aimin' to attend."

There was no response to this brazen speech; but Loop and Dummy knew Tige and the prodding of Iceberg's gun stirred them into action. They obeyed orders and clambered reluctantly into their saddles while Tige and Iceberg, keeping them covered, got into the car where their reception was decided chilly.

It was not until the lights of the school

house, where the dance was to be held, twinkled into view, that Nora's curiosity bested her resolve never again to speak to Tige Northrup.

"What about Garry? What did you do to him?" she demanded insistently.

"Oh, Gary! Why, he turned over his undivided interest in this here party to me, Nora," replied Tige, giving the siren a resounding blast.

"But the car—he told me—" began Nora indignantly.

"Why, Nora, he ain't got no more interest in this car than a jackrabbit, not now. As for Loop and Dummy, if they behaves themselves like good little boys for the balance of the night, I reckon I'll let 'em ride home with us."

Tige played a regular jazz tune of the siren as he caught the faint wail of a violin stealing out from the open windows of the school house.

"Tige—you made me so mad! I hate you—sometimes!" stormed Nora. "If you don't tell me all about what's happened to Gary, I sha'n't dance with you—not once!"

"Pshaw, now, little girl, if that's the

way you feel about it, 'course I'll tell you. Gary he raised three hundred dollars on a little bunch o' Smoke Lake steers to buy himself a interest in this here car. Happened I had three hundred bucks of my hard-earned savings salted down which same I trotted over to the man who bought the steers—that smoothed things over for everybody but Gary.

"I just mentioned to him that the sheriff was gonna be at the dance to-night and Gary allowed he'd forgotten something over in Nevada. That's where he's headed for right now."

"Gary—a—rustler!" exclaimed Nora aghast.

"Oh, well," said Tige, who could now afford to enact a charitable role. He'll have to do some tall rustling if he gets to Nevada over them sagebrush hills and alkali flats. Gee, it's great for a feller to be rolling up to a dance in his own car and with his best girl."

Tige jumped out and reached up to help Nora alight.

"I'm glad you think so," said she, frowning and dimpling at the same time.

IN CITY STREETS

BY MARTHA HASKELL CLARK

DIM seen through murky pane and fading light,
Hemmed round with smoke-stained brick and dingy walls,
There gleams a tiny strip of sunset bright,
That golden on my dust-thick window falls.

And clear amid the clamor of the street
I hear a pine-stirred murmur borne along
Of bough-hung rivers, flowing cool and sweet,
And echoed note of distant thrushes' song.

I smell the mingled scent of birch and fir,
In shadowed ways that wander, dim and cool,
Past hidden swamps and alders wind-astir
Beside the reedy edge of lowland pool.

The night-wind brushes soft along the stair,
With shadowed crown of woven starlight sweet;
And lo, I feel the breath of pine-sweet air,
And wind-swept leagues—within a city street.

Good References

By E. J. Rath

Author of "Elope If You Must," "Once Again," "Too Much Efficiency," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WHEN Mary Wayne, reduced by the sudden death of her father to earning her own living, applied at the Brain Workers' Exchange for a high-class position, she discovered in short order that skill, efficiency and respectability were all useless without the employers' fetish, *references*; and as she had yet to fill her first position she had none.

Turning sadly away she met another girl, Nell Norcross, who, being fortunately abundantly supplied with the great essential, had just secured a particularly fine position with Miss Caroline Marshall, of an old and conservative family on lower Fifth Avenue, and when later she, Nell, was taken ill and it became evident that it would be weeks before she would be able to work, she persuaded Mary to take her job, and incidentally her name and references.

Mary did so, and easily got the position, but discovered to her dismay that it was not with Miss Marshall personally, but as social secretary to her huge and vigorous nephew, Bill Marshall, a young man just out of college, who abhorred society, but was being forced into it by his rich aunt to maintain "the position of the family." Bill's position was peculiar. His aunt stood in the place of mother and guardian to him, and he was her only natural heir, but their ideas for his career were diametrically opposed. Also things were complicated by the fact that Bill had brought home a college friend, Pete Stearns, a practical joker of great genius, who, being of a family that Miss Marshall regarded much as a mountaineer regards a revenueur, had insisted as posing as Bill's valet, and who further insisted upon giving Bill a most enviable reputation, to his aunt, as a student and generally model young man. Likewise respectfully suggesting methods by which Bill might easily break into the loathed society.

Mary found the task set her far from an easy one, but Bill getting himself arrested one night when the police broke up a prize-fight, the pseudo valet being obliged to appeal to her in order to get bail, gave her a club which she did not hesitate to wield, with the result that Bill finally consented to allow a party to be given in his honor. The guests were all of the older and more conservative aristocracy of the city, Bill inviting only one friend, whom he described as Signor Antonio Valentino, a famous Italian sculptor.

In spite of the fact that Bill's friend proved to be Kid Whaley, the prize-fighter, the party went off very well; so well that Miss Marshall conceived the idea of following it up with a dinner, at which the famous Mrs. Rokeby-Jones would be a guest. In fear and trembling Mary at last was forced to telephone that lady, only to learn that she had never had a secretary by the name of Nell Norcross, and Nell herself, when taxed with it, admitted that she had written all the fine references by which Mary had secured the position, herself.

Stunned by this, and realizing that Miss Marshall was determined to have Mrs. Rokeby-Jones present, no matter who else was invited, Nell set about changing the plans, and, with the aid of Bill and Pete, succeeded in getting the dinner abandoned in favor of a yachting cruise. A fine auxiliary yacht, the Sunshine, was chartered, and finally one pleasant evening the party all went aboard.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WAY OF A MAID.

LARCHMONT HARBOR!

It was fair even to the eyes of Bill Marshall, as he stood under the after awning of the Sunshine, staring out over the shining water, as yet untouched by so much

as a breath of breeze. He was in no pleasant mood this morning, but he could not deny the serene, luxurious charm of the harbor. At another time it might have awakened the spirit of the muse within him; Pete always insisted that far under the surface Bill was a poet. But now its influence was not quite so potent as that; it

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merely laid a restraining spell upon him, soothing him, mollifying him, yet not lifting him to the heights.

There were many yachts at anchor, with club ensigns and owners' flags drooping limp in the sluggish air. Bill watched them for signs of life, but it was still an early hour for Larchmont. Occasionally he saw a hand scrubbing a deck or polishing a brass, but he discovered no person who resembled an owner or a guest. A warm mist had thinned sufficiently to show the rocky shore, and beyond it, partly sequestered among the trees, the summer homes and cottages of persons who still slept in innocence of the designs of Aunt Caroline. The harbor was not even half awake; it was yet heavy with the unspent drowsiness of a summer night.

Bill was on deck early because he had slept badly. The affair of Mary Wayne and Pete Stearns, as he interpreted it, rankled. The yacht had been clear of Hell Gate before he went to his stateroom, and even then it was a long time before he closed his eyes. The fact that Bill was jealous he did not himself attempt to blink; he admitted it.

"He's not a valet, of course," Bill was muttering, as he continued to watch the harbor. "But she doesn't know that. Why does she have to pick a valet? And if she wanted to go ashore with him, why didn't she say so, instead of sneaking off? I wish I'd stayed home. Damned if I'll go into society, either by way of the steamboat route or any other way."

A steward brought breakfast and served it under the awning. Bill greeted it with his usual sound appetite; nothing ever seriously interfered with his breakfast.

"Good morning!"

He looked up from the omelette at Mary Wayne, who stood there all in white, fresh, clear-eyed, a part of the morning itself.

Bill arose and drew another chair to the table; he could do no less.

"Good morning," he said.

"Doesn't it make you just want to shout?" she exclaimed. "I was watching it from my stateroom window while I dressed. It's Larchmont, isn't it? I love it already."

Bill pushed the coffee pot toward her and rang for the steward.

"Yes; it's Larchmont," he said.

"Aren't you just glad all over that we came?"

"Not particularly."

Mary studied him more carefully.

"Oh," she said.

Bill continued to eat in silence. The steward brought another omelette and she helped herself sparingly.

"How long shall we stay here, do you think?" she ventured.

"What have I got to say about it?"

"I should think you'd have quite a lot to say. I would if I was in command of a yacht."

"Suppose you weren't sure who was in command?"

"I'd make sure," she answered promptly.

Bill glowered sullenly. The spell of the morning was loosening its grip.

"Well, aboard this yacht it appears that everybody does as he pleases," said Bill, helping himself to more coffee and ignoring her proffered assistance.

His mood pleased her. She would not, of course, show him that it did; but her innermost self accepted it as a tribute, no matter how ungraciously the tribute might be disguised.

"That's something new, isn't it?" she inquired. "At sea I always thought the captain was a czar. Have we a soviet, or something like that?"

"I'm not sure we have even that much. More coffee?"

"No, thank you."

He appeared determined to relapse into a silence, but Mary would not have it so. She had not been wholly tranquil when she came on deck; she was somewhat uncertain about the night before. But now everything suited her very well.

"Do you go ashore here?" she asked.

"Don't know."

"Will any of us be permitted to go ashore?"

"Why ask me?"

"Because you don't seem to want us to use the launch."

Bill gave her a measuring glance.

"Did I say so?"

"Not exactly; that is, not in so many words. But last night—"

"We won't talk about last night, if you don't mind."

She was becoming better pleased every minute. When she had retired the night before she made up her mind that it would be necessary to make a clear explanation concerning Peter, the valet. Now she knew that she would never explain.

"Well, if we're not permitted to go ashore here, do you think we can get permission at Newport?" she asked.

"Confound it! I didn't say you couldn't go ashore. You can go ashore any time you want. You can—"

Bill excused himself abruptly and walked forward. Mary beamed at his retreating back and poured another cup of coffee.

"He was going to say I could go to hell," she murmured. "Oh, lovely!"

Aunt Caroline had breakfast served in her stateroom and then sent for Mary. After a satisfactory conference, she dismissed Mary and sent for Bill.

"How soon are you going ashore, William?" she asked.

"I didn't know I was going."

"Why, of course. You have friends here. You can't leave Larchmont without calling. That's what we came for."

"Who are the friends, I'd like to know."

"Well, in the first place, I believe Bishop Wrangell is staying here—with the Williamses. It will give you an opportunity to meet them; they're very desirable. And then the Kingsleys have a cottage here, or did, at any rate. You remember the little Kingsley girl at the party—the one in blue?"

Bill remembered. Only she was not the Kingsley girl; she was Arnold Gibbs's little girl.

"You must look them up, too. They'll probably have some people visiting them, too; the Kingsleys always did entertain, and they have a very good position. And Miss Norcross thinks it just possible that the Humes have opened their house. You've never met Mrs. Hume, but if you just mention that you're a Marshall, she'll be delighted to see you. She knew your mother."

Bill groaned.

"Talk to Miss Norcross about it," added Aunt Caroline. "She'll know exactly what you should do."

"Good Lord, Aunt Caroline! Don't you think I know how to behave without getting tips from Miss Norcross? You'll be wanting me to consult Peter next."

"And a very good idea it would be, William. I suggest it. And now see if you can find last night's *Evening Post*; I haven't seen it yet. After that I think you'd better start."

Bill walked out like a surly child. He could not find the *Evening Post*, but he picked up a copy of *Devilish Stories*, gave it to a maid and told her Aunt Caroline wanted it. Then he went on deck and ordered the launch.

He had no intention of calling on anybody. He might ring up Kid Whaley on the phone and see if everything was all set for that little affair. But what he wanted principally was a change of environment.

Mary saw him sulking at the rail as he waited for the launch to be brought around to the gangway. She smiled, bit her lip and approached.

"You're going ashore?"

"Uhuh."

"You have cards with you, I suppose? Your aunt's also?"

Bill faced her savagely.

"Stacks of cards," he barked. "Mine and my aunt's and my valet's and my secretary's and the steward's and everybody else's. And my shoes are clean and I've washed behind my ears and brushed my hair in the back. Anything else?"

"I don't think of a thing, unless you've forgotten a handkerchief," she said, sweetly.

The launch arrived and Bill boarded it. At the final moment it occurred to him that he had, perhaps, been ungracious.

"Want to come along?" he asked, looking up at the rail where Mary stood. He really hoped she would say yes.

Mary shook her head and smiled like the morning.

"I'm afraid I have too many things to do," she answered. "But thank you, just the same. You won't forget to call on Mrs. Hume, if she's here?"

"I won't forget to take you by the neck

and pitch you overboard," was what Bill had in his mind, but he did not give utterance to it. He merely scowled and turned his back.

Mary watched the launch as it headed for the yacht club landing and, when it had moved beyond any possibility of hearing, laughed outright.

"The poor man!" she said. "I'd better watch myself. Back to New York I felt as if I were living in a reign of hidden terror. Now the pendulum is at the other extreme and I feel as if I could do anything that pleased me. It's a time for caution, probably. But he is so funny!"

Bill was gone for several hours. He was late for lunch when the launch drew alongside the Sunshine; in fact, everybody else had had lunch long ago. His visit ashore had not been satisfactory and was only prolonged because he felt that the shore, however strange and lonesome, was more congenial than the deck of his yacht.

He spied Aunt Caroline in an easy chair.

"Nobody home, Aunt Caroline?" he said.

"Oh, I'm sorry, William. Well, there's no hurry, of course; we can stay over indefinitely. Probably you'd better go back this afternoon."

Bill had no intention of going back. He had not visited a single house; he had done nothing beyond making several futile attempts to get a telephone connection with Kid Whaley.

He glanced about the deck and saw nobody but a couple of hands.

"Where's Miss Norcross?" he asked.

"She went swimming," said Aunt Caroline.

"Swimming!"

"Right off the yacht, William. Do you know that she's a very remarkable swimmer. I was completely astonished."

William went to the rail and surveyed the harbor. He saw no sign of a swimmer.

"Where is she?" he demanded.

"Oh, somewhere out there," said Aunt Caroline, with an easy gesture. "She's perfectly safe. Peter is with her."

"What!"

"They went swimming together. I wish you could have seen them, William. They were just like two children. They've been

swimming all around among the yachts. Where they are now I haven't the least idea; but they'll be back."

Bill struck the rail savagely and once again glared out at the harbor. So this was the reason his secretary did not want to go ashore; she had an engagement to go swimming with his valet. But if Bill was disturbed, not so Aunt Caroline; she was once more absorbed in her magazine.

The boss of the yacht Sunshine walked forward, where he found the second officer superintending the cleaning of brasswork.

"Where's that swimming party of ours?" asked Bill, carelessly.

"Now, there's a question you might well ask, sir," said the second officer. "Where aren't they? Seems to me they've been all over the harbor, sir, as far as I could make out. Never saw anything like it."

"Is there any boat following them?"

"Boat, sir?" The second officer laughed. "I don't know what they'd be doing with a boat. The last time I saw them they looked as if they were fit to swim to Europe. And the young lady, sir!"

He made what was intended to be an eloquent gesture.

"What about the young lady?"

"A fish, sir; a fish, if ever one lived. First off they did a lot of playing around the yacht, sir. Climbing aboard and diving off again. I give you my word, sir, the whole crew was on deck watching. The young lady—well, she's a little thing, but she's nicely set up, sir. She'd think nothing of making a back dive off the end of the bridge. And the young gentleman was no ways behind her, sir. You'd think there was a couple of porpoises in the harbor."

Bill's soul was growing blacker and blacker.

"I've seen swimmers in my time, but never the beat of that pair, unless it was professionals," added the second officer, in a musing tone.

He glanced out at the water, then gestured quickly.

"Look, now! There they go."

Bill looked. There was a commotion in the water a hundred yards distant. Two heads were moving rapidly in parallel courses; one was conspicuous in a scarlet

bathing cap. He could see a flashing of wet arms; the sound of a familiar laugh came to him. A race seemed to be in progress.

He ran up on the bridge for a better view and evidently the red cap sighted him, for there was an instant of slackened pace and the joyous wave of a white arm. And then she was again leaving a wake behind her as she sped in pursuit of the second swimmer. Bill gritted his teeth and watched. They were not returning to the yacht; rather, they were increasing their distance from it with every stroke. He stared until they passed from sight behind a big sloop that lay at anchor, and then the harbor seemed to swallow them. Evidently they were again exploring the yacht anchorage, which was crowded with craft.

Bill slowly returned to the deck.

"They've been at it over an hour," volunteered the second officer. "Get the lady to dive for you when they come back, sir. She'll surprise you, if I don't mistake."

Bill made no answer, but walked aft, where he plunged himself heavily into a wicker chair. Aunt Caroline had retired to her stateroom for a nap and he had the deck to himself.

"I'll not stand for it!" he muttered fiercely. "Last night they were sneaking off to town together and now they're making a holy show of themselves here. What does she think she can put over on me, anyhow? As for Pete Stearns, I'll drown him."

In fact, Bill for a time had been minded to get into his own bathing suit and pursue them, but his dignity intervened. No; if his secretary chose to run away with his valet, let her do so. What made it worse, she knew he was aboard; she had seen him; she had waved her arm at him. And then, deliberately, she had turned her back upon him.

After half an hour of glooming he went to the rail again and once more searched the harbor with his glance. He saw no flashing arms; no red cap.

"I won't stand much more of this," he said, grimly. "I'll show them where they get off."

He went to his stateroom and mixed a drink, and after that he mixed another. Presently he returned to the deck, this time

with a pair of binoculars. The glasses showed him no more than he had been able to see without them. He fell to pacing, his hands clasped behind him, his glance directed at the canvas-covered deck beneath his feet. Napoleon could have done it no better; Lord Nelson would have been hard put to outdo him.

The afternoon was as fair as the morning, but Bill took no account of its glory. He was wholly absorbed in plumbing the gloomy depths of his mind.

"They think they're putting it over on me," he sneered. "All right. Let 'em see what happens."

Once again he swept the glasses in a circle of the harbor. No scarlet cap. He glanced at his watch.

"Well, I'm through. Time's up."

Slipping the glasses into their case, he strode forward and banged on the door of the sailing master's cabin. A sleepy-eyed officer answered the summons.

"We're going to pull out of here at once," said Bill.

"Everybody aboard, sir?"

"Everybody that's going."

"Very good, sir. Which way are we heading?"

"I'll tell you when we get outside the harbor. I'm in a hurry."

The sailing master ducked back into his cabin, shouted an order through a speaking tube that communicated with the engine-room and then ran forward along the deck. A minute later the winch was wheezing and the yacht Sunshine was bringing her mud-hook aboard.

Bill retired to his stateroom and poured another drink.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CASTAWAYS.

TWO swimmers rested for breath at an anchorage buoy and smiled at each other.

"Where did you learn to swim, anyhow?" demanded Pete Stearns. "You never said a word about it until this afternoon."

"I don't tell all I know," said Mary,

tucking a wet lock of hair under the scarlet cap.

"I believe you. But there's only one thing I'd criticize: you'd get more out of that trudgeon of yours if you watched your breathing."

"I know it," she answered, with a nod. "But I don't take it so seriously as all that. I've always managed to get along, anyhow."

Pete blinked the salt water out of his eyes and studied the social secretary with new respect.

"You haven't ever been a diving beauty or a movie bathing girl or anything like that, have you?"

Mary laughed. "Not yet, thank you. I never made any money out of swimming."

"Oh, they don't swim," said Pete. "They just dress for it."

"Well, I never did that either."

"But you could if you wanted to."

"That will do," said Mary.

Even in the democratic embrace of Larchmont Harbor she did not think it advisable for her employer's valet to venture into the realm of personal compliment. Besides, she was not wholly convinced of the validity of his status as a valet. For one thing, she had never heard of a valet who could swim, and by swimming she meant more than the ordinary paddling about of the average human. For Mary could swim herself and she had discovered that Pete was something more than her equal.

"Well, anyhow," he said, "you're a first-class seagoing secretary. Did you notice Mr. Marshall standing on the bridge? I think he saw us."

"I'm quite sure he did. And I believe we'd better be starting back."

"Is it a race?"

"You never can tell," said Mary, as she slid off the buoy like a seal and shot along under the surface for a dozen feet.

Pete fell in beside her and let her set the pace. It was a smart one and he did not try to take the lead; he was saving himself for the sprint. For several minutes Mary attended strictly to her work. They were reaching mid-harbor when she eased up and raised her head to take a bearing for the Sunshine. Then she ceased swimming altogether and began to tread.

"Why, where's the yacht?" she said.

Pete also paused for a survey.

"They've moved it, haven't they? Well, I'll—"

He made a slow and deliberate inspection of the horizon.

"Is that it?" and Mary pointed.

Pete studied a stern view of a somewhat distant craft, shading his eyes from the sun.

"That's it," he announced. "And it's still moving."

"They must be going to anchor in another place. I think they might have waited until we reached them. Shall we follow?"

She did not wait for an answer, but fell once more into a steady trudgeon stroke that served her extremely well. Then she paused for another reconnaissance.

"The darn thing is still moving," declared Pete. "It's further off than when we first saw it. Now, what do you make out of that?"

Mary wrinkled her forehead into a moist frown as the water dripped from the tip of her nose.

"It's perfectly silly to try to catch it by swimming," she said. "They must have forgotten all about us. Why didn't they blow a whistle, or something?"

There was no question that the silhouette of the Sunshine had receded since their first observation. Pete tried to judge the distance; it was more than half a mile, he was certain.

"Well, what 'll we do? Paddle around here and wait for it to come back?"

"I don't mind admitting that I'm a little bit tired," said Mary. "I'm not going to wait out here in the middle of the bay for Mr. Marshall to turn his yacht around. How far is it over to that shore?"

"It's only a few hundred yards. Shall we go?"

"We'll go there and wait until we see what they're going to do."

Several minutes afterward Pete stood waist deep on a sandy bottom. There was a tiny beach in front of them, where a cove nestled between two rocky horns. He gazed out into the harbor.

"It's still going—the other way," he reported.

Mary was also standing and staring. The Sunshine looked discouragingly small.

"Oh, well, we'll sit on the beach and get some sun. If Bill—if Mr. Marshall thinks he's having fun with us he's greatly mistaken. I'm having the time of my ecclesiastical life."

He waded ashore and sat down on the sand. But Mary did not follow. She stood immersed to her waist, biting her lip. There was a look of annoyance and a hint of confusion in her eyes.

"You'd better come ashore and rest," called Pete. "You'll get chilled standing half in and half out of the water."

"I—I can't come ashore very well," said Mary.

"What's the matter?"

She was flushing under her freckles.

"When we decided to swim around the harbor," she said, slowly, "I—er—slipped off the skirt of my bathing suit and tossed it up to one of the deck-hands to keep for me until I got back. And it's aboard the yacht now."

Pete stifled a grin.

"It—it wasn't a very big skirt," she added. "But it was a skirt."

"Oh, forget it," he advised. "Don't mind me. Come on out of the water."

But Mary was again studying the retreat-yacht. At that instant she would liked to have laid hands on Bill Marshall. Not only the skirt of her bathing suit, but every stitch she owned was aboard that yacht.

"I'm only a valet," Pete reminded her.

Mary was not at all certain about that, but she decided not to be foolish any longer. She waded ashore. There was something boyish about her as she emerged full length into the picture, yet not too boyish. Not only was she lacking a skirt, but also stockings, for when Mary went swimming she put aside frills. The scarlet bathing cap gave her a charming jauntiness, although she was anything but jaunty in mood.

"My, but the sun is comfortable," she said, as she sat down and dug her toes into the sand.

"It'll warm you up," said Pete, affecting to take no notice of her costume. "Say, what do you make out of that yacht, anyhow?"

"It seems to be still going. It looks awfully small to me."

They watched it for another minute.

"There's another landing down that way, where they're headed," said Pete. "Maybe they want to send somebody up to town for something."

"You've been here before, haven't you?"

"Oh, I've valeted 'round a bit in the summers, miss."

She gave him a swift, sidelong glance. Out in the harbor he had dropped the "miss;" the water seemed to have washed away his surface servility. Now he was falling back into the manner of his calling.

"They can't go much farther in that direction," he added. "They've either got to anchor, turn around or stand out for the mouth of the harbor. We'll know in a minute or two, miss."

"Please stop calling me 'miss,'" she said, sharply.

"Why?" He turned innocent eyes toward her.

"It annoys me."

"Oh, very well. But I didn't want you to feel that I was forgetting my place. Once you reminded me—"

"Never mind, if you please. I think one of your troubles is that you are too conscious of your 'place,' as you call it. You make other people conscious of it."

"I'm unconscious from now on, Miss Way—Miss Norcross."

She whirled around upon him in fair earnest.

"Excuse me," said Pete. "I get the names mixed. I'm apt to do the same thing when I'm with your friend Miss Wayne."

She studied him with uneasy eyes. How much did he know? Or was he just blundering clumsily around on the brink of a discovery? Last night he had flung a pointed hint at her; it came to her mind now. Well, if there was to be a battle, Mary felt that she was not without her weapons. She knew of a divinity student who followed the prize ring and who kissed the house guests of the master to whom he played valet.

"She's swinging around," said Pete, abruptly, pointing out into the harbor.

The Sunshine was turning to port and now showed her profile. But she was not

turning far enough to cruise back in her own wake. Her new course was almost at a right angle to that she had been following, and she seemed bent upon pursuing it briskly.

Pete gasped and leaped to his feet.

"Come on!" he cried.

The rocky promontory that sheltered one end of their little beach was cutting off a view of the yacht. He raced along the strip of sand, with Mary at his heels, quite unconscious of her missing skirt and certainly a gainer in freedom of movement through the lack of it.

Pete climbed the rocks at reckless speed and she followed him, heedless of the rough places. He was poised rigidly on an eminence as she scrambled up beside him.

"Damnation!"

He said it so fervently that it seemed to Mary the most sincere word he had ever spoken.

"Do you see what they're doing?" he cried, seizing her arm. "Look! They're heading out of the harbor!"

"You mean they're leaving us?"

He shook her arm almost savagely.

"Can't you see? There they go. They're headed out, I tell you. They're going out into the Sound!"

The yacht seemed to be gaining in speed.

"But I just can't believe it," she said, in a stifled voice.

"You'd better, then. Look!"

"But I'm sure that Mr. Marshall wouldn't—"

"Oh, you are, are you? Well, I'll prove to you in about one holy minute that he'll do whatever comes into his crazy head. Take your last look. They're on their way."

Nor had they long to wait in order to be convinced beyond argument. Even at the distance that separated them from the Sunshine they could see the white bone in her teeth as she continued to pick up speed. And then she was gone, beyond a jutting point that barred their vision.

Pete looked at Mary. Mary looked at Pete. Both looked again toward the spot where they caught their last glimpse of the Sunshine. Then, with one accord and without speech, they slowly descended to the

beach and sat in the sand. A thin, blue cloud of rage seemed to have descended upon them.

Minutes afterward she flung a handful of sand at an innocent darning needle that was treading air directly in front of her.

"Oh, say something!" she cried.

"You'd censor it, Mlle. Secretary."

"I wouldn't!"

Pete lifted his eyes to the heavens and swore horribly.

"That's better," she said. "But you needn't do it any more. Now what are we going to do?"

"Wait for the commander-in-chief to get over his practical joke, I suppose."

"Then, this is your idea of a joke, is it?"

"Not mine; his," said Pete. "And it's not so bad, at that."

Mary tried to wither him with a look.

"I believe you don't care," she said, stormily.

"Oh, yes, I do. But I'm all over the rage part of it. What's the use?"

"Well, think of something, then."

"I don't think it even requires thinking. What is there to do but sit here and wait?"

Mary gritted her teeth.

"That may be all right for you," she said, coldly. "But it seems absolutely futile to me. We don't know whether they'll ever come back."

"Oh, they're bound to."

"They're not, anything of the kind! He's done it deliberately; I'm sure of it. I wish I had him here for about two minutes."

"I wish you had," said Pete, earnestly. "I'd pay for a grand stand seat."

"I'd tell him what I think of him."

"You sure would."

"I never felt so helpless in my life. All I'm doing is getting sunburned. I'll be a fright."

"If it's freckles you're worrying about, he likes 'em."

"Oh, don't talk about them." She had a sudden craving for a mirror. But beyond that boyish bathing suit and the scarlet rubber cap, Mary did not even possess so much as a hairpin. She would have given a million dollars for a kimono and a vanity bag.

"At a rough guess," mused Pete, "I'd say we're the first persons who were ever shipwrecked on a society coast. Didn't you ever feel a yearning to be marooned?"

"Never—and I never will, after this."

"Well, we're better off than a lot of castaways. We're not on an island. We can walk home, if it comes to that."

"Walk! Dressed like this?"

"Swim, then."

Mary relapsed into a fit of exasperated silence. If Pete's rage had cooled, her own was still at cherry heat. She felt ready to take the whole world by the throat and shake revenge out of it, particularly out of Bill Marshall. But she was helpless even to start upon the warpath. A girl in a bathing suit, the skirt of which had been carried to sea by a ruthless yacht, is not panoplied for a campaign. She felt shamed, outraged, desperate to the point of violence—and futile. It seemed quite possible, as she viewed it then, that she might be compelled to sit on that beach for the remainder of her life. Certainly she did not intend to walk around Larchmont in a costume designed only for the Australian crawl.

Pete was devoting time to a survey of their immediate environment. The beach was not more than ten yards in breadth; it was bounded on either side by the little capes of rock, and behind them by a low stone wall. A well-rolled and clipped lawn came down to the edge of the wall; it was studded with trees and shrubs. The gable of a dwelling was visible through an opening. As Pete studied the landscape a figure appeared from among the trees.

It was that of a young man in white flannels. He approached to the top of the stone wall and observed them carefully.

"This is a private beach," said the young man, speaking in a peculiar drawl that Pete immediately identified with the world of exclusive society.

Mary, until then unaware of the presence of a third person, turned quickly, observed the speaker and huddled her knees under her chin.

"Well, we're private citizens," said Pete.

"We do not permit trespassing," said the young man.

"Do you by any chance permit Divine

Providence to deposit a pair of shipwrecked castaways on your seacoast?" inquired the valet.

The young man in flannels appeared to be puzzled. He was now studying Mary with particular attention. Then he glanced quickly from side to side, as though searching for something else.

"We never permit motion pictures to be taken here," he said. "Oblige me by going away."

"My dear sir," said Pete, who had risen to his feet, "we are not in the movies. We are not here for fame or for profit. We do not occupy your beach either in the interests of art or health. We are merely here as the result of a contingency, a hazard of fortune, a mischance of fate."

"Well, go away."

The young man stepped down on the beach and approached for a closer view.

Pete turned and whispered to Mary:

"Shall we steal his beautiful clothes and divide 'em up?"

"Hush!" she said.

The owner of the white flannels, which Pete was coveting with envious eyes, studied Mary until she began to blush.

"We do not wish to have this kind of a display on our private waterfront," he remarked. "You must leave at once."

Mary sprang up, her gray eyes dangerous.

"Can't you see that we're in distress?" she cried, hotly.

He surveyed her deliberately—her legs, bare from the knees down, her skirtless trunks, her white, rounded arms.

"I can see very little of anything," was his comment.

"Why, you—"

But even though she choked on her words, there was no need for her to finish them. Pete stepped to within a yard of the stranger.

"I don't like the color of your hair," he said, "and that, of course, leaves me no alternative."

So he tapped the young man on the nose, so unexpectedly and with such speed and virility that the owner of the nose lost his balance and sat in the sand.

Pete turned and seized Mary by the hand.

"Run like hell," he counseled.

"But where?"

"Overboard."

He dragged her across the sand and out into the water. Waist deep they paused and looked back.

The young man in flannels had followed to the edge of the water, where he stood holding a handkerchief to his nose and shaking a fist.

"You come ashore!" he yelled.

"We can't, sir. It's private," said Pete, with a bland grin.

"Come back here. I'm going to thrash you!"

"We can't come back," said Pete, "but we invite you to join us, dear old thing."

The young man stood irresolute, glaring at them. Then he looked down at his flannels and edged backward a step from the water.

"I'm going to have you arrested!" he cried, as he turned and ran in the direction of the house.

Pete waved him a gay salute.

"Well, come on," he said to Mary.

"Where?"

"To a more friendly coast. We can't use this one any more."

He struck out into the harbor and Mary followed.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SPOILERS.

THEY followed the shore for a while and presently a bend in its contour hid their view of the unfriendly harbor. It was an aimless journey. They were safe from the revenge of the young man in white flannels, but they were as far as ever from any project of rescue. Mary swam in a listless, automatic fashion; there was no longer any zest of sport. She was not tired, but her enthusiasm had oozed away. As for Pete, he also felt that there had been enough swimming for a day.

"Shall we try that place in there?" she asked, lifting her arm above the water and pointing.

"I'm for it," he answered, with a nod. "I'm not going to be a poor fish any lon-

ger. I don't care if they meet us with a shotgun committee."

Their second landing place was devoid of a beach, but it had shelving, sunwarmed rocks, upon which they climbed out and sat down.

"I never suspected you were a fighter," observed Mary, the recent picture still fresh in memory.

"I'm not. I'm a baseball player, by rights. That was what they call the hit-and-run play."

"Well, I think you did excellently, Peter. I was just getting ready to do something like that myself. Was his nose bleeding?"

"Here's hoping. While I don't claim to be within a mile of Signor Antonio Valentino's class, I have a fixed impression that by this time the young gentleman has a beak like a pelican."

Mary glanced appreciatively at her knight. "I'm glad Mr. Marshall wasn't there," she said.

"Why?"

"If he had hit him the young man would probably be dead, and then we'd have lots of trouble."

"Now, that," said Pete, in an aggrieved tone, "is what I call ungrateful. I hit the bird as hard as I could, didn't I? I don't see and need of dragging the boss into this, by way of comparison. Of course, if you can't get him out of your head—"

"Nonsense! He's not in my head. I said I was glad he wasn't there, didn't I? And I explained why. I didn't mean to take any credit away from you at all. Don't be so sensitive. Are you hungry?"

Pete groaned.

"There! Now you've done it. I've been busy trying to forget it and you've deliberately made me remember it. Of course I'm hungry. If I don't eat I'm going to die."

"So am I."

Pete stood up and looked about him.

"I don't see any coconut palms or breadfruit trees," he said. "That's what we're supposed to live on, isn't it? I don't even see a drink of water. It's an awful comedown for a pair of Robinson Crusoes, but it looks as if I'd have to go to somebody's kitchen door and ask for a handout."

"Never," said Mary. "I'll starve first."

"I don't think that's a very clever revenge. I'm still pusillanimous enough to eat. I'll scout around."

"No!"

"But why not?"

"Because I feel ridiculous enough as it is," she declared, frowning at her costume.

"But I might be able to locate some of our society friends. We're supposed to have friends here, aren't we?"

"I wouldn't dream of appealing to them."

Pete shook his head helplessly.

"Do you expect to sit here for the rest of your life?"

"I don't care. I'm not going to humiliate myself any further. We might meet another man and—"

"But I'll soak him for you. Honest."

"We might meet several."

"It doesn't take you long to collect a crowd, does it?" he said. "You can invent whole armies right out of your head. Be cheerful and take it the other way around; we may not meet anybody at all."

But Mary wiggled her toes in the sun and shook her head.

"You stay here, then, and I'll reconnoiter."

"No! I don't intend to be left alone."

"Let's hoist a signal of distress, then. That's always been done and it's considered perfectly good form."

"No."

"All right. Starve!" Pete made no effort to hide exasperation.

"I don't believe you'd care if I did."

His only answer to that was a gesture of despair. Who was it who claimed to understand woman? Pete would have been glad to submit this one for analysis and report.

He sat with his knees drawn up under his chin, staring out at the harbor. He was hungry. He was thirsty. He wanted a cigarette. He wanted to stretch his legs. He wanted to do anything except remain glued to a rock, like a shellfish. Why did she have to be so fussy on the subject of conventions? He knew that many a martyr had died cheerfully for a cause. But did ever one die for a cause like this?

After half an hour of silence he was about to renew the argument when he dis-

covered that she was asleep. She had curled herself up in a sunny hollow of the rocks, made a pillow out of an arm and become quite oblivious to Larchmont Harbor and all the world beyond and around it.

Pete arose cautiously. He climbed farther up on the rocks, then paused to look back. She had not moved. He went still farther inshore, moving noiselessly on all fours, then straightened up and walked as briskly as a man may who is not inured to going barefoot in the rough places.

"If she wakes up, let her holler," he muttered. "I'm going to take a look around."

Half an hour later he was back again, munching an apple. He had several more that he placed on the rock beside Mary, who still slept as dreamlessly as a baby and who had not stirred during his absence. Pete regarded her with severe eyes.

"Shall I wake her? No. Let her sleep the sleep of starvation within arm's reach of food. Never was there any justice more poetic. If she wants to be stubborn let her find out what it is costing her. Perhaps I'd better eat all the apples. No; I won't do that. Then she'd never know what she missed. I might leave a little row of cores for her to look at. That's a good idea, but—oh, she'd murder me. I think she could be dangerous if she tried."

Mary did not look dangerous. She seemed more like a tired little child. Once she stirred, but did not awaken, although she smiled faintly.

"Dreaming of Bill," was Pete's comment. "Which reminds me: wonder where Bill is?"

Several yachts had entered the harbor; others had left. But although he made systematic survey of the entire anchorage there was no trace of the Sunshine. The sun disappeared, and there followed a perceptible cooling of the air. Pete reached mechanically for his watch, then remembered and laughed. The laugh awoke Mary.

She sat up in a daze, staring at him.

"We're in Larchmont, sitting on a rock and trying to be dignified in the midst of preposterous adversity," he reminded her. "Have an apple?"

She seized one and bit into it, then eyed him accusingly.

"You did go away, didn't you?"

"Oh, hear the woman! Certainly I did. I sneaked off as soon as you hit the hay. I'm not cut out for a martyr. But I notice you're not above accepting the fruits of my enterprise. Now, are you ready to be reasonable?"

"I'm always reasonable," she mumbled through a large mouthful.

"So? Well, listen, then: I have made discoveries."

Mary stopped chewing and stared expectantly.

"Those apples come from a toy orchard. The orchard is part of the backyard of a house. This place where we are sitting is part of the waterfront adjoining that house. So much I have learned by being cautious as well as intrepid. Do I bore you?"

"Hurry!" she commanded.

"In the other part of that backyard, nearest to the house, is something even more important than food. Can you guess?"

"Clothes?"

"Not exactly the word," said Pete. "It is better to say the week's wash. My dear seagoing secretary, there is wash enough in that backyard not only for you and me, but for the whole crew of the Sunshine, if they had happened to be cast away with us."

"Well, if there are clothes there, for Heaven's sake, why didn't you bring some? I'm getting chilly."

"Wash, I said; not clothes. You'll understand when you see. The reason I didn't bring any is simple: it was still broad daylight. Back in the orchard I had partial concealment among the trees, but I took chances, even there. To have invaded the raiment department would have been foolhardiness, for which I have never been celebrated. So I merely located the outfit and provided myself with food."

He glanced out at the harbor.

"In a very short time it will be twilight, and when twilight comes we will see what can be done to remove a rival from the path of Annette Kellerman."

Mary was too deeply interested in these disclosures to pay any attention to this ref-

erence to her present costume. He had brought a new hope into her life. Clothes at last! After that—well, clothes came first. Except, of course, the apples. She began to eat another.

Never had a twilight gathered so slowly. Just as she had been immovable before, now it was difficult to restrain her impatience. She was for starting at once.

"I'm getting chillier all the time," she complained.

"Patience," he counseled. "Give us fifteen minutes more. If you're cold you might spend the time doing setting-up exercises."

He took his own advice and began a series of exercises that were highly recommended to the pupils in Kid Whaley's gymnasium. Mary watched for awhile and then emulated him, so that two figures were presently engaged in an occupation that suggested nothing so much as a pair of railroad semaphores gone mad. Eventually they paused breathless.

"I think we'd better go," said Pete. "A man on that nearest yacht seems to be trying to answer us with a pair of wigwag flags. You didn't happen to be telegraphing him anything, did you?"

Mary squealed and began scrambling up the rocks.

"You'd better let me take the lead," he said. "I know the way. Follow close behind me and do whatever I do. If I flop down on my stomach, you flop. If I duck behind a tree, you duck. If I run, run."

"And if we get caught?" she asked.

"That's one thing we won't permit. Don't suggest it. Take to the water again, if it comes to that."

The ledge of rock along which they picked their way ended at a grassy bluff, where there was a grove of small evergreens. In among the trees Pete paused to look and listen. Then he beckoned her to follow. Dusk was thicker in the grove, and Mary felt more comfortable in its added security, although she hoped it would not be long before they came to the land of promised raiment. Pete moved stealthily and she imitated his caution.

They skirted along close to the edge of the bluff, keeping within the shelter of the

evergreens. Through a vista she glimpsed a house, and pointed, but Pete shook his head. Evidently it was not the right one. Presently they arrived at a tall, thickly grown hedge.

He got down on all fours in front of it, thrust his head into an opening and, with a series of cautious wriggles, began to disappear from her sight. When he had completely vanished, Mary undertook to follow him. The hedge was rough and stiff, and the aperture through which he had passed was uncomfortably small. With head and shoulders through, she looked up and found him beckoning.

"It scratches awfully," she whispered.

"S-sh! Never mind the scratches."

She wriggled a few inches farther.

"Ouch! I'm afraid I'll tear—"

"Let it tear."

He seized her hand and dragged her completely through, mindless of her protest that she was being flayed.

"Don't talk so loudly," he warned.

"You're in the orchard now. It's only a little way to the raiment. Remember: this is no deserted house. The folks are home. I'm banking on the fact that they're at dinner, and that the servants are busy. Come on."

He now began to advance by a series of short rushes, each rush taking him from the shelter of one tree to the next. Mary followed, establishing herself behind a tree as soon as he had vacated it. It seemed to her that the trees were intolerably meager in girth; she felt as if she were trying to hide behind a series of widely placed lead pencils. But the dusk was continuing to thicken, which was welcome consolation.

They were within easy view of the house now. It was something more than a house; it was a mansion, filled with innumerable windows, it seemed to Mary, and out of each window a pair of accusing eyes probably staring. Where the orchard left off there was an open space, and beyond that a yard full of fluttering garments, suspended from a clothes line. Between the yard and the house was another hedge, and Pete was counting upon that hedge as a screen.

They paused at the edge of the orchard.

"For the next few minutes we are in the hands of Providence," he whispered. "Want to come with me, or will you trust me to pick out a costume?"

"I—I'll trust you," said Mary.

"Stay right here, then. Here goes."

Out into the open, where there was still an ominous amount of daylight, dashed Bill Marshall's valet, bent as low as he could manage without sacrificing speed. Mary held her breath and watched. A few seconds and he vanished behind a white curtain that represented a part of the family wash.

To Mary it seemed that there was an interminable interval. Then, with a spooky flutter, the white curtain that hid him seemed to sink into the ground. Another instant and the flying figure of Pete Stearns was approaching. He seemed to be pursued by a long, white snake, writhing close at his heels. And then he was back in the shelter of the trees.

"Help pull on this!" he panted.

And Mary identified the white snake as a clothes line to which was attached garment after garment of ghostly hue. She seized the line and together they raced back toward the rear of the orchard, the snake following.

"Found a sickle and cut the whole line!" he explained. "Quickest way. Help yourself. I'll begin at the other end."

Mary was pulling clothes-pins as rapidly as she could make her fingers fly.

"Don't stop to choose anything here," he warned. "Take everything. We've got to beat it."

So they took everything. Pete made two hasty bundles, thrust one into her arms, picked up the other and started at a lope through the orchard, in a direction opposite to that from which they had come. They came to another hedge that was as forbidding as the one through which they had passed.

He dropped his bundle, dove half-way through the hedge, made a swift inspection of what lay beyond, and then hauled himself back again.

"It's all right," he said.

Picking up his bundle, he tossed it over the hedge. He seized Mary's and repeated.

"Now for you!"

Before she could protest, even had she been so minded, Pete was wedging her into a dense, prickly obstruction and ordering her to scramble with all her might. She landed head down on the other side of the hedge, and was picking herself up when he joined her.

He seized both bundles and started running again. They were still among evergreens, but the property was evidently that of a neighbor. Pete had made an observation of it on his previous journey. He knew exactly where he was going. Right on the edge of the bluff, which still followed the line of the shore, stood a summer pavilion. Into its shadowy shelter he dashed, with Mary Wayne close behind.

"There!" he gasped, tossing the bundles to the floor. "Now doll yourself up."

Five minutes later she looked up at him in dismay.

"Why, it's nothing but lingerie!" she exclaimed.

Pete was holding out a pair of silk pajamas at arm's length, for better inspection.

"What did you expect? A tailor-made suit?" he demanded. "I'm going to be satisfied with these."

"But lingerie! And it's—"

"Put on plenty of it and it'll keep you warm."

"You don't understand," she said. "Oh, we've done an awful thing!"

She spread out a long, lacy garment and viewed it with awe in her eyes.

"Do you know lingerie when you see it?" she demanded. "Why, this is so beautiful that I'm afraid of it. I never dared buy anything like this for myself."

"Is that what's worrying you?"

"But it's perishable—fragile! And I'm afraid I've torn some of it already. You're not a woman and you can't understand—but what I'm doing is almost a sacrilege. I feel like a vandal."

"Here's some more," said Pete, tossing additional articles out of his pile. "What do you care? Pile it on."

He discovered a second suit of pajamas as he rummaged further, and added them to his collection.

"Give you five minutes to dress," he said, as he stepped outside the summer-house, the pajamas tucked under his arm.

Pete dressed on the edge of the bluff, putting on one suit of pajamas over another, and keeping a wary eye for possible intruders. So concerned was he lest they be discovered that he was unaware, until he had finished dressing, that his outer covering consisted of the coat of one suit and the trousers of another. The coat was striped in purple and green, the trousers in a delicate shade of salmon pink. But the effect did not dismay him; rather, it appealed to his sense of color.

As he approached the summer-house he saw an apparition in the doorway. Mary Wayne had taken his advice; she had piled it on.

"Jehosaphat!" he exclaimed in a low voice. "You look like something out of Rider Haggard, or grand opera, or— Why, you're barbaric!"

"Isn't it awful!" she whispered.

"Awful? Why, it's magnificent! You're not dressed—you're arrayed! You're a poem, a ballad—a romance! You're a queen of Egypt; you're something from the next world! You're—oh, baby!"

He spread his hands and salaamed.

"Hush, for Heaven's sake! I just can't wear this. It's impossible!"

"You're a hasheesh dream," he murmured.

Mary shook her head angrily.

"I've no shoes," she said. "And the stockings are not mates."

"You're a vision from heaven," said Pete.

"Shut up! Don't you see I'm no better off than I was before? Neither are you."

"We're warmer, anyhow."

"Oh, be sensible."

"And we're more beautiful," he added, stroking his silken coat.

"But we can't go anywhere in these things!" she cried. "We'll be arrested. We haven't any money. We'll be taken for lunatics. And then they'll find out we're thieves. And then— Oh, I wish I'd never come on this awful trip!"

Pete shook off the spell of his gorgeous imagination.

"You're a hard lady to please," he said. "But I'll see what I can do. Go back in the summer-house and wait for me. If anybody bothers you, jump at them and do some kind of an incantation. They'll leave you alone, fast enough."

"Where are you going now?" she demanded.

"Well, having stolen a classy outfit of society lingerie for you, I'm now going to see if I can steal you a limousine."

"Peter! Don't, you leave me here. Come back! I—"

But he was gone.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HIGH COST OF JEALOUSY.

BILL MARSHALL, leaning on the after rail of his yacht and watching the churning, white wake of her twin screws, was not sure but the best way to mend things was to jump overboard and forget how to swim. Jealousy and rage were no longer his chief troubles. Remorse had perched itself on his already burdened shoulders. And then came shame, piling itself on top of remorse. And soon afterward fear, to sit on the shoulders of shame. Truly, his load was great.

To steam his way out of Larchmont Harbor had been a magnificent revenge. But with Bill, vengeance was never a protracted emotion; when its thrill began to fade it left him chilled. Even jealousy did not suffice to warm him. And then came crowding all the other emotions, to thrust him down into a bottomless mire of despondency and irresolution.

The sailing master of the Sunshine had reached the opinion that his owner, in which relation, as charterer, Bill stood for the time being, was either extremely absent-minded or slightly mad. When the yacht cleared the harbor he asked for further orders. Bill told him to stand across the Sound for awhile. When it was no longer possible to hold that course, because of the presence of Long Island, he again asked for a course. Bill advised him to sail east awhile, then west awhile, but on no account to bother him about the

matter any further. So this was done, while the sailing master and his two officers held whispered consultations on the subject of their owner.

While these somewhat peculiar maneuvers were being carried into execution, Bill endeavored to reach a decision. Should he go back to Larchmont and hunt for the missing ones? No; their punishment was not yet great enough. Even if he went back, was there any chance of finding them? Had they gone ashore? Had they been picked up by a craft? Had—he shivered—anything worse happened to them? Of course nothing had happened to them; of course. He assured himself of that over and over again. And yet—well, things did happen, even to the best of swimmers. And if anything had happened, what could he do now? Would he be responsible? Would he be a murderer? Nonsense; certainly not. Yet he would feel himself a murderer, even if the law demanded nothing of him. Why, if anything happened to that little girl— He gripped the rail and tried to pull himself together.

Well, even if the worst happened, it would put an end to his society career. There might be consolation in that, he thought; but much as he sought to draw upon this source of comfort, it yielded little.

"Any further orders, sir?" asked the sailing master.

"Not yet; keep on sailing."

"But which way, sir?"

Bill glared.

"Forward, backward, sidewise—suit yourself."

The sailing master went away with deep wrinkles in his forehead and, for a change, the Sunshine began to describe wide circles. She was still circling, like a destroyer waiting to pounce upon a submarine, when Aunt Caroline, fresh from her nap, came on deck. She found Bill still standing at the stern.

"Have you seen Miss Norcross, William?"

"Not for some time."

"I've been looking for her. I can't imagine where she is."

"Neither can I."

Aunt Caroline looked at him inquiringly.

"You haven't quarreled with her about anything, have you, William?"

"Quarreled? No, indeed; there's been no quarrel."

"I'm glad of that," said Aunt Caroline. "She's too nice a girl to quarrel with."

Now, for the first time since her arrival on deck, she took note of the fact that the Sunshine was moving; also, that their environment had completely changed.

"Why, we're sailing again, William!"

"We're just out in the Sound a ways; I got tired of staying in one place."

The answer seemed to satisfy her immediate curiosity. Bill wished that she would go away, so that he might drown himself in peace, but Aunt Caroline appeared to be taking an interest in things.

"I don't think they keep the yacht quite as tidy as they might," she remarked. "There's a chair lying on its back. The magazines are blowing all over the deck, too. There ought to be paper-weights. Dear me, William; they need a house-keeper."

Suddenly she walked across the deck and bent over to study a dark object that lay near the opposite rail.

"More untidiness," said Aunt Caroline resentfully. "One of the sailors has left a wash-rag here."

She stooped and picked the thing up between thumb and forefinger. As she shook it out drops of water flew from it. Aunt Caroline's eyes became round with amazement.

"Why, William! It's the skirt of her bathing-suit!"

Bill stared at the thing, fascinated.

"How on earth did it ever come to be lying here on the deck?" exclaimed Aunt Caroline.

"She must have taken it off," he mumbled.

"And came on board without it? William, she is not that kind of girl."

What was the use of hiding things any longer? Bill looked Aunt Caroline in the eye.

"She didn't come on board," he said.

It required several seconds for that to sink in.

"Not on board?" she repeated. "Why, what do you mean? Where is she?"

He waved his hand in the direction of Larchmont Harbor.

"Having a swim, I guess," he said, with an effort at nonchalance.

"William Marshall! You mean to say she didn't come back to the yacht?"

"She hadn't at the time we left."

"Or Peter?"

"Nope. Peter didn't come back, either."

"Then what in the world is this boat doing out here?" demanded Aunt Caroline.

"It got tired of waiting."

"You don't mean to tell me that you left them back there in the water?"

"That's about it."

Aunt Caroline was puffing out.

"Why, William! Are you insane? To leave that girl back there with nothing—" She looked down at the little wet skirt and shuddered. "Oh, I can't believe it!"

"Well, it's true, all right," said Bill sullenly. "They didn't seem in any hurry to come back, and I didn't think it was up to me to wait all day."

"It's unheard of. It's shocking! Why, she isn't dressed to go anywhere. She isn't even properly dressed for—for bathing." Aunt Caroline for an instant was trying to put herself in the place of any fish who might chance to swim in the vicinity of Mary Wayne. "William Marshall, there ought to be some terrible way to punish you!"

Bill thought a way had been discovered; he had been punishing himself for the last two hours.

"You turn this yacht right around and go back to Larchmont and find them," she commanded.

In one respect, Bill found a slight measure of relief in his aunt's view of the situation. Evidently it did not occur to her that Mary and Pete might be drowned, and if such a possibility had not occurred to her very likely it was extremely remote.

"What's the sense of going back now?" he asked. "It'll be dark in half an hour."

"Nevertheless, you turn this boat around."

"Oh, they're all right by this time," he said carelessly.

"Well, if they are, it's not because of anything you've done, William Marshall." Aunt Caroline's eyes were beginning to blaze. "You've done your best to disgrace the girl. Oh, that poor child! I don't approve of her taking off her skirt, understand me; I never could bring myself to that. I never did it myself, when I was a young woman, and I wouldn't do it now. But that doesn't excuse you. It simply makes it worse that you should have gone away and left her. You did quarrel with her, of course; I can understand, now. You let that childish temper of yours govern you. Oh, that I should ever have had such a nephew! I'm ashamed of you!"

Bill felt that he was on the verge of disinheritance, but Aunt Caroline abruptly changed her line of thought.

"Thank goodness she's in charge of a responsible person!" she exclaimed.

"Who? My valet?"

"Certainly. If it were not for that I should be dreadfully frightened. But he'll take care of her, of course. He's just the kind of young man she ought to be with in such an awful predicament. If she were my own daughter I wouldn't ask anything better, under the circumstances."

Bill sneered elaborately.

"He's so absolutely safe," declared Aunt Caroline. "He has such fine, high principles."

"Oh, bunk, Aunt Caroline."

"William, don't you try to disparage that young man. I only wish you had his pure ideals. That's what makes me feel safe about Miss Norcross. He's so sound, and religious, and upright. Why, his very character is sufficient to save the girl's reputation."

Bill was growing restive under the panegyric.

"Her reputation doesn't need any saving," he declared.

"Not with you or me; no. That's perfectly understood. But with the world—that is different. The world will never understand. That is, it would not understand if her companion were anybody but Peter. But when it is known that it was he who guarded her and watched over her—"

"Aunt Caroline, lay off!"

She stopped in sheer amazement and stared at her nephew. Bill was in a mood to throw caution to the winds.

"I'll agree with you she's safe enough," he said, "but for the love of Mike cut out that bull about Pete. He hasn't got any more principles than I have. I'm sick and tired of hearing you singing psalms about him."

Aunt Caroline gasped.

"Why, confound him, he hasn't any more religion than a fish. He never studied theology in his life."

"William, I don't believe a word you say!"

"You might as well," said Bill scornfully. "Why, Aunt Caroline, he doesn't know any more about theology than you do about dancing the shimmy."

"But he talked to Bishop Wrangell—"

"Oh, he talked, all right. He's a bird at that. But it was just words, I tell you, words. He got it all out of the encyclopedia home. He's been stringing you—you and the bishop. That's just where he lives—stringing people."

"I—don't—believe—it!" But there was a trace of alarm in Aunt Caroline's voice, despite her brave insistence.

"Oh, all right; don't. But if you'd ever known that wild aborigine in college you wouldn't swallow that theology stuff, hook, line and sinker."

"It simply cannot be true, William Marshall."

Bill laughed recklessly.

"Why, if you'd ever seen Pete Stearns—"

"Peter who?"

"Stearns."

Aunt Caroline was sniffing, as though she scented danger.

"What Stearns?" she demanded.

"Oh, you know 'em, all right, Aunt Caroline."

She seized Bill by the arm and backed him against the rail.

"Of the Eliphalet Stearns family?" she demanded.

"That's the bunch," affirmed Bill, wick- edly.

She put her hand to her throat and re-

treated a pace, staring at Bill through horrified eyes.

"You stand there and tell me he is a Stearns?" she whispered. "And you say it without shame, William Marshall? You have brought a Stearns to my house, when you knew— Oh, William!"

"As a matter of fact," said Bill, with sudden generosity, "Pete's all right in his own way, but he's no divinity student. As for his being a Stearns—"

Aunt Caroline stopped him with a gesture.

"Answer my question," she said sharply. "Is he a grandson of Eliphalet Stearns?"

"Uh huh."

"A son of Grosvenor Stearns?"

"That's Pete."

She seemed to grow suddenly in stature.

"Then," she said, "you have disgraced the house of Marshall. You have brought under my roof, in disguise, the son of an enemy. A Stearns! You have done this thing with the deliberate purpose of deceiving me. Had I known, had I even suspected, that you had ever associated with such a person, I should have disowned you, William Marshall."

"But his name is Pete, all right, Aunt Caroline. And you never asked me for his last name."

"You would have lied if I had," she said, in a voice that trembled despite its sternness. "You did all this knowing full well my opinion of the Stearns family. Eliphalet Stearns! He was your grandfather's worst enemy. Grosvenor Stearns! Your father and Grosvenor Stearns never spoke to each other from the days when they were boys. And now—now it remains for you to bring into my house another generation of a people who are beneath the notice or the contempt of a true Marshall. It is unspeakable!"

And yet she found herself able to speak with much freedom on the matter.

"Oh, what's the use of all this medieval history?" demanded Bill. "Just because my grandfather and old man Stearns had a blow-up, I don't see why I've got to go on hating the family for the rest of my days. That old row isn't any of my funeral, Aunt Caroline."

"Have you no regard for your family

honor and pride, William Marshall? Have you no loyalty to the memory of your ancestors? Have you no thought of me? Must you insult the living as well as the dead?"

"I should think," grumbled Bill, "that if you believed in theology you'd go in for that business of forgiving your enemies."

"But not a Stearns," she said vehemently. "And as for believing in theology—oh, how can I believe in anything after this?"

"Well, if you hadn't gone so daffy over him I wouldn't have said anything about it."

"Daffy?" echoed Aunt Caroline. "Are you insinuating—"

"You've been throwing him up to me as a model of holy innocence ever since he came into the house," said Bill angrily. "Just now you've been preaching about how safe she was with Pete, and all that sort of poppycock. I tell you, I'm sick of it, Aunt Caroline."

Aunt Caroline suddenly remembered. She groaned.

"Oh, that poor girl! Heaven knows what will become of her now. Out there—" She gestured wildly. "With a Stearns!"

"Oh, he'll do as well by her as any sanctimonious guy."

"The child's reputation is gone! Gone!"

"That's nonsense," said Bill sharply. "If it comes to that, she can take care of herself."

"No girl can take care of herself, William Marshall. No proper girl would think of attempting it." Aunt Caroline bridled afresh at the very suggestion of feminine independence. "This is the end of the poor child. And you are responsible!"

"Oh, piffle."

"A Stearns!" murmured Aunt Caroline.

"Bunk!"

"A Stearns!"

"But suppose he was really trying to live down the family name and lead a better life?" suggested Bill.

"Not a Stearns, William Marshall. There are some things in this world that cannot be done. Oh, that unfortunate girl!"

Bill sighed irritably.

"All right; we'll go back and hunt her up," he said. He was, in fact, rather pleased to have an excuse.

"And see to it that she is properly married to him," added Aunt Caroline.

Bill looked like a man about to choke.

"What!" he shouted.

"Certainly," said his aunt. "He's a Stearns, I know; but what else is there to do? Even a bad name is better than none."

"Aunt Caroline, you're crazy!"

"I was never more sane in my life, William. The poor child *must* marry him. I'm sorry, of course; but it is better than not marrying him at all."

"Marry Pete Stearns?" Bill resembled a large and ferocious animal, perhaps a lion. "Marry him? Not in a million years will she marry him!"

Aunt Caroline studied her nephew in astonishment.

"Would you deny her the poor consolation of a name?" she demanded. "Of course she will marry him. I shall personally attend to it."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Bill savagely. "You'll keep out of it."

"Order the boat back to Larchmont at once," was Aunt Caroline's answer.

"Not for that purpose."

"To Larchmont!"

Had she been taller, Aunt Caroline at that moment would have been imperious. She gestured with a sweep of the arm worthy of a queen. The gesture, it happened, was not in the direction of Larchmont at all, but she did not know that.

Bill shook his head grimly.

"William Marshall, I propose to be obeyed."

Ordinarily, when Aunt Caroline reached that point, Bill yielded the field to her. But this was no ordinary occasion. She proposed to marry her social secretary to Pete Stearns—*his* secretary! Where was ever such an outrageous idea conceived? Again he shook his head. He could find no words to voice his scornful defiance.

Suddenly Aunt Caroline wilted into a deck chair.

"I wish to go to my stateroom," she said, in a weak voice. "I feel faint. Send for my maid."

Bill departed on a run. The maid brought smelling salts, and after a minute of sniffing Aunt Caroline arose and walked slowly toward the saloon entrance, through which she disappeared. She ignored Bill's offer of an arm.

The boss of the yacht *Sunshine*, having satisfied his lust for defiance, ran forward and mounted the bridge two steps at a time.

"Back to Larchmont!" he commanded.

He was still standing on the bridge as they entered the harbor. By the time they were well inside, darkness had fallen.

"Are we to anchor, sir?" inquired the sailing master.

"I don't know," said Bill shortly. "Take a turn up where we were moored a while ago."

But before they had proceeded very far up the harbor he realized the futility of it. No sane persons would be swimming about after dark looking for a yacht whose return was purely conjectural.

"Head her outside again," ordered Bill.

The sailing master shrugged, gave a command, and the *Sunshine* began swinging in a circle.

"After we get outside, sir, which way?"

"I don't know. I haven't decided. I'll tell you later. Damn it, don't ask so many questions."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST BATTLE IN LARCHMONT.

WHEN Pete Stearns went in quest of a limousine he had, of course, merely employed a figure of speech that seemed to befit the raiment of his fair charge. In his practical mind he knew that it did not matter whether it was a limousine or a lizzie, so long as it was capable of locomotion and was not locked. The grounds through which he now walked were less familiar to him than those which contained the orchard on the other side of the hedge, yet he sensed the general direction of the house that he knew they must contain.

Through the darkening shadows he wended his way confidently; he felt sure that if there was danger ahead he would detect it

before falling a victim. At last he emerged from the grove and stepped upon a lawn, where he paused for reconnaissance. Fifty yards from him stood a house. It was large and dark and quiet. For two or three minutes he observed it carefully, but detected no sign of life. There was no other building to be seen; if there was a garage it was probably on the farther side of the house. He was more interested in discovering a garage than anything else.

He walked rapidly across the lawn, intending to pass in what seemed to be the rear of the dwelling. The path he chose carried him near to the end of a broad porch, from which half a dozen steps descended to the lawn. Close to the edge of the top step his watchful eyes observed an object that caused him to slacken pace, then stop. It was a hat.

"I need a hat," thought Pete.

His bare feet were soundless on the steps as he ascended lightly and captured the object of his desire. It was a straw hat with a striped ribbon and by good chance it was an excellent fit.

"I ought to get her a hat," he murmured. "She'll expect it."

It seemed quite safe to explore the porch a bit further, so he moved softly along, avoiding a hammock, a table and several chairs. He was midway the length of the house when he became aware that there was a light within. Its mellow glow reached him through a curtained window. Pete held his breath as he came to a halt, and decided that his next move would be a retreat.

And then he found himself bathed in a flood of illumination that came from directly overhead. Some one within the house had switched on the porch-light!

"Run!" he whispered to himself.

Too late! In front of him a French window was slowly opening. Pete stared at it hypnotically. Wider and wider it swung as he stood there inert, as incapable of flight as though his bare feet were nailed to the porch floor.

And then from out the window stepped a stout gentleman of middle age whose face wore an innocuous and cordial smile. He did not seem to be smiling at anything in particular, but rather at the whole world.

Evidently it had been warm in the house, for he was coatless and collarless and his shirt was unbuttoned at the throat. Hugged against his bosom with one hand was a bottle in which there was no cork. Swinging loosely in the other hand was a carbonated water siphon.

The stout gentleman's glance rested upon Pete with the utmost friendliness. His smile ceased to be a generalization and became a greeting. He bowed. He winked slowly and ponderously. The winking achievement pleased him so well that he repeated it, and afterward tried it with the other eye, where he again succeeded to his still greater satisfaction.

"Prince," said the stout gentleman, "have a drink."

Pete indulged in a deep sigh of relief.

"Sir," he said, returning the bow, "your hospitality charms me. I don't mind if I do."

"Hold 'em," said the gentleman, proffering the bottle and the siphon. "Have a chair, prince. Back in a minute."

He turned and disappeared through the French window. There was a barely perceptible unsteadiness in his gait, but it did not interfere with his efficiency, for he returned within a few seconds, bearing two glasses. Pete and the gentleman drank to each other punctiliously, the latter waving his glass with a grandiose flourish before he put it to his lips.

"Lil private stock, prince," and the gentleman winked again, this time with the original eye.

"Nectar, sir, if you will permit me to say so," affirmed Pete, with another bow. "But I regret to say that you have made a slight mistake. I am not a prince."

The gentleman smiled knowingly and made a gesture of deprecation.

"Sall right, old man. My mistake. Liable to run into princes any time round here. Had prince callin' on my daughter 'safternoon. Just as soon have prince 'round as anybody. I'm liberal. Have lil drink?"

Pete declined regretfully. His host placed bottle and siphon on a table with meticulous care.

"Listen, prince."

Pete checked him with an upraised hand.

"Merely a viscount, sir."

"Listen, viscount. Play a lil cowboy pool?"

Pete considered. Clearly it would be inconsiderate to treat so benevolent a host in a churlish manner; yet there was a lady all in lace, sitting in a gloomy summer-house among the trees, who doubtless awaited his return with impatience and perhaps alarm.

"I fear, sir," he said, "it would be an intrusion upon your family."

The stout gentleman shook his head earnestly.

"Nobody home, viscount. No family; no servants. Everybody gone away somewhere. Everybody on a party. I'm on party; you're on party. You and me play lil cowboy pool."

So saying, he linked his arm affectionately into one of Pete's and led him firmly into the house. He led him through several rooms, pausing in each to press buttons, so that the apartments through which they strolled became ablaze with lights. No ordinary summer cottage was this, Pete learned, as his eyes appraised each successive revelation; it was a mansion.

"Family all in society, viscount," confided the stout gentleman, as he clung to Pete's arm. "All hittin' high spots. Wife, society; daughter, society; son, society. Old man, cowboy pool. C'mon."

While Pete Stearns was conscious of his own informalities of costume, it seemed that his host had not given the matter a thought. The purple and green coat of silk did not appear to have attracted his attention, nor the other garment, that was striped in salmon pink. If the stout gentleman owned the straw hat that Pete had discovered on the porch, he displayed no sign of recognition. He was, in fact, surprised at nothing whatever.

In the billiard room the shaded lights that were suspended over the table did not satisfy him, for he made a complete circuit of the apartment, turning on all the lights in the wall sockets.

"Smore cheerful," he explained. "Find a cue, prince."

"Viscount, sir."

"My mistake, viscount. Find a cue."

Pete found a cue that suited as to weight. His host bowed until he rocked on his heels and assigned him the honor of opening the game.

For some fifteen minutes they played in silence, the stout gentleman revealing a measure of skill and technique that quite astonished his antagonist. His difficulties seemed to be wholly in measuring angles with the eye; otherwise his game was well nigh faultless and his control of the cue masterly. It was the eye difficulty that eventually compassed his defeat, although Pete was hard put, even with the employment of all his own skill, to nose out a winner.

With the shot that settled the game the stout gentleman flung his cue on the table and embraced his conqueror.

"Viscount," he said, "you're a prince. Firs' man beat me cowboy pool all summer."

"It was but an accident, sir," said Pete modestly.

"Nope. No accident. Strictly on merits. 'Sall right; pleasure all mine. Firs' time ever stacked up against gentleman from Arabian Nights."

From which remark Pete perceived that his host had not been wholly insensible of his costume, although it was evident that he was in no whit surprised by it, nor did he regard it as in any way incongruous.

"I think, sir, if you will pardon me, that I should be taking my leave," observed Pete, as his eye chanced upon a tall clock that stood in a corner.

"What's hurry, prince? Have lil drink."

But Pete, even under the warm pressure of hospitality, had not forgotten the lady in the summer-house. He felt certain that she was becoming alarmed; he feared that she might even attempt an exploration on her own account.

"Viscount," observed the lord of the manor, once more linking arms, "you're greates' cowboy pool player in world. Extraord'nary! I'm next greates'. Any gentleman beats me welcome anything I got."

They had progressed as far as a library, where his host halted.

"Any thing I got," he repeated, with a

wave of his arm. " 'Sall yours. Anything you see—'s yours. What 'll it be?"

It occurred to Pete that so generous an invitation to trespass further upon hospitality should not be ignored.

"If you could loan me a pair of shoes," he suggested, "I would be greatly indebted to you."

"Dozen pair shoes!" said the stout gentleman earnestly.

"And a hat—a lady's hat."

"Lady's hat? Lady's—"

His host looked him in the eye, placed a finger alongside his nose and winked roguishly.

"Lady's hat—for princess?"

"For the viscountess, sir."

"Dozen hats!" exclaimed his host warmly. "Dozen hats for viscountess. Back in a minute."

He rushed upstairs at an alarming speed and Pete heard him charging around on the floor above. The gentleman had an unaccountable way of keeping his word almost to the letter. It was little more than a minute before he was back again, his arms full of hats and shoes. He dumped them all on the floor and bowed.

"All yours, prince."

Pete was not long in finding a pair of shoes that would stay on his feet, but the selection of a hat from among the fragile heap was a task that perplexed him. His difficulty was not ignored by his host, for the stout gentleman suddenly reached into the pile, yanked forth something that was broad brimmed and lacy and thrust it into his hands.

"There's hat for princess!" he exclaimed. "My compliments. Have a lil drink?"

He hugged Pete's arm delightedly as he led the way back to the porch. The bottle and the siphon inspired him to confidences.

"Viscount, observe bottle, please. Listen. Last bottle Scotch in Larchmont."

He lifted the bottle and stroked it gently.

"Last bottle anything in Larchmont," he added.

Pete viewed the bottle with a new and reverent light in his eyes.

"Sir," he said, "knowledge of that fact

overwhelms me with the true measure of your hospitality."

" 'Sall right, prince, old man. 'Sall yours. Take bottle."

But there were some things that even Pete Stearns could not bring himself to do. He sighed and shook his head. To what unknown heights of generosity might this genial gentleman arise—this gentleman who would even renounce the last bottle in Larchmont?

"Have lil drink, anyhow."

And it was a very small drink that Pete poured for himself, for he had discovered that within him lay a conscience.

"Where's princess?" demanded his host abruptly.

Pete answered with an indefinite wave of the hand.

"She awaits me," he said.

The stout gentleman winked again, knowingly, and thrust an elbow into the ribs of his guest. He was clinging to Pete's arm. Pete hesitated. He wanted something more; in fact, he had not yet obtained that for which he had gone in search. Yet why hesitate? Surely a gentleman who offered his last bottle would not quibble over an automobile.

"Do you happen, sir, to have a car that I could borrow for a short time?"

"Car? Le's see." His host thought for several seconds. "Nope, all cars out with family. All cars out in society. All cars—"

He paused, then smiled broadly yet mysteriously.

"Sh! This way, prince."

Although there was nobody in the house, the owner thereof tiptoed his way carefully along the porch toward the rear, with a constant beckoning and a warning for caution. He created in Pete the impression that they were now upon an errand of distinctly clandestine character and must manage the affair accordingly.

Down the steps to the lawn and around the corner of the house they went, in single file. The stout gentleman paused near a small porch that evidently constituted an entrance to the kitchen. He looked around cautiously in the semidarkness. Bidding Pete to remain exactly where he stood, he

stole across to the side of the porch with catlike steps, fumbled there for a moment, and returned, trundling a vehicle.

It was a motorcycle, and attached to it was one of those peregrinating bath-tubs known as a side car.

"Sh! Last car in Larchmont, viscount. Belongs to gardener. 'Sall yours."

In the dim light Pete examined it hastily. He mounted the saddle and threw the switch. He pumped the starting pedal. At the third thrust there was a sharp explosion, and then a rapid fire that cut the night. He let the engine race for half a minute, then throttled down and leaned over toward his benefactor.

"Sir," he said, "you are the noblest of men. You do not know just what you have done, but it is a service far beyond price."

"Viscount," answered his host, with a deep bow, "pleasure's all mine. Any gentleman beats me cowboy pool—any gentleman honors me cowboy pool—any gentleman from Arabian Nights—" A thought occurred to him. "Want you to meet family. Stay and meet family. Stay and meet society. Stay—"

Pete interrupted him hastily.

"At any other time, sir, I should be charmed. But, as I told you, there is a lady awaiting me."

"Forgot lady. My apologies. Forgot all about lady. My apologies to lady."

"And so I bid you good night, sir. And may Heaven reward you," said Pete fervently.

The stout gentleman clung to his hand.

"Want to see princess," he observed. "Want to salute princess. Want to extend hospitality—"

"If you will go up on your porch," said Pete, "I will drive the princess by. She will be charmed to see you, sir, and in her behalf I now thank you for all your goodness."

He threw in the clutch and the motorcycle started forward with a leap. Straight across the lawn Pete headed it, bringing it to a halt at the edge of the grove. Leaving the engine running, he leaped from the saddle and ran in among the trees, in the direction of the summer-house.

Mary Wayne was standing in the doorway as he approached.

"Where—where have you been?" she demanded.

"I'll explain later," he answered briefly.

"Hurry. I've got a car."

"You stole—"

"It was presented to me. Come on."

He seized her hand and urged her forward at a run.

As they reached the panting machine, Mary uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"That thing!"

"What do you want for nothing? Get in. It's all right."

"But it's so conspic—"

He lifted her and dumped her into the bathtub.

"That thing down at your feet is a hat," he said. "Put it on. Now, there's a gentleman waiting to wave good-by at us. He's the most important man in the world. He thinks you're a princess. As we go past, I want you to kiss your hand to him. It's highly necessary. He expects it."

The motorcycle was under way again. Pete guided it in a wide curve until he was headed toward the house. Then he dashed with full speed, straight for the illuminated veranda.

Standing at the edge of the porch was the stout gentleman, his body gently swaying. His arms seemed to be engaged in an incantation, for they waved rhythmically. In one hand was the bottle.

Pete swerved the machine within a few feet of the porch and waved elaborately. The gentleman was saying something, but they could not hear him. Mary waved her hand as they swept by.

"Throw him a kiss!" ordered Pete sharply. "Confound it, you're a princess! Wait, now; I'll make a circle and go by again."

The machine curved out across the lawn and Pete laid a course that would once more enable them to pass in review. The gentleman on the porch continued his incantation. He was chanting, too.

As they slowed down opposite him, Mary half rose from her seat and threw him a kiss. The waving arms halted abruptly. The stout gentleman's eyes became round

with pleasure. He gripped the rail and leaned forward.

"Princess—"

He made a courtly gesture and a treasured object flew from the gesturing hand. There was a crash of glass on the gravel walk below. The gentleman blinked,

lurched forward, swung back and sat heavily on the floor of the porch. He leaned his forehead against the rail and burst into manly tears.

Pete gave his chariot a full charge of gas.

"The last bottle in Larchmont!" he gasped chokingly.

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

The Ninety-Ninth Proposal



By Robert J. Horton

THEY sat on the soft green sward in the lee of a clump of pines overlooking the Sound near Nanny Van Zandt's home.

"Why won't you marry me?" asked Billy Knapp for the fifth time.

"We are too young to be thinking of marriage," answered Nanny, struggling with fifteen or twenty rebellious wisps of hair.

"Now when we are young is just the time we *ought* to get married," argued Billy.

"Your future is still in doubt," observed Nanny, judiciously.

"I know what you mean," flared Billy. "Because your people have got oddles of dough and I'm a struggling bank clerk, you might say, you're afraid to take a chance!"

Nanny's pretty face became severe in disapproval.

"Now, Billy, I don't want you saying things like that because—with me—money wouldn't count for a cent if I wanted to marry you; but I'm not ready to get married yet—to anybody, and we *would* have

to think about the future, now wouldn't we?"

"All right, Nanny, let's think about it," said Billy, brightening. "Now look here. I've got three hundred and ten dollars in the bank. That isn't much, but it 'll start us. It 'll pay for the honeymoon and everything."

Nanny laughed in delight. Billy certainly was an enthusiastic young lover, at least.

"Now what're you laughing at?" he demanded, sitting back and peering at her with a wrinkled brow.

"I was just thinking about that three-hundred-dollar honeymoon," she giggled.

"Well, what's the matter with it? Ain't it enough?"

"I suppose so, only don't be silly, Billy, and talk about honeymoons—"

"Now, look here," said Billy, firmly, running his fingers through his thick brown hair which stuck straight up as though with indignation; "I *want* to talk about honeymoons—our honeymoon. You think that isn't enough money for a honeymoon, don't you?"

"Well, I wasn't planning a trip to Europe; I just thought we could take my flivver and run up to the mountains for a coupla weeks, or wherever you want to go—so far as I'm concerned I'd just as soon spend my honeymoon in a catboat or an ash heap so long as I spend it with you!"

This was entirely too flattering a statement for Nanny to answer readily. It would have been easy to pooh-hoo the idea if Billy hadn't been so terribly in earnest and so mighty good looking with that pleading look in his eyes. She had known Billy a long time, too; they had grown up together.

"And then—after the honeymoon," Billy went on, "I've got my hundred dollars a month, but they'd probably raise me for a wedding present. I don't believe that old crab of a president of ours would have the nerve to ask a *married* man to work for any hundred a month!"

"Oh, I'd look after you, all right, Nanny; you'd find me a mighty good provider; I'd never see *my* wife and children suffer for lack—"

"Billy! Now stop right there! Why, you're positively the silliest boy I ever saw."

"Boy! Now, look here, Nanny, I'm twenty-three and I've passed the boy stage. I'm an old man right now, in my thoughts; and I want the comfort of a wife and a home!"

"Why, Billy, your folks have a good home."

"That isn't the kind of a home I mean," said Billy in disgusted explanation. "I want my own home, with you in it."

"But it takes money to have a home, Billy."

"There you go again—money, money, money; nothing but money! Money ain't everything, Nanny. Look at the muscle in that right arm! And I've got enough with this month's pay to buy a lot in the new addition, and you know if you have a lot you can get almost anybody to build a house on it for you and pay so much down a month. And you can buy all kinds of furniture on the instalment plan, and a piano; and with you to spur me on I'd make that bank hum and get promoted.

"Why, say! I could maybe get your father's account for the bank—they've been

trying to get it for years—and they'd *have* to promote me—although I detest the banking business."

Nanny felt herself wavering once or twice during this long speech, almost carried away by Billy's enthusiasm, but she recovered quickly at the end.

"That's one trouble with you, Billy, you don't know what you want to do."

"I want to be outdoors, that's all," Billy asserted.

"Well, why don't you get an outdoor job then?"

"Why, I'm outdoors all day except the seven hours I have to put in at the bank."

"That's the trouble, Billy; you look on your position at the bank as a place to put in seven hours a day and your heart isn't in the work there. That's why you don't get promoted faster."

"You don't see many twenty-three-year-old bank cashiers," he reflected aloud.

"But you're not even an assistant cashier yet, Billy; and instead of thinking of how to get to be an assistant cashier or something you're thinking about tennis matches, and swimming records, and automobile races, and rowing, and fishing, and—"

"And *you*," he supplied, bringing the conversation back to where it was in the first place. "If you'd just marry me, Nanny, I'd be *sure* to take more interest in my work."

He beamed in triumph. Wasn't it a clincher?

"But I'm not *ready* to get married," she said, tossing back her head in defiance.

Billy suddenly remembered something.

"Why, you haven't ever told me if you ever *will* marry me," he complained.

"What's the use?" she said evasively.

"Why, just this much, that I'll have to keep on asking you and asking and being more or less worried—and neglecting my *work*—ah—and you've got to marry me *sometime*—"

"Oh, I *have*, have I? First I knew of it!"

"Well, Nanny, it's so, isn't it? You *are* going to marry me sometime, aren't you?"

"I'm not going to talk any more about it," said Nanny, rising. "I'm going home and make fudge."

"And I'll come over to-night and help eat it—if you'll let me."

"You know you're always welcome at our house, Billy."

"Well, I don't know for sure whether I am or not. I've seen your dad hand out some looks that were not as encouraging or cordial as the welcome sign on the door-mat!"

"Billy! Papa wouldn't look that way at any one."

Well, maybe not uncordial—but just a little more irritated than neutral. Does he know I want to marry you?"

"Of course not! How could he know? Who would tell him?"

"Why—"

And in the instant an idea was born in Billy's brain. He grinned to himself. Why shouldn't he tell Mr. Van Zandt that he wished to marry his daughter? Because it would make Mr. Van Zandt very mad?

But suppose Mr. Van Zandt *did* become very mad, what then?

Why, he would doubtless throw him—Billy—out of the house and tell him to *stay* out! And he would likely call Nanny in and tell her never to see or speak to him—Billy—again! And he might tell Mrs. Van Zandt to see that his instructions were carried out to the letter and thus put the finishing touches on a great scene.

And then?

Why, he—Billy—would be a martyr. Nanny would feel sympathy for him. They would meet in clandestine fashion—stolen sweets are always sweeter—and eventually he might be able to get her to elope with him. Then Mr. Van Zandt could go to—no, he wouldn't say it. After all, the man was her father!

"So long, Nanny," he said at her gate. "Could I whisper something in your ear before you go in?"

"You're not going to ask me again?" she inquired suspiciously.

"Give you my word of honor," he said earnestly.

Billy's word of honor was good and Nanny knew it.

She turned up her ear.

"I love you," he whispered. "Whatever happens, don't forget *that*."

"Whatever happens!" she exclaimed wonderingly. "Why, what could happen, Billy?"

"You never can tell," he said mysteriously.

"Billy! You are not going to—you're not going to do anything foolish, are you?"

She was thrilled at the veiled hint of something unusual in Billy's words. She had a vision of him jumping off Brooklyn Bridge, or slashing his throat with a safety-razor blade, or scattering his brains all over the yard with a bullet.

"I wouldn't call it foolish," he said.

"Billy, promise me you won't try to kill yourself or anything."

Kill himself! He hadn't thought of that! Well, one thing at a time; but he told himself that he could, if necessary, stick another iron in the fire any time by being caught with a bottle of carbolic-acid or some such thing. He would bear it in mind.

"Oh, I promise," he said with a sigh, as if he only half meant it.

He thought he caught the gleam of Mr. Van Zandt's eagle eye through a window. Well, Mr. Van Zandt would know all by midnight. And let him do his worst! The harder he blew up the better. More than one irate father had forced his daughter into an unsanctioned marriage without knowing it, and without intending to do so.

"You'll surely come over after supper?" asked Nanny anxiously.

"I'll be here," said Billy.

And he glared defiantly toward the window as he departed.

II.

C. WHITNEY VAN ZANDT, ESQ., reclined in luxurious ease in a big leather chair before an open fire in his library.

It was his dignified custom to sit thus, of a late evening, with a book in his hands, ostensibly reading, but really thinking of his numerous investments and real estate holdings and contemplating with quiet satisfaction the fortunate lot of the Van Zandts in life.

The library was his sanctuary. The balance of the house might be given over to the revels of his children or the social func-

tions of his wife, but the library was reserved exclusively for him and this refuge was jealously guarded by Sims, the butler.

Thus it was a credit to Billy's ingenuity and a reflection upon Sim's efficiency that that young gentleman was able to slip into the quiet rooms and close the door behind him unobserved. He stood regarding the head of the house of Van Zandt who sat before the fire with the book-shelves and portraits of a large number of past Van Zandts as a background.

Mr. Van Zandt did not hear him come in nor see him after he entered. He was absorbed in the evolution of an excuse for increasing the fares of an electric railway he was interested in—an excuse which would neither arouse patrons to any very high pitch nor irritate the newspapers to any extraordinary extent—a problem worthy of the financial brains inherited from a long line of money-making ancestors.

There were many arguments to support the claim for increased fares. For instance, and to begin with, the item of labor alone—

“Mr. Van Zandt!”

The great man looked up suddenly and blinked with surprise and irritation.

“May I speak with you for a moment, sir?” asked Billy respectfully.

Mr. Van Zandt removed his glasses, wiped them, readjusted them.

“Sit down, Knapp.”

“Thank you,” said Billy with relief, seating himself.

“What is it you wish to speak to me about?”

“I'll soon puncture that businesslike attitude of his,” thought Billy. Aloud he said:

“Ah—I—I suppose you have noticed me about quite a bit lately?”

“For about twenty years,” said Mr. Van Zandt, disconcertingly; “you've lived here that long, haven't you?”

“Twenty-three years,” corrected Billy. “I was born here.”

“I didn't think you were quite that old,” observed Mr. Van Zandt.

“Yes, twenty-three,” said Billy stoutly. “Old enough to begin to think about the serious things of life.”

“I'm glad somebody is beginning to think about them,” smiled the older man.

“But I didn't mean the fact that you had noticed me merely in the town,” explained Billy. “I meant, hadn't you noticed me about your house a great deal lately?”

“Sometimes,” mused the other, “I've wondered if you were not living here!”

Instead of feeling nonplused at this, Billy accepted it as a favorable sign. Very likely Mr. Van Zandt would welcome the opportunity he was soon to have accorded him to order Billy out of the house forever.

“I suppose you have wondered why I came here so often?”

“On the contrary, considering the kitchen bills, I've wondered that you didn't ask for permission to move in.”

Billy reddened a bit at this. The remark was under the belt—literally and figuratively.

“I don't come here for food,” he snapped.

“No? Well, I've often suspected that you came so often this spring because you were enamoured of my second daughter's charm—Nanny, I mean.”

“Why, Mr. Van Zandt, you've hit the nail plumb on the head!”

“I hope I hit it hard enough to drive it clear through the plank to the other side.”

“The other side?” Billy couldn't suppress his curiosity.

“Because on the other side there is a stone wall, Billy.”

“Meaning you don't favor my suit.”

“You haven't got any suit; you are merely in some kind of a state of mind.”

“You were in that state of mind yourself once, Mr. Van Zandt.”

“What's that?” roared the other.

“I say you were in love yourself once, Mr. Van Zandt.”

“Dont' be impertinent, young man. Who said anything about love?”

Billy thrilled. Nanny's tears would yet flow in sympathy for Mr. Van Zandt was getting mad. He would goad him on—and with the truth.

“I love your daughter, Mr. Van Zandt.”

The older man closed his book and carefully laid it upon the table under the reading-lamp. He lifted his brows inquiringly.

“I wish to marry her,” continued Billy, awaiting the expected explosion.

"Go on," urged Van Zandt.

"Why—why, that's about all," faltered Billy, surprised. "Have you any objections?"

Mr. Van Zandt looked him over leisurely and speculatively. Finally he spoke.

"Well, my boy, I'd rather see her marry you than"—Billy's heart jumped at the pause—"than some illiterate, bomb-throwing Russian bolshevik, for instance; and I don't know but what I'd rather have her marry you than some brands of foreign nobleman I've seen. And I believe I'd prefer you to a paroled convict, too. But that's about the extent of my interest."

Billy swallowed a furious lump.

"I trust I'm not insulting you by telling you that I love your daughter and want to marry her," he retorted, not without a certain aggravated dignity.

"No, I'm not insulted—I'm merely amused."

"Maybe you won't be so amused when we are married!"

"I see. How soon do you think that will be?"

A poser, that one, everything considered, and particularly considering the fact that Billy would make it the very next day, if he could. Some people think that the four letters, l-o-v-e, are the principal ingredient of romance; but Billy was running up against the two letters, i-f, with discouraging regularity.

"I should like to have your consent first, if possible," he evaded.

"I can't give that."

"No?"

"No!"

"Well, I suppose you'll be ordering me out of the house," hinted Billy, hopefully.

"Not at all, not at all," said Mr. Van Zandt, cheerfully. "I'm too wise for that. I'm not going to make things worse by giving you a chance to operate under any 'true-love-never-runs-smooth' alibi. No, you can come here all you want to—you can have a room here if you wish!"

In an illuminating instant Billy knew what it was that Mr. Van Zandt resembled, with his narrow face and Vandyke beard. An old fox!

So he—Billy—was thus to be cheated

of his purpose. If he couldn't get ordered out of the house and told to stay away he couldn't make much of a plea for sympathy and there would be little excuse for thrilling and forbidden meetings arranged by friends.

"By the way," said Van Zandt, "what does my daughter think of all this?"

"Why—er—what do you mean?"

"Has Nanny agreed to marry you if you get my consent?"

"Why—we haven't reached any definite agreement as yet."

"Have you told her you wanted to marry her?"

"Oh, yes—yes, I've told her."

"Well, what did she say?"

"She—ah—" The conversation had unexpectedly taken a turn that Billy didn't relish. He was on the defensive.

"She hasn't given me her decision just yet."

"I see. Well, don't you think it would be a good plan to wait until she makes up her mind before you go any further in this matter?"

"Of course, I shall have to do that."

"You really have been jumping at conclusions, haven't you, Billy?"

"Nanny loves me," Billy said stoutly. "And when she consents to marry me, then will you agree to it?" He was hopeful again.

"Then there would be other things to consider," said Mr. Van Zandt with a judicial air. "Your future."

"I've got a job in the bank at a hundred a month and I'd probably get a raise when I got married," said Billy eagerly.

"And did you know that a hundred dollars would buy that summery dress she's wearing to-day?"

"Those things would all be adjusted," said Billy.

"No doubt—if you had money enough. Say you wait until you are making more money before you consider getting married. Wait say until you are getting a hundred a week, instead of a hundred a month; and then think about it."

"A hundred a week!" gasped Billy.

"At least that—and then there's Nanny's view to be considered."

"Nanny won't make me wait until I'm getting a hundred a week," said Billy confidently.

"Well, the fact remains that she's making you wait on a hundred a month," said Mr. Van Zandt.

Billy stared at him for several moments resentfully searching his mind for an answer. Thus it was borne in upon him that it now was more essential than ever to get some kind of an answer from Nanny. His strategy had failed and he was burdened in addition with a goal of extraordinary financial proportions. The Van Zandts thought nothing except money, he told himself bitterly.

"I think this will be all for now," he said, rising.

"Glad you came in," said Van Zandt, offering his hand. "Always best to understand these things. Give a little thought to the matter and I'm sure you'll see there is something to my way of thinking. It costs a lot to live these days in double harness—even when the girl is willing to try the experiment."

Billy nearly knocked the dignified Sims over as he went out.

And he didn't take the trouble to stop and apologize, either.

III.

It is marvelous how much of a kid a man can be at twenty-three; and even more marvelous, for that matter, how much of a kid he can be at thirty-four!

Nanny, from the heights of her superior mental years—twenty—looked down upon Billy's material twenty-three years with something akin to pity and amusement.

It is within the province of all women that they shall forever tolerate the men. That word never has been better used. It is within their province to tolerate them and their natural duty to look after them.

No masculine joy is quite equal to that of being looked after by a woman—providing it is the *right* woman. It is instinct.

Even ridiculously young men of twenty-three, say, have this instinct. Billy had it. And whenever Billy wished to be reminded of the *right* woman in *his* eyes he had but

to look in the back of his watch-case from which position the smiling features of Nanny Van Zandt looked up at him through the medium of the photographer's art; although the reproduction was somewhat blurred and faded because of a repeated ceremony of affection which had transferred much of the gloss to Billy's lips.

Two nights after the interview with Mr. Van Zandt, which was a secret between Billy and Nanny's father so far as he—Billy—knew, the two young people sat upon the Van Zandt front porch.

"If I was the only man on an island, Nanny, and all the girls in the world were there on the island with me, except *you*; and if you were on another island miles away—"

"With all the men?" she broke in.

"Nanny, how can you be so downright mean!" he ejaculated.

It was his eighth proposal that week.

And he had expected it to prove a knockout. He had intended to say that if she had been on another island, miles away, he would have turned his back upon all the other girls in the world on the island with *him*, to make the attempt to swim to her.

A very pretty thought. Putting over very cleverly, he had hoped, his preference for her to all other girls of this country or any other.

But Nanny's cynicism of her superior mental years—carrying with it a wreath of girlish humor—had effectively unsaddled his extravagant comparison.

It ended the proposals for that week.

Billy now began to set store by methods rather than by words. He prodded his inventive faculties for new and out-of-the-ordinary ways in which to ask Nanny to marry him.

Maybe one of the methods would prove so unusual as to catch her off her guard and draw a favorable answer. Perhaps she could be startled into accepting him without further delay. And isn't woman susceptible to a persistent suitor? Faint heart, you know, never filled any family cars.

Thus one evening as Nanny walked homeward she looked up suddenly to find Billy hanging by his toes from a branch which arched over the sidewalk. Owing

to the position he was in his face was quite red, and also quite near to her own, and she could not fail to catch the words he hissed into her ear.

"When are you going to marry me?"

Billy might possibly have had an idea that she would be surprised into saying "When you get down from that tree?" but she didn't.

Instead she began to giggle in a very undignified way.

However, there is no need to give the details of that absurd argument here. The whole affair, as ridiculous as it was, just goes to prove the once-a-kid-always-a-kid theory.

And eventually Billy found that he either had to get down off the branch or succumb to apoplexy or something, and he chose to get down—still unanswered.

Then followed other subtle methods. There was the tissue-paper note in the bon-bon which, unfortunately, was drawn by Mrs. Van Zandt and thus missed fire and queered that particular brand of confections in the Van Zandt household.

The late-at-night telegram, addressed to Nanny, and received and opened by Mr. Van Zandt resulted in nothing more than a record-breaking outburst of severe language from Nanny's father.

An underwater proposal, unique in itself, also proved unavailing.

Thus it came to a matter of asking her perfunctorily every time he met her—in church, at parties, during dances; and Billy finally realized that it was necessary to cut this out or he would change in her estimation from a lover to a nuisance.

Three weeks passed.

And then there was a party at the Van Zandt home at which some home-made phonograph-records were played. They proved a decided novelty. And the selections by the Crescent Bay Canoe Club quartet, of which Billy was a member, achieved enormous popularity. There were several of these records. And in one of the records each member of the quartet had a line to sing alone.

Great was the sensation then when Billy's voice was heard singing in its turn: "Oh, when will you marry me?"—which

was in every way irrelevant to the balance of the song and was clearly interpolated by Billy for some particular purpose.

Regarding the exact nature of that purpose those present had only to glance at Nanny's face when she heard the words—repeated three times in Billy's very excellent barytone voice.

It was Mrs. Van Zandt who stopped the machine and took off the record. And it was Mr. Van Zandt who later smashed it into smithereens with an ax. And it was Billy who suffered.

"I was never so humiliated in my life," sobbed Nanny late in the evening, when Billy had lingered after the others. "Everyone there knew who you meant."

To do Billy justice he was keenly aware that he had stepped beyond bounds, and he was truly sorry. He said so.

"Sorry!" exclaimed Nanny. "What good does it do to say you are sorry? Everybody will be laughing at me."

"I don't think anybody will laugh at you just because I asked you to marry me—"

"In public? It was awful."

"But, Nanny—I want you so badly I would do anything to get you to tell me at least that you will marry me *sometime*. I'm desperate—just desperate, that's all."

"Don't you dare ask me again, Billy Knapp. If you've asked me once you've asked me ninety-eight times and if you ask me again I'll say *no!*"

"Oh, you wouldn't really do that, would you, Nanny?"

"Yes, I would—I will. If you ask me again I'll say no, no, *no!*"

And with this warning—a warning that shot straight to Billy's heart and lodged there with a sickening thud—she fled angrily into the house.

"A nice evening," said Sims, the butler, who had ventured out upon the porch.

"Oh, is it?" snapped Billy. "Where did you get your information?"

Then the night and despair swallowed him.

IV.

A DARK, dreary day dawned for Billy. He rose so early that he was able to

get to the bank at nine o'clock sharp, instead of nine-eleven, his usual punctual, if tardy, hour of reporting for work, and thus so startled the other members of the force that they inquired anxiously concerning his health.

All day he thought, and the more he thought, the gloomier he became. The rosy horizon of his dreams was besmudged with gray clouds of hopeless doubt.

Truly, he reflected dismally, his path of true love not only wasn't running smooth, but it seemed to be beset with barbed-wire entanglements and fortifications behind which loomed three specters: Mr. Van Zandt and his hundred dollar-a-week stipulation, Nanny and her resentment, and his own apparent helplessness.

They talk about the tragedies of seventeen, and the tragedies of sixty—but, oh, my friends, too little is said of the tragedies of twenty-three!

Billy leaned upon the polished counter and stared out through the wire netting and big windows of the bank to where the bright sun dazzled upon the clean, white pavements of the little Long Island town's main street. But he saw no dazzle, no warmth. To him the world looked dead and he might as well be dead, too!

The spring, which had blossomed into summer, and now was preparing to wilt into fall, had brought him no lilac wreath of success, but a thorn-studded bouquet of failure. If he asked Nanny again she would say no—he knew in his own heart that she would say no because she had a stubborn streak when aroused.

And if he couldn't ask her again how was he ever to know if she ever *would* marry him? And if by some gracious freak of fortune they *were* to become engaged, would she disregard her father's wishes?

Billy knew Nanny's father for a wily diplomat, for that gentleman had in a very subtle way contributed to and aided Billy to accomplish his own downfall.

He remembered, with grim irony, how Nanny had exacted his promise not to kill himself. Little she would care now, no doubt. He started under the whiplash of a dangerous idea.

Why not? There was nothing left to

live for—was there? Without Nanny life would be an empty void for him.

It was in this frame of mind that Billy walked aimlessly across town after work and came upon Sam Talbot tinkering with his newest invention in a vacant block.

Sam Talbot ran a small garage in a casual way to provide his living expenses and the costs of materials while he pursued his work of inventing.

He hailed Billy gleefully.

"Can you keep a secret, Billy?" he cried. "If I tell you something will you keep it to yourself for a while—will you promise?"

Billy promised. He would have promised almost anything this day.

"My motor kite is a success," whispered Sam excitedly, pointing at the contraption on the ground. "I started the engine and went up about fifty feet in it to-day without expecting to at all—at all. Then flew right along most the length of this block, too. It just happened there wasn't anybody around to see me."

Billy was but mildly interested. Motor kites—bah! There were people in this love-lorn world, then, who had the time and energy to think of such things.

"Yes, sir, Billy," Sam rattled on, "I was up fifty feet and it was great. What's the use of airplanes when you can do the same thing with a kite? Gee, I wish I could find somebody else with enough nerve to go up—I'd like to see how it looks and acts off the ground."

Billy suddenly was very much interested. Here was a chance he was looking for—a chance with death! Why not go up—way up—in Sam's new invention and if he got back to earth all right he would have had a thrilling experience; and if not—if he fell and was killed—what would he care?

He snapped his fingers. "I'll go up, Sam; let *me* try her out!"

"Do you actually mean it?" cried Sam. "By golly, I believe you do! Are you *sure* you have the nerve?"

"Nerve?" scoffed Billy. "Try me—show me how to run her and I'll go up in a second!"

"It'll take a couple of days to show you how to operate it," speculated Sam. "Say you go up Saturday afternoon. It'll

be the first public demonstration. Will you shake on it?"

"Sure," said Billy recklessly, as he stuck out his hand. He was ready to take *any* kind of a chance. And he felt almost happy as he concluded that in view of the performance of some of Sam's other inventions, the chances were *against* him!

V.

AND thus it came to be noised about that Sam Talbot's newest invention—a motor kite—would be tried out on Saturday afternoon and that Billy Knapp would be the daring aviator.

Billy and Sam held many mysterious conferences in Sam's garage in the next two days, but Billy made no attempt to see Nanny. In fact, he kept out of her way. She would learn—that girl would—that he had no fear of death!

On the other hand, the president of the bank where Billy worked made a few pointed observations to the effect that perhaps at least one young man in his employ was more fitted for ballooning or kiting than for banking. And Billy's mother's imprecations had no effect upon him. His decision had been made and was not to be shaken.

Needless to state, there was a vast crowd at the improvised aviation field Saturday afternoon to see the flight.

A movie-theater proprietor, seeing a chance for some effective advertising, gave Billy a ten-dollar bill to carry aloft a sack of cards bearing the title of a coming attraction—these to be dropped from the sack and thus circulated in a unique manner among the crowd.

In due time Billy was strapped to the trapeze bar under the wing of the kite, and with the little motor roaring industriously before him and the propeller whirling behind him, he took to the air amid thundering applause from the assembled spectators.

Sam Talbot was captivated with delight as Billy soared above and the advertising cards came fluttering down.

Then the kite, with its propeller revolving erratically, made several startling fig-

ures in the air, turned over on its side and dipped sharply to earth.

Billy landed in a heap with his head thrust unceremoniously through the fabric wing, the motor on top of him, and his feet in the propeller.

"Sheer suicide," said the spectators with a shudder.

When Billy opened his eyes again he found himself in bed swathed in bandages. His face, head, neck and arms were encased in gauze and burned steadily. But he was alive, and he became thrilled with the knowledge.

With a nurse cautioning him to remain quiet, he laid there, and called himself a great many kinds of a fool. What did Nanny Van Zandt think of all this? And what had he been thinking of, himself, for the past few weeks?

"You scraped a great deal of skin off," explained the nurse with a kindly smile, "but there are no bones broken, and you'll be all right again when you recover from the shock. Just be quiet."

As if he cared whether there were any bones broken or not! But—yes, he *did* care. He had practically tried to kill himself, that was all there was to it.

And what a way to go about anything!

His mother tried to cheer him up and next morning Nanny Van Zandt came.

"I didn't think you would be so foolish as to risk your life to ask me the ninety-ninth time, Billy," she said, "but I'm not going to say no, as I threatened. I'm going to give you a chance to get your senses back and—and find out the right way to win me, perhaps."

"But I didn't—"

"Don't talk," she interrupted. "You'll loosen those bandages. I got one of the cards you dropped, just as you intended I should; see—here it is."

She unfolded and held up the card, across which appeared the legend:

"*Why Not Marry?*"

Billy gasped. He had not taken the trouble to ascertain what was on the card. He only knew they were advertising some moving picture and that he received ten dollars to drop them from the sack.

Nanny had thought it a dare-devil pro-

posal stunt. And she hadn't said *no!* But when she learned the truth; what then?"

Billy groaned.

"Now don't be foolish any more, Billy," said the girl. "Just remember what I said about the future, only take it in the way I meant it."

She rose to go, then bent over swiftly and kissed the tip of his nose, bandage and all.

"There!" she said, as she fled out the door.

Billy was both exhilarated and depressed. Exhilarated because Nanny hadn't said no, and depressed because he dreaded the result when she learned how the cards came to be dropped.

It was in this mood that Mr. Van Zandt found him when he called that evening.

"That was a fool stunt, Billy—it won't get you anywhere."

"But it did—it *did!*" exclaimed Billy through his bandages.

And then he mumbled out the whole story to Nanny's father and gave him a detailed account of what she had said and what he feared.

"And what are *you* going to do?" asked Mr. Van Zandt.

"I'm going to tell her all about it—and I'm going to ask our president to transfer me into the real-estate department and I'm going to work like the devil for that future—"

"By George, I believe that fool stunt knocked some sense into your head, Billy, and if you'll do that, I'll—I'll—"

"Yes?" prompted Billy.

"I'll transfer my account down there and help you—"

"To make good!" cried Billy joyfully.



The Price

By Evans Emoe Kel

FROM schoolboy to leader of the Canner gang, Barney Lupin's trail was marked by a complete disability to play the game—any game—straight. At school he had cheated at marbles and fibbed unceasingly to extricate himself, at the expense of others, from petty scrapes.

At seventeen he shifted much of his work upon others employed in the same office, displaying also considerable ingenuity in having mistakes of his own making attributed to his coworkers. Too, he managed to ingratiate himself with his immediate superiors by carrying tales, reporting late-comers and absentees, as well as the thou-

sand and one petty trifles that crop up in the day's work, all calculated to keep himself in the good graces of the boss and others in hot water.

Tiring of business at twenty, he devoted a year or two to the acquisition of a skill at pool that was equaled only by the suave manner in which he could inveigle a prospective "sucker" into a wager on a game that would be won or lost as best suited Lupin's purpose.

It would be, perhaps, hard for even Lupin himself to trace clearly the line that marked his descent into actual thievery—the kind that is accomplished without the aid of the

victim's cupidity and desire for gain. The "rolling" of a drunk, stupefied with liquor and lying conveniently in Lupin's path at a time when he was returning, with empty pockets, to the furnished room that served him as a home, awakened within him a thirst for easily acquired money that was akin to the fierce appetite of the man-eating tiger upon tasting human blood. For weeks thereafter he haunted the out-of-the-way spots of the tenderloin, scheming to outwit similar vultures to whom the insensibly intoxicated traveler was legitimate prey.

Equipped with considerably more reasoning powers and perception than the average cheap crook, it did not take Lupin long to discover that the amount of money to be acquired by searching for and robbing drunks was far too small either to repay the risks run or to meet his expenses.

Going directly to the root of the matter, Lupin argued with himself that the reason for this state of affairs was a scarcity of material upon which to work. Reasoning further, he decided to increase that supply. For nearly a year thereafter he haunted the barrooms of the better-class commercial hotels, shrewd eye upon the lookout for plethoric bank-rolls.

He became easily a "good mixer," reducing good-fellowship to a fine art. In this he was aided by a straight, slim figure, clothing of excellent cut and quality and an almost handsome face and frank eyes that could look squarely into those of the half-intoxicated stranger—a stranger who, under the influence of Lupin's warm geniality and evident desire to treat, was willing to swear eternal friendship.

To urge, without seeming to urge, the stranger to drink far more than could be handled and still retain complete control of his faculties was easy for Lupin. The acquisition of the stranger's money followed, as does the night the day, and as inevitably. Sometimes Lupin was able to "borrow" it, under the compelling influence of a wide-flashed smile and a laughing plea of having forgotten to have a check cashed. At other times, unwilling to make a loan—"on gener'lsh princ'ples un'stand"—the victim would readily consent to cash Lupin's worthless check.

Where harmless methods such as these failed, Lupin would sigh sorrowfully, order and pay for a few more drinks, and then, steering his new-found friend to a conveniently darkened areaway, he would pick his pockets—somewhat clumsily at first, but deftly enough to escape detection by an alcohol-befuddled brain, and, gathering in deftness as the weeks rolled by, until Lupin felt not the slightest hesitation in exploring the pockets of a sober man in a trolley-car or a crowd.

He dropped both these forms of dishonesty only when the police made things unpleasant for him. Never actually caught, he was, nevertheless, an object of so constant a suspicion and watching on the part of the house detectives and plainclothes men, that several times he was forced to relinquish his designs upon pleurably fat rolls of money after spending much of his own good money to bring the contemplated victim to the desired state.

Once, indeed, a detective had placed his hand upon Lupin's shoulder a second after the stranger's roll had found a new resting-place in Lupin's pocket; but luck, blind luck, was on his side. The robbed man turned angrily upon the detective and berated him soundly for this breaking in upon their pleasure trip. He denied absolutely that he had lost money, refused mulishly to identify his own roll, and asserted, indignantly and untruthfully, that he had known Lupin for years. There was nothing for the detective to do but release Lupin, swearing wrathfully that he would yet land him in jail.

Frightened by his narrow escape—for Lupin feared but two things, jail and death—he discarded abruptly this mode of acquiring a livelihood, and for a time returned to the pool-rooms, eeking out a bare subsistence by "trimming" unwary strangers with exaggerated ideas of the expertness of their own game of pool.

To have one's income cut abruptly some thousand per cent is, to say the least, irksome. Lupin found it so—and more. It was then that he discovered, and was discovered by the Cannister gang.

In the back room of a particularly dirty and cheap saloon within sight of Broadway

at its once noisiest and gaudiest corner, Lupin was instrumental in settling a dispute that concerned the pronunciation of a word. Invited to drink, he accepted and treated, listening carefully to a conversation that, guarded and clumsily disguised, was intelligible enough to awaken Lupin's interest.

For a week he was a nightly visitor to the saloon and almost invariably he attached himself to the group he had met on his first visit there. Feigning intoxication on three different occasions, he dropped boastful hints that left room for a wide interpretation. He was a keen enough student of human nature to know that his listeners would, in all probability, be guided by their particular sphere of activity in weighing remarks that, to all intents and purposes, were dropped accidentally. That is precisely what happened, and once more his hail-fellow-well-met personality stood him in good stead.

The Cannister gang comprised as motley a collection of cheap crooks as could well be gathered under one roof. Under the leadership of Big Jim Cannister they waged successful war upon the unwary, and lived their separate, grimy existences secure in a protection from police interference that was none the less comforting, because of its being more or less a figment of Big Jim's fancy. That he levied a certain monthly toll upon each of the gang's members wherewith to purchase such protection, is but a tribute to his financial ability, since the moneys so collected found harbor in Big Jim's pockets.

Himself an illiterate, and surrounded by illiterates, Big Jim Cannister was quick to recognize the advantage that would accrue to the gang in the addition of Barney Lupin, his education, assured, easy bearing, and ability as a mixer.

There were no objections on either side. The subject, broached by Cannister in a clumsy, purpose-concealing manner, was hurried along by deft conversational openings, touches and sides contributed by Lupin. The result was inevitable and in accordance with Lupin's wishes. He attached himself to the Cannister gang.

At first his work was of the most elemental character. He was used as a lookout,

as a go-between for the disposal of stolen goods. His ability as a mixer was also put to good use; boastful clerks entrusted with vault combinations parting therewith under the influence of Lupin's teasing smile and a few drinks.

Once only did Lupin take actual part in a robbery—the breaking of a safe. This once was sufficient to decide him that actual contact with the dangerous part of the game was not for him. His body covered with the cold sweat of fear, his muscles twitching, his limbs shaking, he stumbled about the tasks allotted to him in a clumsy, fear-ridden manner that called down upon him the hoarsely whispered curses of Dope Cohen and Swifty Bowers, the "soup" men of the gang.

The job accomplished, successfully, in spite of Lupin's bungling efforts, there was born in him the idea that led to Big Jim Cannister's death.

Actual participation in any crime that held an element of personal danger, either to life or liberty, Lupin knew was out of the question so far as he was concerned. He hesitated to admit that he was a coward at heart, convincing himself that his sphere was the finer points of the game—the executive end—*leadership!*

Between Lupin and his suddenly conceived ambition there stood but one obstacle—Big Jim Cannister. For years Cannister had ruled the petty crooks under him by his ability to beat into abject submission those who opposed his slightest wish, an ability he was ever ready to exhibit. This, combined with a doggedness of purpose that approximated will-power, enabled him to rule his subjects as imperiously as did any Czar.

Lupin's decision to remove Big Jim was an acknowledgment of Cannister's power. He realized that Cannister's hold upon the men under him was such that it could not be weakened. If, then, Lupin was to attain his end, it would be necessary to remove Big Jim.

Nor did this strike Lupin as an unpleasant alternative. In addition to the leadership of the Cannister gang, there was one other thing in the possession of Big Jim that Lupin coveted. That other possession

of Big Jim's was dainty Claire Cannister, his wife.

Small, dark, and with eyes that flashed saucily and held—or so it seemed to Barney Lupin—promises of bliss in their fulfillment, Claire Benners had been snatched by Big Jim from out an environment that was dominated by a drunken father and a money-loving mother without conscience or shame. The girl, accustomed as she was from childhood to the sort of life that awaited her, had nevertheless recoiled from it in horror. She welcomed Big Jim's attentions, and he, ruled by her capricious will, and under the spell of her witching beauty, obeyed her imperious command that a marriage ceremony be performed. Big Jim, grinning his discomfiture at the jibes of his associates, whose acquaintance with the marriage relation was elemental indeed, paraded his young wife with a pride that was born of honest love.

Whether or not Claire returned this love has little to do with the events that followed Lupin's decision to remove Big Jim. Certain it is that she had allowed Lupin to monopolize increasingly more of her time daily, until it became the subject of comment on the part of the gang.

If Big Jim protested at any time, he did it in the privacy of their apartment, for none of the gang ever heard him upbraid Claire or Lupin. Certain it is, however, that Lupin, too, had fallen under the spell of the girl's undoubted charm and that she, in turn, was attracted by the different something that marked him among his associates.

Convinced, then, that there was no alternative but Big Jim's death, Lupin still hesitated. The thought of himself bringing about the other's death entered his mind, to be banished almost immediately. Not a physical match for Big Jim, he feared the consequences of an encounter. Too, the gang might resent the taking off of their leader and turn him over to the police.

He searched his brain for a solution, and came to the conclusion that it could lay in but one direction. He bided his time and awaited patiently a moment in which it could be put into execution. That moment was not long in coming. A wholesale dry-goods store that offered tempting bait for

the gang was scheduled for a midnight visit, in which Big Jim and another member of the gang would play the part of visitors.

It was an easy matter for Lupin to arrange. A temporary truce with the police captain of the particular neighborhood in which the robbery was to take place, during which Lupin revealed Big Jim's plans, was the only step he need take.

The result was exactly as Lupin had expected. Big Jim, surprised, cornered, and with escape cut off, refused to surrender, fighting with a desperation borne of the fear of a long jail sentence, until a bullet from the gun of one of his would-be captors cut short his life.

With an assurance that went far toward making his bluff good, Lupin constituted himself leader of the gang in the place of the one he had betrayed. There were grumblings on the part of one or two, who also aspired to leadership, but the consensus of opinion favored Lupin.

The widowed Claire was Lupin's next objective, and here he was aided by his slim, graceful figure and good looks. Within a week after Big Jim's burial, Claire openly acknowledged Lupin as a probable successor to her dead husband. In less than a month Lupin had moved into the apartment occupied by the widow, and their world accepted, with more or less comment, rather less than more, the fact that she had "tied up" with Lupin, who was the then acknowledged leader of the band of crooks.

In his new rôle Lupin was enabled to share in the gang's spoils without running any of the risks. Unlike Big Jim, he did not personally appear in any of the jobs that were pulled off. His was the safety-first job of deciding upon "jobs," the unearthing of information as to "soft" opportunities and kindred duties that could be discharged with the minimum of risk to himself. In this capacity he insisted upon and received a division of the spoils; nor was he at all backwārd in demanding the monthly "protection" money from his henchmen. There was not a single opportunity for the acquisition and accumulation of money that was overlooked by him.

Four or five months passed rapidly; Lupin, by his efforts and with the exercise

of a natural aptitude and acquired ingenuity, increasing the efficiency of his band and adding to his own income.

New members were admitted from time to time to take the places of those unfortunate enough to be caught in the law's net, and it was one of these that opened up for Lupin an additional source of income.

Blacky Downs was a malcontent from the day he first joined the band—a trouble-maker. He was open in his disapproval of Lupin, and the high hand with which he ruled, as well as the fact that Lupin side-stepped the dangerous parts of the game. He made no attempt to conceal his scorn of the lady-finger tactics of Lupin, and on more than one occasion open rupture threatened.

Once more the police were called into play, but this time Lupin, knowing that the authorities were keenly desirous of apprehending Blacky Downs with the goods, was able to turn his knowledge of that worthy's contemplated activities to financial advantage.

This proved but the opening wedge. One by one, as occasion presented itself, Lupin "turned up" his comrades, confining his efforts for the most part, however, to the newly acquired members, although not hesitating to sacrifice those members of the original Cannister gang wherever the police made it sufficiently interesting for him, from a financial standpoint.

He became a valuable adjunct to the police department, and, although his information was gladly welcomed and liberally paid for, he was accorded small respect by those officers with whom he came in contact and to whom, Judaslike, he sold out his friends.

The gang itself bordered upon panic. Well-planned job after job was raided by the police, who appeared at the proper moment to make a capture. The very safety and existence of the gang's members were seriously menaced.

At the nightly meetings there was none who displayed quite so much anxiety, anger and mystification as did Lupin. He swore mighty oaths of revenge upon the traitor—for it had long since been decided that there was a traitor among them, and the finger

of suspicion wavered uncertainly from one to another, now pointing at this one, again at some one else, but never at Lupin.

The very fact that he was absolved from all suspicion made the game easier for Lupin to play, and the nightly conferences waxed more and more bitter as job after job came to naught and crook after crook was betrayed into the hands of the police.

Satisfied that he had at last found his proper sphere of activity, combining as it did a two-way profit without risk to his own precious life or liberty, Lupin dreamed dreams in which he would one day be the head of a band composed of the really big crooks of the city's underworld. He turned over in his mind with much relish the rewards offered for some of the notables of crookdom, and his fingers closed as if the money was already in their clutches.

So skilfully did Lupin work up the gang's feelings against the unknown traitor, and so free from suspicion did he manage to keep himself that the members of the gang were satisfied to leave to him the task of ferreting out the one who was betraying them.

It was with some surprise, therefore, that he was greeted on his appearance at the gang's place of meeting with the news that the traitor had been uncovered.

Trembling in every limb, fearing that his game was up, he asked for further information, unable to meet the eyes of those about him.

"Yep," exulted Swifty Bowers, "we got the goods on the dirty snitch."

"Who is he?" faltered Lupin.

"I don't know," was the answer. "Dope Cohen turned him up, and he's out now making sure there ain't no mistake."

"But how can he be sure?" quailed Lupin. "How will he know he's got the right man?"

"Oh, he'll know, all right. Say," and he leaned closer and leered confidentially into Lupin's eyes, "them bulls don't like a stool-pigeon any more than they like poison. I never seen it to fail yet; a wrong guy that makes a deal with the cops is gonna get the worst of it in the end. As soon as they figure they got all they can get outa him, they either frame him and send him to the

coop, or else they give it out kind of quiet that he's been snitchin' on his pals. Either way, it's *good night* for Mr. Snitch. For my part, I'd just as soon they sent me over for a tenner, instead of turnin' me loose among a lot of desperate guys that I double-crossed."

Lupin, fear-cursed, endeavored to speak, but his throat, dry as that of any desert-engulfed wanderer, emitted not a sound. He cleared it once, twice; and was interrupted as speech returned by the entrance of Dope Cohen.

"I got the damned skunk!" was the newcomer's announcement. "I got the goods on him; and I got him where we want him. After to-night there'll be no snitchin' on this gang, believe me."

He radiated grim satisfaction as the others crowded about, pelting him with questions that remained unanswered as he waved them aside.

"Take it easy," he said. "It's up to the chief to settle this." He turned to Lupin.

"I ain't gonna tell anybody who the guy is," he flung over his shoulder to the others before addressing Lupin. "This thing is gonna be pulled off right. If these guys here knew who he was they'd start out on a hunt for him, and ten chances to one he'd get tipped off and beat it.

"I got a better scheme than that. I know for a fact that this guy's got a date with a couple of them plain-clothes bulls to-night."

Lupin breathed a sigh of relief. The last statement did not apply to him. He contemplated no interview with the police that night.

"They're gonna meet in a place where some one can pick him off easy and make a getaway. There's nothin' to it; not a chance of a slip-up. It couldn't be better if it was all framed up for us."

The gang, as well as Lupin, were hanging on Dope Cohen's words. He realized that he had the center of the stage and basked in the sensation of importance it gave him.

"Here's my idea," he continued. "Every one of us, from the chief down, would give an arm or a leg for a crack at the feller that's been throwin' us down. My idea is to give everybody an even chance. Let's

roll the dice; the high man is elected to bump him off."

There was a chorused growl at this, whether of assent or dissent it was impossible to distinguish.

"I tell you it's a cinch," argued Dope Cohen earnestly. "All you got to do is to get a rifle, hide yourself in a room across the street from where the guy is gonna be. I'll see that the bulls are stalled off so that they don't keep the date; I got the room rented and everything is all set. When the bulls don't show up, the guy is naturally gonna get anxious, and when he comes to the window to look out—bing! One shot, a quick getaway, and it's all over."

He ceased talking and looked triumphantly around his circle of auditors. His enthusiasm and confidence had spread to the others, and Lupin, certain now that a mistake had been made, and that an innocent one was about to pay the penalty of his deceit and treachery, led the chorus of acceptance that greeted Dope Cohen's plan.

"Good," he shouted. "Get the dice. I guess maybe I could insist on taking care of this guy, whoever he is"—he paused and looked significantly at Dope Cohen, giving him a chance to reveal the name of the supposed traitor, but Cohen affected not to have heard—"but I'm going to be a sport," continued Lupin, "and give everybody an equal chance with myself."

He signaled for a set of dice, which was handed to him.

"I throw first," he announced, flopping the box with its rattling cubes upside down. The others crowded about the table and peered over each other's shoulders.

"Twelve," announced Lupin, breathing a secret sigh of satisfaction that his number was low enough to preclude the possibility of his being the avenger.

Dope Cohen threw next, followed in turn by the remaining members of the gang. A tie at sixteen between Swifty Bowers and another member resulted in Swifty's winning the play-off.

There was a buzz of excited congratulation when it was definitely decided that to Bowers would go the honor of killing the unknown. Dope Cohen, still conscious of

the fact that he was playing a leading part, motioned for silence.

"At nine o'clock to-night," he instructed Bowers, "you go to the front, third-story room of 2 Blue Street. Right opposite, in the third-floor room of 3, the guy expects to meet the bulls. All you got to do is wait for him to come to the window. After you get him, you can duck down-stairs and out the back way."

Bowers received his instructions amid the cheers of his fellows—cheers that plainly spoke their envy.

"And from eight thirty until eleven to-night," continued Dope Cohen; "all the rest of us wants to be right here. I got it fixed so a coupla of friends of mine on the force is gonna look in here every half-hour or so, *accidentally*. That accident is gonna be our alibi in case any of the stool-pigeon's friends try to fasten the job on us. As for Lefty's alibi, I got that framed, too. Me and him will fix that up after we leave here."

The gang, after a round of drinks, broke up and went their separate ways, Lupin at once for his apartment.

Amused at the turn affairs had taken, and speculating upon the identity of the intended victim, he recounted the entire affair to Claire, who joined in his mirth.

"But," and he suddenly sobered, "we've got to cut it all out and get away. I'm afraid now," and he shuddered visibly. "What Dope said about the cops sooner or later turning down their friends strikes me as being pretty nearly true. I don't understand how Dope Cohen happened to get a wrong steer, but I do know that I'm through. It's time for us to leave the city before they do get wise to me."

He made a ghastly pantomime with his right forefinger across his throat, indicative of what he might expect in the event that he be discovered.

They fell to a discussion of the relative merits of various tentative places of refuge which they had under consideration, which was interrupted by the harsh jangle of the telephone-bell.

The connection made, Lupin listened for several minutes, interrupting the unseen speaker to object angrily to what was being

said. Again he listened, and again he broke into angry speech, only to hang up abruptly in the middle of a sentence. The speaker at the other end had abruptly hung up on him.

He returned in a rage to the room where Claire glanced idly over the evening paper.

"Bowers has quit cold," he announced abruptly. "He's got cold feet and refuses to go on with the job."

"Why?" asked Claire, seemingly only mildly interested.

"He didn't give any reasons. All I could get out of him was that so far as he was concerned the job was all off. He said he was taking the next freight-train out of the city."

"You should worry," smiled Claire. "Some one else will take his place."

"That's just it," burst out Lupin impatiently. "It's too late to get hold of any of the boys now. It's almost time for me to leave. Bowers put it up to me."

"Well?" There was a question in Claire's voice and eyes.

"But I can't do it; I can't!" He shuddered at the thought. "Besides, there's the alibi that Dope has framed up. If I was the only one not there, suspicion would naturally fall upon me."

"Then don't pay any attention to Bowers's message," counseled Claire. "Go on down and meet the boys, just as if nothing had happened."

"Impossible," snapped Lupin. "Bowers had left a message at the saloon for Dope Cohen, saying that he had called me up and that I would attend to the killing. I can't duck now," he almost moaned. "I gave them to understand this afternoon that I was anxious to do the shooting. Fool that I was!"

He paced the floor for an anxious half-minute, Claire meanwhile knitting her pretty brow as if she would find it in her empty head a solution of his problem.

Suddenly Lupin whirled and faced her.

"Claire," he said, "*you* shoot!"

She sensed his meaning almost immediately.

"Nix," she answered coolly.

"But you must; you must!" he cried impatiently. "You must do this for me,

Claire. Can't you see what it means to me—to both of us. It means our safe get-away. I can't do it; I couldn't do the shooting and get away with it without being suspected. You can do it. You must!" He grasped her fiercely by the arm and gazed into her eyes.

"Not for a minute," she said, shaking off his grip. "Little me has never mixed in any of your dirty work, and she's too old to learn now."

He begged, pleaded and threatened to reveal to the gang the fact that she had conspired with him to bring about the death of Big Jim Cannister. To the begging and pleading she paid little heed; to the threat she showed indications of weakening, a fact that did not escape Lupin's notice. He was quick to follow up his advantage, in the end winning his point.

Claire, weeping a little that she was shortly to shed human blood, allowed Lupin to convince her that the end justified the means, that the safety of both was at stake.

Rapidly outlining the course that Claire was to pursue, Lupin kissed away her tears and left to keep his rendezvous with the gang.

Lupin, sore in every limb, his muscles aching excruciatingly, awoke to a dazed, semiconsciousness. For a space his mind was an utter blank, and then slowly memory of recent events came back to him. He recalled distinctly entering the rear room of the cheap, dirty saloon and greeting the assembled members of the gang; he remembered telling them of the arrangement he had made with Claire; less distinctly did he recall the concerted rush they made for him, led by Dope Cohen; and dimly, as if in a dream, he remembered the grinning,

evil face of Dope Cohen as it bent above him, as well as the hissed words that beat into his brain as he sank into unconsciousness.

"You dirty rat! Here's where you get yours! You thought you was gettin' away with somethin', didn't you, you white-livered snake you!"

He lay for a long five minutes in the dark, tentatively stretching his aching limbs and wondering where he was. The fact that the gang had at last discovered his treachery filled him with terror, and he expected momentarily that they would return and wreak their vengeance upon him.

Slowly he rose to his knees and then to his feet. Afraid to strike a light or make a sound, lest it betray to a possible listener the fact that he had regained consciousness, he groped his way about the room in which he found himself. Its furnishings were entirely unfamiliar, and gave no hint of his whereabouts.

His slow, painful, noiseless investigation continued until he reached a window with a drawn shade. Grasping the shade in a trembling hand he raised it slowly—painfully slow, in order to avoid the slightest suspicion of a sound—and pressed his forehead against the window-pane to peer out into the street.

As he did so, there came from without the sharp crack of a small-calibered rifle and the musical tinkle of shattered glass. Lupin, puzzled, sent an inquiring hand to investigate a sudden, sharp pain in his forehead and brought it away covered with blood.

And as he crumpled slowly to his knees, death was made doubly hard by the semi-conscious realization that Claire, his Claire, had implicitly obeyed his instructions.

THE NEW DAY

BY EUGENE C. DOLSON

OUTWORN ideals are falling fast away;
 Beyond its buried past the world has ranged;
 New influences shape its trend to-day—
 But truth lives on, and manhood bides unchanged,

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



IF you received a letter from a rich great-uncle, telling you that he wanted you to visit him for two weeks, so that he could decide whether to leave his fortune to you or to a girl second-cousin—would you go? Carlos Brent did—without loss of time—when he got that sort of letter from wealthy old Gregory Deane. So did charming Shirley Deane, the other candidate for the Deane riches. They met—and then began a series of mysterious happenings in the old house on an island off the Massachusetts coast that are told of in the four-part serial that starts in next week's issue.

MOORS END

BY JEANNETTE I. HELM

Author of "The House of the Purple Stairs," etc.

A good mystery yarn is always fine fun, and this is an exceptionally fine one. It keeps you guessing and gives you thrills—and it is with those objects in view that mystery tales are written—and read!



EVERY country has its own particular legends which are expressive of its national character. Other legends are common to all countries and indigenous of no single soil, because they are founded on our common human nature. Of the latter, one of the most popular is the story of *Cinderella*, whose history is part and parcel of the very stuff of romance. Here is the latest version we have seen, and when you have read it we think you will agree with us, one of the most delightful and arresting:

A SAGEBRUSH CINDERELLA

BY MAX BRAND

Author of "Clung," "The Untamed," "Children of the Night," etc.

Needless to say, a man whose pen graces every subject he touches, has made of this ever ancient, ever new theme, a story which will both delight and entertain you with its fresh romance, its sparkling wit, its unforced sentiment.



"THE FOREIGN SECRETARY," the eighth of the "TEACH: PIRATE DE LUXE" series, by C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne, will appear in our next week's issue. It's right up to the Teach standard of excitement, and contains more than a few real laughs. We were just a trifle afraid that some of

our readers who have a soft spot in their hearts for the Emerald Isle might take exception to this yarn—but it's all in fun, and where can you find a man or woman with Irish blood in their veins who can't see a joke?



JOHN D. SWAIN, whose stories in this magazine are always characterized by freshness of outlook and polish of style, is represented in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY with a timely tale called "A UNIVERSAL SOLVENT." Love and death between them have been contending for a few eons for the honor of Mr. Swain's title. But this delightful tale will show you how they are both out of the running, and how it has been left to us in the twentieth century to find "a universal solvent."



"THE EIGHTH NEGATIVE," by Arthur Tuckerman, is a cleverly conceived and quite unusual story. Unusual not only because it deals with a subject quite new in itself—the aerial police—but because the author's treatment would be equally original applied to any theme. The dramatic and quite unexpected adventure of young Captain Terry, of the U. S. Aerial Police, while on a quite ordinary and peaceful mission to London, makes a story of extraordinary interest.

MR. HAINES IN REBUTTAL.

TO THE EDITOR:

It was with interest and considerable amusement that I read the letters of my esteemed co-readers, W. W. Pefley, of Boise, and the Rev. J. D. Gillian, of Blackfoot, Idaho, in the Heart to Heart Talks of the May 15 issue of your estimable publication. When I first made my little complaint as to the invariable habit of Western story writers transplanting the habits, customs, mode of living, and picturesque lawlessness of the people of the West of yesterday to those of to-day, I had no idea that I would create a "tempest in a teapot." Well, controversies are always interesting.

In the first place, I particularly note that these gentlemen somewhat question my veracity; that "I gained most of my Western lore through the windows of a Pullman." I neither obtained it that way, nor by "ramblin'," like the *Ramblin' Kid*. If these doubters will consult the files of the *Western Trader*, published at Omaha, Nebraska, for the years 1910-1911, they will see my name as editor of this publication during that period. Or they might read my articles upon commercial conditions of the West in the *Journal of Commerce*, *Boston Market Reporter*, and *New York Evening Post*, of which publications I was special Western correspondent at that time. If they will also write me through you I will also give them the names and addresses of various Western business men, whose ranches in Montana and Wyoming I visited as a guest at different times.

Now, I know that, despite the rapid progress that has taken place in the West during the past twenty-five years or so, there are certain parts of it that have changed but slowly, although the same thing can be said likewise of certain New England localities and other parts of our country. But an old colonial New England village, tucked away in the hills and forgotten, could not be cited as typical of the average Eastern town of to-day any more than can the slapstick motion-pictures and the Jesse James style of Western fiction be said to be true of the real, living, new West. Exceptions do not prove a rule by any means. There are certain people who resist change, they persistently cling to their old ideals, and will not accept conditions as they are. They are living in the past and not the present. Is my critic from Boise among them?

Two peculiarities in Mr. Pefley's letter struck me strangely. I was not aware that Boise was a ranching center, or there were old-time ranches in its neighborhood. Where is the room for them with the alfalfa-fields on the one hands and the great silver mining industry of the Cœur d'Alenes on the other? He asks me if I know the meaning of "riata," "lariat," "chaparajos," "caviava," and "remada." He says they are "common, everyday terms used to-day on the stock ranches of the West." Yes, so they are, but *what part?* These are terms common enough upon the stock ranches along the Rio Grande, in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and, infrequently, in Utah; but I'll wager

he never heard of them—with the exception of chaparajos (chaps) and lariat (more common lasso or plain "rope")—in Montana, Wyoming, the Dakotas, or even in his native State. They are Spanish words, and, with the exceptions, are only heard in those localities where that language was either spoken in the days gone by or still is. A "hackamore," Mr. Pefley, is, for the simple explanation of our readers, a halter-rope, although it may possibly have other uses. I am not a ranchman, or a cowboy, but still I think that I know what I am writing about.

Mr. Pefley has asked me a few questions. I will ask him some in return. Does he know that in the principal cities of the West to-day there is a law, similar to our Sullivan law of New York State, that prohibits the carrying of concealed weapons, and that the modern .38 automatic is not carried in a holster *à la* movies, but in the jacket, or hip-picket, as a rule? That "grade stock" and the old Texas steer are rapidly disappearing? Has he ever seen a prairie-schooner outside of the museums? The only one I ever saw in the West was in the museum of Nebraska University, at Lincoln, where it was as much of a curiosity as it would be here in New York. Does he honestly know such a picturesque character as *Ole Heck*, of "Th' Ramblin' Kid," among the ranch owners of his acquaintance? Is his ranch, if he has one, and its surrounding acreage, bound in by barb-wire fencing, or does his cattle still roam the open range? The Department of Agriculture at Washington would best answer this last question of the open range and prove my argument.

I do not say that there are not some old-time ranches still in the West, where all the old traditions and customs are maintained, but they are rapidly diminishing, as is only natural as the West progresses. I am also quite aware that some cowboys still carry arms, a Winchester, or possibly an automatic, for the very purpose that Mr. Pefley specifies. But, as he is evidently a sporting man, I would be glad to come to Boise, if I could, and pay him ten dollars for every man walking the streets of that city that carried an old-fashioned Colt .45 swung in a holster at his hips, as depicted in the movies and described in Western fiction stories, if he will pay me the same amount for every man that does not. As to cowboys wearing velveteens and the serviceable puttee in a dry country such as New Mexico, where they would not "sop up water," I would suggest that my critics visit the stock-yards of South Omaha, take a trip to the border, or even southern Colorado, and see for themselves.

"Th' Ramblin' Kid" was an interesting story, or it would not have been published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, but that is all. The life in the West, except in some localities, perhaps, that I do not know—the West is "some territory to cover"—existed only in the brilliant author's imagination. He describes the West—minus the automobile—as it was. The "chaps" are permissible but not the

.45.

I am glad to see that Miss Reid has treated me

more kindly, and is frank enough to admit that the West is changing rapidly. Does she like the way our authors have of having the Eastern girls captivate the romantic cowboy? I have found the Western girls more charming than their Eastern sisters. Surely she will champion me in this. My critics seem to have gained one wrong impression: I do not mean to imply that the chaps have been disregarded altogether, but they certainly are *not* worn promiscuously as our writers would have us believe, and the carrying of fire-arms, at least in the cities and large towns, is certainly restricted, and, in many places, prohibited. Furthermore, while living at Omaha I did not see one old-style cowboy, outside of those of Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show.

The charming, old picturesque West, with its adventurous cowboy and his .45s, the battles of cattle and sheep ranchers, Jesse James and road agents, prairie-schooners, stage hold-ups, *et cetera*, like the buffalo and the Indian, are in the past, my readers, statements to the contrary notwithstanding. Let their memory still be kept fresh before us by our entertaining writers of Western fiction, for they were a part of our country in its youth, and did their portion of making it what it is to-day, but let the writers keep them to the past, I say, and not make them of the present.

Yours very truly,

EDWARD IRVINE HAINES.

Broad Street, New York.

ABDULLAH, ENGLAND, AND STILSON THE LEADERS

TO THE EDITOR:

Starting with the issue containing David Potter's serial, "Diane of Star Hollow," I have been a constant reader of your excellent periodical—the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

In my opinion the high quality of the stories in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY would be hard to beat.

During the winter months, when Max Brand, A. Merritt, G. A. England, P. P. Sheehan, and other versatile authors appear in one issue, I am quite sure that it would be a hard matter for the most particular reader to find fault.

I have noticed though that during late spring and summer there is a slight falling off in the quality of the serials. All the "star" authors are kept for the winter months. For example, in the present number there are but three serials.

During the years of my acquaintance with the ALL-STORY WEEKLY I have enjoyed so many fine tales that it would be a hard matter to record them all here, but a few that I particularly liked were: George Allan England's "Cursed" and "The Flying Legion"; Perley Poore Sheehan's "White Tigers," "If You Believe It, It's So," and "The House with a Bad Name"; Charles B. Stilson's "A Man Named Jones," and "Little Crooked Master"; Isabel Ostrander's "Twenty-Six Clues" and "Ashes to Ashes"; A. Merritt's "The Conquest of the Moon Pool"; Max Brand's "The Untamed" and "Clung"; Achmed Abdullah's "A

Buccaneer in Spats"; Frank L. Packard's "From Now On"; Philip Gibbs's "Misery Mansions"; John Charles Beecham's "Koyala" tales; James B. Hendryx's "The Gold Girl," and the Williamsons' "Everyman's Land."

My three particular favorite authors are Achmed Abdullah, George Allan England, and Charles B. Stilson. In my opinion they are perfect in every respect.

Wishing you all the success possible, I am,

S. K. S.

Market Street, Paterson, New Jersey.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

I have been a reader of your splendid magazine for about three years and have found that everything in it suits me all right. One thing is lacking—pirate stories. Please tell some author that is good on pirate stories to get busy, and also E. K. Means. I haven't heard anything from him in a long time. Make sure of that pirate story, and that it is a bloody one. K. L. STENNETT.

Portland, Oregon.

I have been reading your magazine, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, for about two years. I enjoy nearly all of your stories, especially by G. W. Ogden, W. M. Raine, and H. Footner.

The boys nearly fight over your magazines here. This camp is near the little town of Gulf Port, which is so small that if I am the tenth in line for your magazine, I am out of luck.

Some time ago, perhaps six months, you printed a request of mine for some ALL-STORY WEEKLYS.

A gentleman answered my request and offered to sell me one hundred and thirty-one of them, I think. I became very ill and didn't send for them, and when I got well I found that I had misplaced his address, so I never wrote again.

If you will print this so that the gentleman can see it and write to me, I will apologize to him properly.

I am very much obliged to you for printing my request; also, I want to thank the many readers for answering it.

Hoping to see this in print before long, I remain,

JESSE LEE BAXTER.

U. S. Naval Station, Gulf Port, Mississippi.

I know that many readers have intended to tell you how they enjoyed reading "The People of the Glacier," but, like myself, have neglected writing. Hope the author will continue these stories, and tell of the children of *Wah* and *Ga*. I am sure they were precocious rascals. Those stories and "The Greater Miracle" are the only kind of "different" stories I care for, although I read all of the freakishly imaginative ones. I think the magazine would be just as good and just as interesting if you stayed closer home and let the golden atoms and *Shining Ones* take care of their own radicals. "The Ten-Foot Chain" was splendid, but E. K. Means's version takes the cake.

Am glad *Dan* is coming back to *Kate*, as I would always have felt a dreary ache of longing if he had stayed with the geese. "Clung" promises to be as alluring and unsettled as *Dan*. He is

the only Chink I ever felt as if I could love, and I suppose that's because I know he is white. Here's to you!
G. F. JONES.
Frannie, Wyoming.

ALL-STORY WEEKLY READERS' EXCHANGE

N. B.—THE OBJECT OF THIS DEPARTMENT IS TO GIVE READERS WHO WISH TO SECURE COPIES OF THE MAGAZINE *which we cannot supply* A CHANCE TO MAKE THEIR WANTS KNOWN. SPACE IS TOO LIMITED TO ALLOW OF OUR PUBLISHING THE LETTERS OF THOSE *who only have magazines to dispose of*. THE LATTER SHOULD WATCH THIS COLUMN, AND COMMUNICATE DIRECT WITH THOSE WHO ASK FOR CERTAIN NUMBERS. LETTERS TO BE PRINTED SHOULD CONTAIN COMPLETE ADDRESS.

I will gladly pay twenty-five cents, or even fifty cents, for a copy of ALL-STORY WEEKLY of the date January 17, 1920.
W. B. OWEN.
200 W. Monroe Street, Springfield, Illinois.

I want the ALL-STORY WEEKLY magazine for January 4 and October 11, 1919. I will pay twenty-five cents each for them, or send other magazines.
GEORGE JONES.
217 Strong Avenue, Trinidad, Colorado.

I wish to secure the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for December 20, 1919. Please write first, stating price.
LOUIS STEWART.
Box 107, Drew, Mississippi.

I want to get the November 14, 1914, issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Write before sending.
J. BUCHANAN.
414 Toby Street, Durham, North Carolina.

Can I secure from some subscriber the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for August 31, 1918, and January 11, 1919? Will pay twenty cents each for them. Please write first.
C. M. DAILY.
2856 North Twenty-Third Street,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

I will pay twenty-five cents each for the following issues of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY: Decem-

ber 28, 1918; March 22 and May 17, 1919. Please write first.
CECIL H. RUST.
Fördyce, Arkansas.

I will pay twenty-cents each for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY containing E. K. Means's "Daida, Daughter of Discord" (September 4, 1915).
ROSSVILLE, GEORGIA.
GASTON EGAN.

The following requests have also been received:

Edmund H. Rankin, Room 2, 185 Devonshire Street, Boston, Massachusetts, desires the January, 1898, ARGOSY.

Sada Bates, Bronson, Kansas, wishes the February 22, 1920, ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

J. D. Morris, 697 Eighth Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, wants the January 17, 1920, ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

William M. Feeley, 24 West Fortieth Street, New York City, desires the March, 1909, issue of the ARGOSY.

Dalton S. McArthur, Tugaska, Saskatchewan, Canada, wishes the January 17, 1920, ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

Joseph R. Higgins, 333 East Eighth Street, Portland, Oregon, wishes to get the *All Story Monthly* for March, 1913.

Robert Bayless, Hanover, Arkansas, wishes the October 11, 1919, issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

THIS **119**th ALL-STORY WEEKLY SERIAL TO
IS THE **BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM**

TARZAN THE UNTAMED

BY EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Author of "Under the Moons of Mars," "At the Earth's Core," "The Cave Girl," "The Mucker," "Pellucidar," etc.

SINCE his introduction in the pages of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, some eight years ago, the fame of the ape man has gone around the world, until to-day the name of Tarzan—and that of his creator—are known wherever books are read or motion-pictures flourish, and that includes most of the habitable globe. Both Tarzan and Mr. Burroughs are too well known, therefore, to need any extended introduction here. It is almost unnecessary even to observe that this latest story is a worthy successor of "Tarzan of the Apes," "The Beasts of Tarzan," "The Son of Tarzan," and all the others of this highly popular series. (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, March 20 to April 17, 1920. Under the title, "Tarzan and the Valley of Luna.")

Published in book form by A. C. McClurg & Co., Chicago, 1920. Price \$1.90 net.

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When you end your corn with Blue-jay, it will be the last corn you let grow.

You will know how to stop the pain. And how to quickly and completely end all corns.

There are millions who use Blue-jay now, and they never let a corn remain.

The new-day way

Blue-jay is the new-day way, the scientific method.

It was perfected in a laboratory world-famed for its surgical dressings.

It is supplanting the many treatments which are harsh and inefficient.

It has made paring as ridiculous as it is unsafe, for paring doesn't end corns.

Do this tonight:

Apply to a corn a Blue-jay



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plaster or the liquid Blue-jay—whichever you prefer.

Mark how the pain stops. Then wait a little and the corn will loosen and come out.

What that corn does all corns will do. Some 20 million corns a year are ended in this way.

Don't suffer corns. Don't have your feet disfigured. They can be ended almost as easily as a dirt-spot on your face. They are just as inexcusable.

Don't forget this. It means too much to you.

Ask your druggist for Blue-jay.

B & B Blue-jay
Plaster or liquid
The Scientific Corn Ender
BAUER & BLACK Chicago New York Toronto
Makers of Sterile Surgical Dressings and Allied Products

Suppose there were no more advertisements

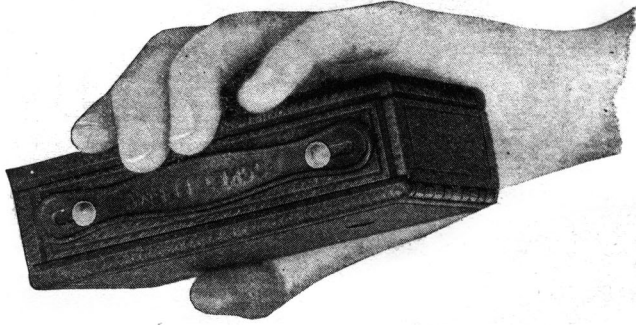
Just imagine for a minute that some power could stop all advertising. How would that affect you?

It would cut you off from all direct, commercial news about things that you need and use in every-day life. Somebody might be selling a new, better, more economical food; or a utensil that would save money and time; or an article that would add greatly to your comfort and well-being; or some better material for making shoes or clothing—but you would never know it.

Manufacturers would be unable to tell you about new and better things. They would thus find it hard to put these things on the market, and often would not try.

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This advertisement prepared by N. W. Ayer & Son, Philadelphia.



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Open the back and drop in a
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Snaps into focus when opened

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Rochester, N. Y.

Catalogue free at your Dealer's or by mail

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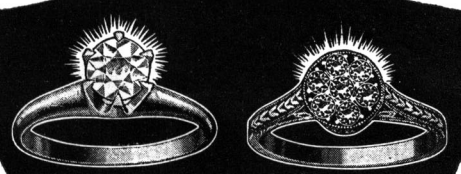
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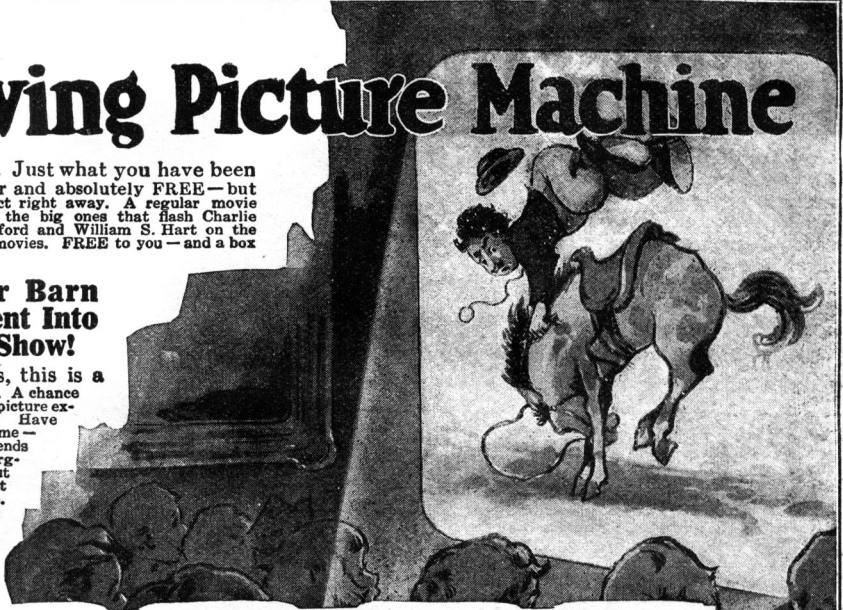
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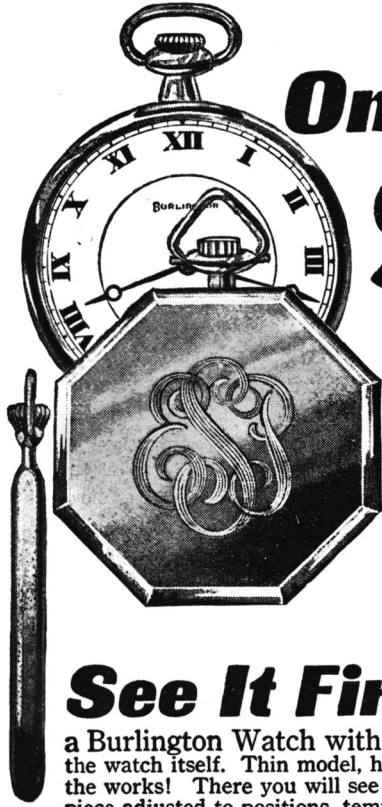
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 But I want something
 —don't know just why—
 To turn over
 And twist around
 On my tongue.
 The answer is
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 So comforting
 So smooth and cool,
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 And each one
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